



Teaching Crossroads

13th and 14th IPB Erasmus Weeks

Edited by Elisabete Silva | Clarisse Pais | Luís S. Pais

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Preface

Elisabete Silva, Clarisse Pais, Luís S. Pais

The Editors

The Polytechnic Institute of Bragança (IPB) has been organising its Erasmus Week since 2004. It is held yearly in May, normally during the second week of May. The Erasmus week's main purposes are three-fold. First, the IPB aims at enforcing closer, more dynamic and more efficient institutional relations amongst the European Higher Education Institutions. Lectures are then organised and introduced in both undergraduate and master classes in accordance with the area of interest. Meetings with directors of the 5 IPB schools and Erasmus coordinators are also scheduled. The second and third goals, which naturally derive from the first, are to facilitate familiarity with the IPB campus, its schools and with the cities of Bragança and Mirandela, where the IPB schools are settled, and with the surrounding area, namely the Montesinho Natural Park and the Alto Douro Wine Region (UNESCO World Heritage). This information can be found on the IPB International Relations Office website. Overall, all these three goals lie behind what is considered an umbrella goal which is to promote the IPB in its numerous valences and strengthen the mobility ties with the different European Higher Institutions which have established cooperation agreements with the IPB. This has revealed fruitful and far-reaching as more than 20 partner countries visit us every year. If one takes into account the two last editions' numbers, Poland is the country with a higher percentage of participants (37.1% and 29%), followed by Spain (11.4% and 15.9%), France, Romania and Czech Republic¹.

¹ Information available at: http://portal3.ipb.pt/images/gri/14th_Erasmus_Week_evaluation.pdf

Regarding the lectures delivered during this week, teachers show a high level of satisfaction and find it rather rewarding according to the evaluation results obtained every year. One of the most visible results of these lectures is the publication of *Teaching Crossroads*. It started being published aiming ultimately at the dissemination of the research work that was presented at the IPB. We then extended it to all activities related to Teachers Erasmus+ mobility and international projects. The idea was not only to disseminate studies from other European researchers but also to give to the IPB teaching staff the opportunity to publish their research work and what they presented during their mobility. So far, the adhesion to this project has been rather steady and compliant with the publication's main goal.

In hindsight, this project, which started in 2011, continues to persevere in its academic path, making thus available to students and teachers the most valuable research studies and relevant data in regard to a myriad of study areas which underlie the spirit of Higher Education, multifaceted, multilayered and plural. In Higher Education we hope never to be at a crossroads, but we dare to constantly thrive when faced with obstacles and embrace the challenges of knowledge. All areas of study are important and meaningful and must be continually promoted. This has been the leading motto of *Teaching Crossroads* since its very beginning.

This would have never been possible without the valuable help of regular contributors to whom we are very grateful, from the authors, the reviewers, the designer to the IPB Image Services. A thanking note must also go to the IPB which has embraced this project by agreeing to publish it.

As a result of the close cooperation work with the researchers who submitted their proposals to blind review, we selected five texts from diverse areas but nonetheless complementary. As such, this year, areas of study vary from comparative literature, education, social education and sociology, finance to business and entrepreneurship. A brief summary of each is presented next.

María Antonia Mezquita Fernández, whose research has been focusing on the modern subject of ecocriticism bearing in mind the new approach to the close relationship between environmental issues and literature, a concern that always permeated literature, discusses the ecocritical identity in the light of literary figures and their poetical messages regarding nature. By highlighting and comparing two British poets, William Wordsworth and Dylan Thomas, and a Spanish poet, Claudio Rodríguez, the author introduces an ecocritical stance to the analysis of the poems under discussion. Sharing the common ground of nature, the poems are worth reading due to the powerful messages they convey, not only bearing in mind the period when they were written but because the topics explored resonate with the environmental defenders' main principles. What the author brings to the fore of discussion is a thought-provocative, challenging and relevant essay which found in literature its main driving force to call the attention to the importance of

the defence of nature in a time where environmental issues, such as global warming and the melting of glaciers, are at the centre of the world's political agenda, despite the constant scepticism that still persists to endure.

Beata Sufa & Anna Szkolak-Śtepiń delve into the idea of creativity fostered within the teaching context, by both teachers and students. In their article entitled “Creative Teacher-Creative Pupil – a Study Report”, the authors argue that, having in mind all the technological advances and (advanced) use of learning technology, the new conditions of school and learning context require new challenges to the way the teaching-learning process is dealt with. The teacher's creative attitude will thus become paramount for children's development of creativity which will help them to improve communication skills.

Kazimiera Król studies the phenomenon of begging in Poland, analyzing the spatial and social framework of such reality which results from many factors and underlies consequences to the places chosen for begging and to the beggars themselves. The author puts forth an empirical study bearing in mind the age, gender, civil status and nationality of mendicants, presenting thus in-depth data which allow her to reach interesting and relevant conclusions regarding the whole phenomenon of begging in nowadays Poland.

Eliza Komierzyńska-Orlińska sheds some light on a common unknown part of the financial system to the majority of people, which is the security of the banking system. When one deposits or withdraws money one is never aware of (or simply does not care about) how our money is held safe or how the banks protect their assets. The article “Security of the Banking System in Poland. Fundamental Assumptions” deals precisely with security issues within the Polish banking system highlighting the crucial role of the central bank in the whole process of surveillance and regulation. Legal issues are therefore discussed. By using simple and straightforward language, the author is able to reach a non-specialist audience who will become more informed about this issue in a rather clear way.

Erik Kubička focuses on organizational culture explaining how well-succeeded, renowned, top companies in the technology sector foster effectiveness in the work environment. In this regard, the author describes several technological companies, such as Google, Apple and IBM, just to name a few. Innovation, informal leadership, less red tape and closer contact with the workers are features that are common to all these companies which represent the key to their success.

Enjoy the reading!



Comparative Literature



Ecocritical Identity. A New Perspective: Nature in the Poetry of William Wordsworth, Dylan Thomas and Claudio Rodríguez

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Abstract

Within our present social context, where preservation of the environment is one of the most common concerns, analyzing literary works from the modern discipline of Ecocriticism has led the way to open up new debates, which in turn have given rise to varied perspectives on the environment and natural issues. Consequently, the aim of this work is to study the poetry of William Wordsworth, Dylan Thomas and Claudio Rodríguez, who, despite being separated in both space and time, share the theme of nature as one of their main topics. For these three authors, nature was the place where they found the tranquillity they needed and where they put their mind at ease. Furthermore, they felt attached to the natural universe and we could make mention of the term Sense of Place. As we will observe, an ecocritical stance will provide the analysis of the poems with a new perspective. Thus, Ecocriticism should be taken into account when studying those authors whose main topic is nature.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Sense of Place, William Wordsworth, Dylan Thomas, Claudio Rodríguez.

The question of the preservation of the environment has contributed to the creation of new public debates today. Obviously, such preservation deals with our welfare, but also with moral discussions. As Clark (2011, p. 2) puts it: “It holds to the mainstream assumption that the natural world would be seen primarily as a resource for human beings, whether economically or culturally, but it strives to defend and conserve it against over-exploitation”. Most of the ecological problems being faced result directly from exploiting our natural resources and from environmentally damaging practices or projects which have a destructive impact on nature. Recently, critics and politicians have been calling for political and educational reform to raise awareness of the harm which is being caused to the environment. They also demand a greater focus on *biocentrism*, as “[s]uch a *biocentrism* would affirm the intrinsic value of all natural life and displace the current preference of even the most trivial human demands over the needs of other species or integrity of place” (Clark, p. 2).

The modern discipline of Ecocriticism, which deals with the representation of nature in the Arts, has proved very successful and is being used to analyze subjects such as Literature, Philosophy, Geography or Anthropology. Ecocriticism was coined as a term in 1970 and has diversified and spread into different trends capable of analyzing the way our world is evolving. As the ecocritical trend involves different interdisciplinary fields of expertise, it is possible to study several topics or subjects through various lenses or approaches.

Consequently, the basis of the following paper will be to examine, throughout an ecocritical approach, the works of three authors, separated in both space and time, who had an abiding interest in nature: the Englishman William Wordsworth (1770-1850), the Welshman Dylan Thomas (1914-54) and the Spaniard Claudio Rodríguez (1934-1999). The paper also aims to scrutinize how these poets envision nature in their works to the extent that they acquired what Thomashow called an “ecological identity” and even ecological awareness. Taking into account that the three poets share one main topic in their poetry, that of nature, we will determine what the key features are, such as a child’s perspective on the natural universe or imagination. In addition, the paper will attempt to give a comprehensive account of the term Sense of Place, or place-attachment, for these three authors. Moreover, it will be necessary to examine the first literary movement interested in the natural world, that is to say, Romanticism. Obviously, Wordsworth belonged to that movement and Thomas and Rodríguez had a close connection with it.

When it comes to education, there is evidence that, quite recently, considerable attention has been paid to the doctrine of Ecocriticism. During the last decades of the twentieth century, environmental awareness was greatly raised and certain universities took the risk of including subjects on Ecocriticism in their course contents. American and British universities started to study the works of certain authors through the lens of Ecocriticism. Gregg Garrad, who has devoted his work

to analyzing and teaching an ecocritical stance at the Bath Spa University, declares that this implies a “kind of activism”:

Ecocriticism has been preoccupied with pedagogy since its inception. Teaching undergraduates environmental theories and literatures is the central kind of “activism” to which busy humanities academics can aspire, and arguably the most effective too; and furthermore, with a few prominent exceptions, ecocriticism in the USA and the UK began in “teaching lead” universities and colleges, and has historically found little favour in the research-focus “elite”. (2012, p. 1)

It is palpable that “Ecocriticism brings new material to the classroom – new ways of looking at literature and some new methods of teaching” (Kerridge, 2012, p. 14). Yet, for some critics, such as David Orr, “all education is already environmental: its practices have ecological impacts and its overt and hidden curricula carry ecological meanings and implications” (quoted in Garrad, 2012, p. 9). So, “[t]he point of ecocritical pedagogy is to make its existing environmentality explicit and, above all, sustainable” (Garrad, p. 9).

Bearing this in mind, there is no doubt one of the most influential movements in Western thought is Romanticism, as it changed the point of view human beings had of nature. In his book entitled *The Roots of Romanticism*, Isaiah Berlin explains this influence in the following terms: “The importance of Romanticism is that it is the largest recent movement to transform the lives and the thought of the Western world. (...) The greatest single shift in the consciousness of the West has occurred [with this movement]” (pp. 1-2). Besides, Romanticism also changed the perspective on the natural world, as it was the first movement whose authors worshipped nature and whose postulates would be adopted by critics in the following centuries.

Romanticism in that sense remains a powerful feature of mainstream culture. It is also, since the 1970s, a basis of the numerous forms of countercultural and alternative cultural movements appealing to notions of nature and the natural as norms of health, vitality or beauty and as precisely what commercial / industrial society represses or destroys, both in the human psyche and in the surrounding environment. (Clark, 2011, p. 13)

However, there are critics who have argued that the publication of the book *Romantic Ecology* was a turning point in analyzing British Romanticism from an ecological stance. Nature played a relevant role in the poetry of the Romantics and it had to be highlighted by using a new point of view. In Hutchings’ view, “[s]ince the publication of Jonathan Bates’s *Romantic Ecology* in 1991, scholars have increasingly sought to reframe British Romanticism in light of environmental history, creating in the process the field of inquiry known as “Green Romanticism” or “Green Ecology””. (2012, p. 49). In addition, we must not forget that, in the modern world we are living in, ecological awareness should prevail. “Given the prominence of environmental issues in today’s media, teaching Romanticism

from an ecocritical perspective can help to bring a sense of topical relevance – and thus renewed vitality – to a “traditional” subject area students often find less than appealing” (Hutchings, p. 50).

Concerning some of the contributions to the discipline of Ecocriticism, the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan maintained that places were “centers of felt values” (2008, p. 4) and, for Axel Goodbody and Carmen Flys Junquera, places were also “part of all lived experience” (p. 12). Space is also a biological and psychological need (Tuan, 2008, p. 186) and “[t]o understand a person’s environmental preference, we may need to examine his biological heritage, upbringing, education, job, and physical surroundings” (Tuan, 1990, p. 59). That leads us to “ecological identity”, or “how we extend our sense of self in relationship to nature, and that the degree of and objects of identification must be resolved individually” (Thomashow, 1996, p. 3). Hence, if we are capable of identifying ourselves with a place and also capable of feeling a particular connection to that place, we could make mention of the term Sense of Place, or place-attachment. Thomashow believed that “Sense of place is a search for ecological roots. (...) It is through the place we live that we construct our personal identities, relate to the landscape, and determine what is important in our lives” (pp. 193-194). On the other hand, “Sense of place is an openness to appreciation of the characteristic features of a place, whose understanding may give us insight into how people interact with their environment, and facilitate efforts to make this interaction more sustainable” (Goodbody & Flys, 2016, p. 17).

As for the Romantics, their real Sense of Place could be found in the natural universe, since they rejected escalating industrialization in favour of a simpler way of life in contact with nature. The spirit of philanthropy widespread at that time had an enormous influence on the artists of this period to the extent that they dedicated most of their compositions to the most common elements in the natural universe. Moreover, they developed the concept of children as blessed beings, able to decipher what was hidden inside natural objects. The French philosopher Rousseau was the first to make childhood and the imaginative power in contact with nature a literary theme.

Having established the theoretical frame, those poems shedding light on the hypothesis that the principal theme of the works of these three authors is nature will be analyzed through an ecocritical approach. It is evident that Romanticism constituted a reference point in the treatment of nature as a literary topic and some of the postulates belonging to these authors were adopted by later poets. Such is the case of Dylan Thomas and Claudio Rodríguez, given that the reader can glimpse similar lines to those of the Romantics in their works. The romantic poet of nature par excellence was undoubtedly William Wordsworth, whose influence still endures today and whose poems represent a model of worship of the natural universe. Love of nature, “is, for Wordsworth, an essential element to thinking critically about the environment” (Ottum & Reno, 2016, p. 1) and, therefore, his

compositions, and also those of Thomas and Rodríguez, can be analyzed from an ecocritical perspective. In fact, “Wordsworth’s re-presentation of the natural world as an affective state continuous with ecological consciousness characterizes a wide range of nineteenth-century ecological literature” (Ottum & Reno, 2016, p. 2). The Romantics embrace nature as an element that caused feelings in them, and “feelings generate ecological thinking, including feelings that might not at first seem conducive to the development of “green” attitudes” (Ottum & Reno, 2016, p. 3).

The sensations he experienced in contact with nature can be observed in most of his poems. He was interested in the connections of emotions, feelings and memory and, in his “preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, he declared that poetry was “emotion recollected in tranquillity” and “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (1969, p. 157), since most of this emotion was recalled in contact with the natural universe. Furthermore, he stated that “poetry is the image of man and nature” (19) and, as a result, poetry reflects the love he feels for nature and for human beings, too. For some researchers, such love of nature has political and moral connotations:

Loving nature is a profoundly political act that communicates a range of social and ideological positions. To love nature – whether a tree or a field or a bunny – is to enact through emotion an opposition to industrialization, consumer capitalism, and certain strands of conservative political ideology. This has been the case since the Romantic period, when William Wordsworth claimed in *The Prelude* (1805) that “Love of Nature lead[s] to love of Mankind.” That phrase, in the early nineteenth century, carries revolutionary connotations reminiscent of both the American and the French declarations of the “rights of man.” It is a political statement that confirms the “natural” rights associated with democracy, liberty, and equality, made even more radical by love of all sentient beings and, for Wordsworth, all inanimate things as well. (Reno, 2016, p. 28)

Wordsworth’s love of nature has its roots in the romantic idea of contemplating the simplest forms of nature due to the philanthropic spirit which arose at that time. Poets and painters preferred the elements of the natural universe and rejected industrialization, as they considered that industrialism spoils the beauty of the landscape and cities corrupted human beings. It was in the country where the human being felt free and liberated from social and political chains. What mattered most to Wordsworth was his emotional development in nature. In the Lake District, he found the calmness he needed to restore his mind and soul and an illustration of this calmness is the poem “Composed upon Westminster Bridge”, in which the elements of the natural world are described with intense imagination:

Earth has anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning: silent, bare,

Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
 Open unto the fields, and to the sky:
 All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
 Never did sun more beautifully steep
 In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill:
 Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
 (1996, p. 158)

What the previous lines show is a great interest in the elements of nature surrounding the poet when contemplating this landscape. In this light, there emerges a great affection for nature and also the need to preserve the environment as the best place for human beings. Subsequently, the ecological point of view has been introduced to change the preconceived ideas we have on Romanticism. However, these ideas have been inherited by other authors such as Dylan Thomas, who, in the opening "Prologue" to *Eighteen Poems* (1934) portrays a magnificent landscape imbued with the creative force of imagination. The poem can also be analyzed through an ecocritical lens, highlighting the interest in the descriptions of the natural object Thomas demonstrates against the industrial city.

This day winding down now
 At God speeded summer's end
 In the torrent salmon sun,
 In my seashaken house
 On a breakneck of rocks
 Tangled with chirrup and fruit,
 Froth, flute, fin and quill
 At a wood's dancing hoof,
 By scummed, starfish sands
 With their fishwife cross
 Gulls, pipers, cockles, and sails,
 Out there, crow black, men
 Tackled with clouds, who kneel
 To the sunset nets,
 Geese nearly in heaven, (...)
 (2004, p. 1)

In the case of Rodríguez, we should mention the fact that his first book, *Gift of Inebriation* (1953), was written while out walking. His devotion to the countryside of Zamora is palpable from the first lines and it is also obvious that the natural world is a fundamental topic in his works. Contemplation is mixed with the creative force of imagination and the result is a magnificent landscape. Rodríguez, like Wordsworth and Thomas, had a preference for nature and rejected industrialization, as he believed it destroyed human values of solidarity and humbleness. In this sense, the poet desires to meld himself with the natural elements and to be part of them.

And so the desire. Like dawn, clear
 from the top and when it halts
 touching what is concrete

recently dark, although instantly.
 Then it opens noisy pigeon lofts
 and already it one more day. Oh, the hostage
 pigeons of the night holding back
 their highest impulses! And always
 like desire, like my desire.
 Watch it rise among the clouds, watch it
 without occupying space dazzling me.
 (2008, pp. 37, 39)

Related to the topic of nature is that of childhood. For these three authors, children were blessed creatures able to contemplate the world with purer eyes, as they were not corrupted by the evils of society. The Romantics included this thesis in their work, derived directly from the French philosopher Rousseau, and also from the philanthropic spirit of that time. For the Romantics, nature had sacred connotations and was both the place when human beings sheltered when they felt of the modern world and the place children left their imagination run free. According to Lisa Ottum and Seth T. Reno (2016), “[s]imilar to the study of ecology, the study of affect was incipient in the nineteenth century. Following their eighteenth-century forbearers, the Romantics were deeply interested in matters such as the transmission and mediation of “sympathy”” (p. 7). In *The Lake District*, Wordsworth found the inspiration and the serenity he needed to the extent that nature acted as an alleviation of distress. In particular, when remembering those moments of childhood in contact with nature, the poet feels reconciled with himself and with the elements of the natural world. In Book Eight of *The Prelude* (1805), he admitted how fortunate and blessed he was for having been brought up in such a place and, as a consequence, how, through nature, human beings can love mankind:

My present theme
 Is to retrace the way that led me on
 Through Nature to the love of human-kind;
 Nor could I with such object overlook
 The influence of this power which turned itself
 Instinctively to human passion, things
 Least understood – of this adulterate power,
 For so it may be called, and without wrong,
 When with that first compared. Yet in the midst
 Of these vagaries, with an eye so rich
 As mine was— through the chance, on me not wasted,
 Of having been brought up in such a grand
 And lovely region –I had forms of distinct
 To steady me. (...)
 (1979, p. 296)

So, we can deduce that, for Wordsworth, loving the natural objects can be compared to loving human beings. For Ashton Nichols, this love of mankind derives directly from childhood feelings and deals with our emotions. In fact, developing

such emotions means a “literal return to those passions of childhood by which the soul was “built up,” a mental example of time travel, back to those early experiences that shaped the “soul” and made it into the feeling self it became” (150). Moreover, “[t]his love is then transferred to human persons (sisters, friends, and even the self) as the maturing identity begins to realize that other selves – unlike the rest of nature – share in our emotional power to be generative of affects” (Nichols, 2016, p. 150). In Dylan Thomas, imagination provides nature with another perspective not glimpsed before and magnificent memories of childhood constitute a restoring balm when the poet experiences a kind of despair due to the social circumstances he lived in. The composition “Poem in October”, included in *Death and Entrances* (1946), shows the vision of nature and childhood from the point of view of an adult person, although it is with a visionary force that only a blessed and purer creature can possess. Here, “[w]eak nostalgia is replaced with a powerful rapture of recollection. Images of farm childhood with its tilts, its harvests and its fruit trees – all “green” – swarm it on the poet”. (Davies, 2005, p. 62).

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
 About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,
 In the sun that is young once only,
 Time let me play and be
 Golden in the mercy of his means,
 And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves
 Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,
 And the sabbath rang slowly
 In the pebbles of the holy streams.
 (2004, p. 134)

As for Claudio Rodríguez, childhood was undoubtedly one of his favourite topics. He devoted himself to two themes: the natural universe and childhood, the worship of nature being the main one and that from which the rest, including childhood, emerged. In his view, children were gifted with a special capacity to recognize everything ordinary adult mortals were not able to. Their world, like in Wordsworth and Rodríguez, was impregnated with an aura of purity that could not be found in modern society. The poem “Ode to Childhood”, belonging to *Alliance and Condemnation* (1965), bears witness to how the immaculateness that lies in childhood and the vision children hold differs from a mechanical society where human beings are devoid of sensitivity.

Always now, at the door,
 and much to our sorrow, here returns, returns
 this childhood fate that explodes
 everywhere: in the street, in this
 voracious breathing of the day, in the
 simplicity of the first savoury smoke,
 in the gaze, in each labour
 of man.

.....
 See that everything is childhood:
 the truth that is silence forever.
 years of buying and selling,
 men full of prices,
 the voiceless proclamations, the shady weddings,
 put into us the fear of our race's
 great adventure, of childhood.
 (2008, pp. 239, 241,243)

Taking this into account, we could affirm that, for these three authors, nature stands out as their principal topic. The ecological identity was formed in their childhood and it remained with them during their lives, so they could go on to be taught about as authors with deep ecological thoughts. Nevertheless, in his study entitled *Ecological Identity* (1995), Thomashow explains about such identity in nature writing and also the “purpose of a learning community”:

Love and loss. Wonder and doom. These are some of the feelings that emerge through ecological identity work. The educator must find a way to balance these impressions, avoiding the temptation to dwell for too long in any emotional space. For ecological identity work, the purpose of a learning community is to provide people with a forum in which it is safe to discuss these conflicting feelings, but to do so within a broader context as a way to internalize the meaning of environmentalism, provide guidance for professional and personal choices, create cohesion and solidarity within the group, legitimate the feelings themselves, and acknowledge that these discussions belong in environmental education.
 (p. 13)

Directly related to the topic of ecological identity, it is that of Sense of Place, which can be defined as the attachment to a specific place for biographical or sentimental reasons, among others. For Carmen Flys Junquera and Axel Goodbody, the term contains a wide variety of meanings; however, a more subjective vision also leverages its connotations:

The variety of usage of “sense of place” across this range of disciplines, in which it is sometimes loosely employed as a synonym for place-attachment, place-belonging and even place-identity, is not the only reason why “sense of place” is difficult to define. While its primary meaning is the subjective feel which an individual or group has of a place, their perception of it, the term is also frequently used to designate supposedly, objective qualities of places, which exist independently of the observer. This duality of meaning can be traced back to the Romantics.
 (2016, p. 14)

Wordsworth's favourite place was the Lake District. As has already been said, it was there that he found the calm and peace of mind he longed for. What he felt in contact with nature constituted almost a mystical experience and nature was not only seen as his real home, but also as the place he belonged to; such a place

being covered with religious connotations. A good example of these ideas is the well-known composition “Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree”, belonging to *Lyrical Ballads*, which belies the immensity of the devotion he possesses and shows his belief in belonging to such magnificent place. The creative force of imagination also gives strength to the poem and a new vision never seen before:

-Nay, Traveller! rest. This lonely yew-tree stands
 Far from all human dwelling; what if here
 No sparkling rivulet spread the verdant herb;
 What if these barren boughs the bee not loves;
 Yet, if the wind breathe soft, the curling waves,
 That break against the shore, shall lull thy mind
 By one soft impulse saved from vacancy.
 (1969, p. 35)

Dylan Thomas always professed a huge love for his country, Wales, and, in particular, for Swansea and its countryside. As a child, he stayed many a time on a farm his aunt had near the village of Llangain, in Carmarthenshire. Thomas worshipped rural Wales and, on certain occasions, his poems were permeated with a sacred aura that made them seem religious without being so at all. “Especially when the October Wind”, included in *Eighteen Poems* (1934), is an illustration of how the natural universe was filled with both imagination and the sacred aura which makes Thomas a different author from his contemporaries:

Especially when the October wind
 (Some let me make you of autumnal spells,
 The spider-tongued, and the loud hills of Wales)
 With fits of turnips punishes the land,
 Some let me make you of the heartless words.
 The heart is drained that, spelling in the scurry
 Of chemic blood, warned of the coming fury.
 By the sea’s side hear the dark-vowelled birds.
 (1998, p. 19)

Claudio Rodríguez’s Sense of Place was undeniably Zamora and its countryside. The profound admiration and love he professed to his birthplace is shown clearly throughout his works. Not only had he worshipped the city of Zamora, but also its green and magnificent landscape, which was covered with a sacred veil. In this sense, nature had a religious connotation and a mystical aura can be felt in his works. Evidence of such love is manifested in “Song III” (First Book), included in *Gift of Inebriation*, where the poets makes mention of “a great tableland”. No doubt this tableland is the one in which Zamora is located. In a similar vein to Thomas, the composition also exudes a spiritual overtone, but without being in any way religious.

The holm oak, which preserves a ray
 of sun more than a whole month of Spring,
 does not feel the spontaneity of its shadow,

the simplicity of growth; it scarcely
 knows the terrain in which it has sprouted.
 With that wind which in its branches leave
 What has no music, it imagines
 A great tableland for its dreams.
 And with what haste it identifies itself
 with countryside, with the entire soul
 of its luxuriance and of myself.
 (2008, pp. 35, 37)

It is evident that members of the Romantic Movement were the first to include subjectivism of the natural universe in their works. These authors changed completely the point of view of nature and showed her as a recipient of the feelings they experienced when being in contact with her. In this sense, we can mention the duality of mind and nature and also the ecocritical perspective. In Rigby's words:

The shift to an ecocritical perspective entails the recognition that the natural world is not simply a passive object of knowledge and control, a mere resource to be bought and sold or an indifferent screen upon which we project culturally specific and socially overdetermined images of nature. Rather, the natural world is the dynamic enabling condition of all cultural production, which in turn bears the trace of its more-than-human genesis. (2004, p. 4)

Regarding this duality, it is particularly worth adding that both the Romantic Movement and the ecocritical trend were crucial points while analyzing the topic of nature in the Arts. It is true that the romantic authors felt at ease when they were in contact with the natural universe; however, the panic or the anxiety they experienced were sometimes reflected in nature too. For them, understanding nature and its processes was equivalent to understanding the human mind and this postulate has also been defended by experts on Ecocriticism, today it is patent that:

This idea that "ecology" links the natural world to the human mind, and thus the material world to an imaginative construct like literary form, animates a great deal of Romantic poetry from the 1790s to the 1830s. (Nichols, 2016, p. 147)

One of Wordsworth's most celebrated poems, "Lines composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey", proves that nature provides the poet with the calmness he needs and the beauty and the tranquillity of the landscape is transmitted to his mind:

These beauteous forms,
 Through a long absence, have not been to me
 As a landscape to a blind's mind eye:
 But of, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
 Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
 In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
 Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
 And passing even into my purer mind,

With tranquil restoration: (...)
(1996, p. 127)

Dylan Thomas was always aware of the fact that his mind was put at ease when contemplating natural objects. Sometimes, the reader may sense that the feelings the poet experienced are transmitted to nature and, consequently, nature can be compared to human beings and their minds. The composition “In the Beginning”, included in his book *Eighteen Poems*, refers to the creation of both the natural universe and human beings and is coloured with a religious tone which defines the poetry of this Welsh author. The poem also includes an allusion to the creation of the human brain.

In the beginning was the world, the world
That from the solid bases of the light
Abstracted all the letters of the void:
And from the cloudy bases of the breath
The world flowed up, translating to the heart
First characters of birth and death.

In the beginning was the secret brain.
The brain was celled and soldered in the thought
Before the pitch was forking to a sun;
Before the veins were shacking in their sieve,
Blood shot and scattered to the winds of light
The ribbed original of love.
(2004, p. 23)

In the case of Rodríguez and as already mentioned, the natural universe seems to be covered by a sacred veil. One of the most persistent images is of melding with the elements of nature in a kind of mystical process. What the poet experiences is echoed in nature. So, whenever the cycles of nature take place, the poet, together with his mind, feels certain sensations as if they were part of the natural elements. The composition “With March”, belonging to the third book of *Gift of Inebriation*, provides us with this idea of fusing with nature, in which the mind would be a part of her.

What was exact before doesn't find
its place now. It can't find it and it's daytime,
and the water spring runs quickly as if from
far away, and it sounds like lost light.
Quickly myself too, by dint of warm
hunger, of unheard-of mornings,
I have seen in the incense of the peaks
and in my white writings a happiness
dispelled of vigour. And hasn't everything
risen yet to kiss? Don't start unlimit
themselves for something more beautiful
than a concealed relapsing? I wish life

summoned me in the middle of my body
 as the clearing among pine trees does to the
 cold moon breathing, because now
 I can, and now it is there.... (...)
 (2008, p. 59)

To conclude, we must add that the discipline of Ecocriticism has provided new perspectives, not only to increase the field of literary criticism, but also the contents of courses at certain universities, and it has offered new perspectives when analyzing canonical texts. Concepts such as “Ecological Identity” or Sense of Place have begun to enter the vocabulary used in literary criticism.

In this paper, we have shown that the works of the three authors studied can be analyzed from an ecocritical stance. They all are connected to the Romantic Movement. In fact, Wordsworth became one of its most popular poets. However, the ecocritical point of view has offered a new vision not contemplated before.

The main topic Wordsworth, Thomas and Rodríguez shared was the natural universe; a universe which they started worshipping during their childhood. Nature, for all of them, was purer in the eyes of a child since they were not damaged by the evils of a corrupted society uninterested in preserving the natural world. So, children, according to them, were able to demonstrate that what they contemplate with their innocent eyes is more unpolluted than what adults perceive. Furthermore, they consider nature to be covered by a sacred veil which adds religious or mystical connotations without being religious at all.

Regarding the idea of place-attachment, or Sense of Place, it is necessary to add that these terms have provided new perspectives when studying the devotion felt towards the birthplace. The real Sense of Place, for these authors, was nature and they felt they belonged to it. They dedicated most of their poems to magnificent descriptions of nature full of beauty and manifested that the natural world was the place where they found tranquillity and to which they escaped to forget the daily problems of being themselves. Thus, they also knew that there was a kind of “ecological identity” growing inside them and forcing them to care for the environment as the place they worshiped and as the place we should preserve. Nature is more than a loving mother and, as Wordsworth affirmed, “One impulse from a vernal wood / May teach you more of man; (...) / Than all the sages can.” (Wordsworth & Coleridge, 1989, p. 105).

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Education

Creative Teacher-Creative Pupil – a Study Report

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Abstract

Nowadays, many social changes demand flexibility to accommodate to new conditions, becoming creative plays an important role. This ability is seen as one of the most important goals in modern education. Considering the dynamic nature of teaching and very often unpredictable working as a teacher, creativity in this job is necessary. It simplifies solving many educational problems, which frequently demand acting in an unintended way. Teacher's creative attitude is also important for the child's development of creativity, which helps pupils to face changes in environment and to conform to the developing reality. In this article communication abilities, necessary to develop creativity at elementary education, are being discussed.

Keywords: *creative competences, early childhood education teacher, pupil*

Introduction

Becoming creative seems to be crucial in today's world as it demands flexibility to accommodate to new conditions. This ability is seen as one of the most important goals in modern education. Considering how unpredictable working as a teacher can be, creativity in this job is necessary. A teacher faces with solving many educational problems, which frequently demand acting in an unintended way. The teacher's creative attitude seems to be also important for the child's development of creativity. Many authors (Craft, 2000; Jäder, 2005; Uszyńska-Jarmoc, 2003) postulate to support child's development of creativity, in an effective way, during elementary education and they want teachers to act creatively. Many psychologists tend to think that stimulation of creative verbal and non-verbal behaviour is an essential condition in learning and collecting experiences and reaching high level in chosen activities by the pupils. Liberating creativity potential, right creative practice and proper organization of verbal and non-verbal expression, i.e. choosing various situations and material, impact pupils' development and further educational and personal success. Developing creativity and forming alternative thinking should start at the elementary education stage. The first years of education are crucial to the pupils' future educational and professional career. Because in elementary education all forms of verbal or non-verbal contact represent an important information channel, professional success of a teacher depends on his interpersonal abilities and knowledge about them, situational factors and attitude, which pupils adopt towards teacher's measures. The results of researches indicate that the teachers' interpersonal skills, and in particular their constituent communication skills, do not always contribute to the development of students' creativity. Unfortunately, "many scientific, methodic and guiding publications, connected with creativity and ways to develop it, stance that modern school supresses pupil's development of creativity" (Szmidt, 2007, p.11) and the idea that it is old-fashioned, neglected and stereotyped is still current (Suświłło, 2005).

1. Definition of the concept of creativity

Creativity is a personality potential of most of the people for achieving significant – at least in the psychological scale – results of the creation. In the opinion of Karwowski (2010) "Creativity is a creative potential, earnest money of the artistic work (starting level), feature of individual, causing that its chances of the real rather than only seeming artistic work grow" (p. 14). Creative thinking, unlike the creative activity, is being defined as activity bringing products, which were unknown until now, and at the same time are considered to be socially valuable.

Creative thinking is mainly associated with personality – features – with the openness, the independence and the perseverance, as well as with cognitive sphere features, with creative abilities (Karwowski, 2010). All these features are of great importance for the real problem solving. The openness is particularly essential at

noticing and defining problems, perseverance at generating solutions, independence whereas at implementing other announcing them, and the defence against the criticism. And so combining creative thinking with the creative attitude, and with creative faculties, understood as the efficiency in intellectual operations at generating, exploring and implementing the idea into life and the problem solving is justified. When we are dealing with the creative attitude, deprived of the abilities, perhaps only one creative trait is being talked about, without chances of the real creative activity, because for the creative activity basic cognitive processes are significant (e.g. attention, memory, spotting, imagination) and more complex processes (language, solving problems), as well as intellectual operations so as thinking, the intuitive thinking, abstracting, synthesizing, analyzing, transforming and associations, the ability to generate metaphors, the pliability of thinking or associating. Creative faculties are non-specific, i.e. creating requires no other abilities than solving typical problems. However the essence lies in using the operation differently than usually (Karwowski, 2010, p. 14).

2. Conditions for stimulating the creative potential

Peculiarly predisposed to the creative activity are people, whose abilities and creative postures are harmonized. Accepting the egalitarian approach to the creative activity, recognised as the potential opportunity of the individual, it is assumed that everyone, at least to some extent, can be creative (Runco, 2003, p. 322). Children also have a high creative potential, which is possible and necessary to develop and stimulate (Runco, 2003). According to Runco “It is worth underlining that this phenomenon should be combined with the creative, in case of children focusing on achievements and work is useless, and analyzing should start, when thinking or solving problems appears and the child produces new meanings” (Runco, 2004, p. 678).

Many factors contribute to the accomplishment of the children’s potential, such as:

- perseverance
- maturity
- intrinsic and intentional motivation
- appropriate level of the intelligence and expertise knowledge
- environmental support

In the opinion of Polish psychologists (Przetacznik-Gierowska, 1993; Kielar-Turska, 1992) the development of the individual’s creativity is conditioned by genetic factors and social conditions, and his own activity, which is based on cognitive, research, emotional and entertainment needs. The creativity of the child appears during expressive and exploratory activities, playing games or motor activities (Czelakowska, 2007, p. 97). According to Grochowalska (2014) playing games, a free form of the activity of the child, can also proceed according to the instruction of adults, so they can also be implemented to achieve the educational goal. Games

help not only to develop cognitive competence, to improve social abilities, to problem solving learning, to develop the children's memory, but also stimulate creative thinking, as Sufa also argues: "Create conditions for the creative activities, but if necessary also to modify the creative activity of children, according to their needs and the development potential and also must feel the need of creating" (Sufa, 2011, p. 57). To sum up, creating conditions to develop creativity and creative thinking should include the number of competent actions of the teacher, who will:

1. Appreciate every sign of creative thinking, ingeniousness, originality of thinking of the child, irrespective of the practical value of the idea, because in creative games there are no wrong answers, there are only diverse ideas and possibilities. Noticing the creative initiative of the pupil, the self-reliance and the determination in taking actions is important. Expressing the approval, appreciation for intellectual or artistic efforts of the child what will be supporting for him and will help him to believe in his own power.
2. Inspire the pupil to create new, untypical answers, observation, experimenting or reflective assessing (trying out alternative manners of acting and thinking).
3. Refer to the children's needs, interests, experience, considering individual creative possibilities of every child, his self-reliance.
4. Promote the openness and the elasticity of thinking, having own opinion.
5. Concentrate the attention of children on problems, allow multitude of equivalent answers, without suggesting solutions when children still intensively think above creating the reply.
6. Not criticize ideas, avoid judging right after describing them on the forum of the group/ of the team, teach active listening, but also defend somebody's position by giving specific arguments.
7. Teach the cooperation in the group during solving problems, to eliminate rivalry, teach appreciating the value of the effective work of the team, which can often show original ideas, thanks to mutual supplementing oneself and for prompting to think.
8. Assume effective results.

All children, who have conditions to develop their abilities, have a chance to achieve subjective success if they deal with fields, to which they have predispositions and feel appreciated, valuable and satisfied at the same time. Relying on the strongest points of the pupil, prevents the syndrome of inappropriate achievements, minimizes frustration, suffering defeat and the negative evaluation of the period of the education. Czelakowska states that:

Teachers, who creates conditions for development of creative thinking and creative activities, should motivate pupils to: conceive many kinds of ideas; judge ideas; look for solutions in the wider space by looking at different points of view; reflect.

The teacher should also reward the child for creating questions, which sometimes might be strange, untypical, sometimes even finding them incomprehensible statements, and sometimes absurd, pointless or funny” (Czelakowska, 2007, p. 97).

Such an atmosphere in the classroom and a teacher’s attitude seem to be the most beneficial for children and help them gain success. What is more, desire for asking and creating stems from the child’s natural curiosity about the world and inquisitiveness, which is based on the child’s ability to be amazed and to experience new feelings and sensations. Such behavior is primary for a child. Asking questions opens the door to reflection, formation of the interpretative knowledge (Klus-Stańska, 2002). It is the first step to the mature creative activity. The ability of formulating questions and the cognitive curiosity are understood in this presentation as the motivating state/process, “powering” process of creative thinking. Unfortunately in the traditional, transmission pedagogy, which teaches the encyclopedic knowledge, there’s no time for examining and discussing the courage of children, who are afraid of taking risk, and prefer stereotyped solutions to present standard behaviors, of which a teacher and an education system are a guarantor of the safety (Szmidt, 2005). Stimulating creative thinking should be held in a sense of subjectivity of the pupil, in the atmosphere of acceptance, respect and partnership, full of tolerance for disaccord and novelties of other children’s behavior or the idea in which creative activity will be noticed and accepted. In order to create such an atmosphere the teacher should be imaginative, demonstrate such personality predispositions and cognitive competence, as: openness and approval for novelty, creative thinking, complexity of cognitive structures (including the originality of thinking and sensitivity to problems), ability of the use of information from many various sources, the curiosity about the world, the courage, lack of anxieties of the unknown, the change or the risk, a sense of humour, spontaneity, optimism, positive self-assessment and expressiveness, ability to have a passion and being fascinated by the task, inquisitiveness and independence (Czaja- Chudyba, 2009). Creative teachers, as Szmidt (2001) notices, sometimes misunderstand the aims of education action and want to help children to develop. In the end, they make numerous mistakes such as: compulsion of the improvisation (abusing “free subjects” in action of children), precipitating experience (realization of too difficult subjects, unsuited to the level of the child’s emotional or moral development), superficial tolerating the freedom (approving and requiring correct replies during analysis of open problems) and instilling with a sense of guilt (e.g. during the identification with negative objects).

I admonish the uncritical usage of “obligatory creation” under all circumstances and vulnerable situations. Developing creative faculties of pupils, which are based on action of teachers, depends on the ability of accurate identification of children’s creative possibilities, or generally recognizing the production by teachers and such organizing educational assignments, so they support the development of children’s

creativity (Szmids, 2001). The identification of the creative potential is the base of educational action supporting the child's development of creativity. The process of the identification should have an impact on situations which are directly organized to be described as educational games representing the character of creative disposition. Gathering information about possibilities and restrictions should include individual attitude of the child towards tasks that were given. "Developmental approach in the process of the identification of the creative potential involves rejecting labels such as "creative "/" noncreative". Looking for factors which can free creative potential options of the child and the ones which can be barriers in the creative development is important" (Dziedziewicz, 2009, p. 51). An interaction between parents and teachers should be an essential condition of the accurate identification of the creative potential and collected information should be used in the process of stimulating the works of the child, as Dziedziewicz reinforces: "In the process of the child's creativity identification, creativity tests and methods based on self-reflection are valuable, for self-discovery, e.g. questionnaires and interviews" (p. 51).

3. Creative Competences of Early Childhood Education Teachers (grades 1-3) – research report

Every teacher starting his work at school should understand that creative competences are indispensable in his everyday work and significantly increase its effectiveness.

A closer look has been taken at a catalogue of creative competences of early childhood education teachers (grades 1-3). Further, an attempt has been made to diagnose the competences during an entire period of the teachers' professional activity. The subjects of the research were 10 teachers from primary schools located in cities in the Świętokrzyskie region. The following questions have been asked:

1. Do you have the skills to independently perform analysis of teaching curricula and to select one of them?
2. Are you able to prepare your own teaching curriculum?
3. Do you improve your teaching and training skills? Do you modernize your teaching tools and introduce innovative solutions?
4. Do you create your own educational projects (e.g. lesson plans, articles) and publish them in educational journals?

The analysis of the data presented in Table 1 shows that more than half of the teachers participating in the survey (59%) claims that they are able to perform analysis of teaching curricula (score: high). Approximately one third of the respondents (34%) evaluates their skills to analyse teaching curricula available on the market as average. At the same time only 7% of the respondents acknowledge that they are not able to independently select the best curriculum. Taking into account the length of service of the surveyed teachers, young teachers working for not longer than 5 years as well as a group of teachers with the length of service from 6 to 15 years

performed best. Among young teachers, high assessment of skills concerning the analysis of curricula is declared by 8 out of 10 surveyed teachers (80%). At the same time, on average 2 teachers out of 10 (20%) assess their abilities as average whereas none of them states that their skills in this respect are low. Similarly, in a group of teachers with the length of service from 6 to 15 years as much as 69% report high self-assessment abilities in terms of analysing available curricula, 31% - average and there is no teacher in this group who cannot make a decision in this respect. In a group of teachers working in their profession for the period from 16 to 25 years a similar number of respondents report high self-assessment abilities (43%) and average self-assessment abilities (41%). There are also teachers who claim that the selection of a specific curriculum is a too difficult task for them (16%). In a group of teachers working for longer than 25 years, the majority of respondents (8 out of 13, 61%) report high abilities to select a given curriculum. Unfortunately, one person (9%) cannot cope with the variety of the proposed curricula at the level of early childhood education.

Table 1: Self-assessment of skills to independently perform analysis of teaching curricula and to select one of them in the context of the length of service

Do you have the skills to independently perform analysis of teaching curricula and to select of one them?

Self-assessment category	Length of service in years								Total	
	0 - 5		6 - 15		16 - 25		More than 25		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
High	8	80	25	69	18	43	8	61	59	59
Average	2	20	11	31	17	41	4	30	34	34
Low	0	0	0	0	6	16	1	9	7	7
Total	10	100	36	100	41	100	18	100	100	100

Both flexibility in the choice of curriculum or the possibility to adapt an educational offer to the needs and expectations of school environment and the importance of a curriculum in the implementation of teaching objectives assign teachers to a difficult task of evaluating teaching curricula. A teaching curriculum is one of the most important tools for the organization of the teaching-learning process which has a great impact on students' educational achievements. The curriculum's concept, philosophy, proper objectives, content, methods and teaching aids influence the quality of the teaching process and achieved teaching outcomes. A teaching curriculum for a given grade is selected by a class teacher taking into account students' abilities and school's equipment. Consequently, the class teacher is responsible for his choice. Teachers face the dilemma of how to select the best curriculum for his students and for himself out of many offers available on the market.

The results of the conducted research are surprising. According to Table 1 the majority of surveyed teachers reported the highest self-assessment grade in terms of analysing curricula independently and selecting one of them.

The above thoughts make us ask the following questions: Are early school education teachers really so well prepared for a difficult task of selecting a curriculum, one of the most important tools of the organization of the teaching-learning process influencing students’ achievements? Are teachers able to answer the following questions: Which curriculum shall be defined as good? What criteria should be applied while assessing a curriculum? What shall be done when a selected curriculum does not meet our expectations and students’ needs? On what grounds should a teacher select a curriculum? What should be the basis for making a decision concerning the approval of the curriculum? If the teachers know the answers to all these questions then why are the research results concerning the ability to design one’s own teaching curriculum not satisfactory? (See Table 2).

Table 2: *Self-assessment of the ability to design teacher’s own teaching curriculum in the context of the length of service*

Are you able to design your own teaching curriculum?										
Self-assessment category	Length of service in years								Total	
	0 - 5		6 - 15		16 - 25		More than 25		N	%
	n	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
High	3	30	17	47	17	41	3	23	40	40
Average	6	60	11	30	22	53	9	69	48	48
Low	1	10	8	23	2	6	1	8	12	12
Total	10	100	36	100	41	100	13	100	100	100

The next question in the survey was related to the ability of designing the teacher’s own curriculum. The results obtained show that a comparable number of teachers assess the level of abilities to design their own teaching curriculum as high – 40% and as average – 48%. Only 12% admit they are not able to design their own teaching curriculum. The results are similar in all groups of teachers. In the group of teachers with the shortest length of service out of 10 people only 3 (30%) are not able to design a curriculum for early school education, 6 (60%) report an average interest in designing their own curriculum for grades 1-3 of early school education whereas 1 person (10%) reports high interest in doing so. In the group of teachers with the length of service spanning from 6 to 15 years, 47% of the surveyed teachers report high level of ability to prepare a teaching curriculum, 30% - average and 8% - no ability to do so. In the group of teachers with the length of service from 16 to 25 years approximately half (41%) reports high level of the ability to design one’s own teaching curriculum, 22 teachers (53%) – average level and 2 (6%) – low level. Based on the self-assessment of teachers working in their

profession for longer than 25 years, 23% report high level of the ability to design their own teaching curriculum, 69% - average whereas 8% - low.

Empirical material points to certain problems existed in connection with the ability to design one's own teaching curriculum. The majority of teachers reported an average level of ability in this respect.

The respondents were also asked about whether and how they improve their teaching and training skills and whether they modernize their teaching tools and introduce innovative solutions.

The results presented in Table 3 refer to the answers to Question 3, taking into account the length of service of the surveyed teachers.

Table 3: Self-assessment of the level of improvement of teaching and training skills as well as undertaken attempts at modernizing teaching tools and introducing innovative solutions.

Do you improve your teaching and training skills? Do you modernize your teaching tools and introduce innovative solutions?

Self-assessment category	Length of service in years								Total	
	0 - 5		6 - 15		16 - 25		More than 25		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%	n	%		
High	10	100	36	100	38	92	9	69	93	93
Average	0	0	0	0	3	8	4	31	7	7
Low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	10	100	36	100	41	100	13	100	100	100

As can be seen from the results presented in Table 3, the surveyed teachers report high level of ability to improve their teaching and training skills (93%). In the light of self-assessment, all teachers working no longer than 15 years have no problems in introducing innovative solutions to teaching activities. More experienced teachers also make some attempts at modernizing their teaching tools. High level of self-assessment was reported by 38 teachers (92%) with the length of service from 16 to 25 years and 9 teachers (69%) working for longer than 25 years. Only 8% of the respondents assess their creative abilities in their contacts with students as average. These are 3 teachers in the group of teachers with the length of service from 16 to 25 years and 4 (31%) from the group of teachers working for longer than 25 years. No teachers assessed the level of their creative abilities in teaching as low.

To sum up, it needs to be stressed that the majority of respondents assesses the level of improving their teaching and training skills, modernizing their teaching tools and introducing innovative solutions as high. In this way, they are able to master their teaching, introducing new solutions which lead to better teaching outcomes and faster progress of students. The teachers participating in the study are engaged in searching, examining, experimenting thus going off the beaten track when it comes to improving their teaching and training skills.

The last question connected with creative competences regarded the ability to design teacher's own educational projects and to publish them. Based on the results presented in Table 4 it can be concluded that the answers to the given question depended on the length of service.

Table 4: *Self-assessment concerning the creation of teacher's own educational projects (e.g. lesson plans, articles) and publishing them in educational journals.*

Do you create your own educational projects (e.g. lesson plans, articles) and publish them in educational journals?

Self-assessment category	Length of service in years								Total	
	0 - 5		6 - 15		16 - 25		More than 25		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%	n	%		
High	3	30	12	33	13	31	4	30	82	32
Average	6	60	15	41	19	46	7	53	47	47
Low	1	10	9	26	9	23	2	17	21	21
Total	10	100	36	100	41	100	13	100	100	100

The highest number of surveyed teachers (47%) reported a moderate level of self-assessment concerning the creation of their own educational projects. A similar number of teachers assessed their level of abilities as high, 32%, and low, 21%. There were no significant differences in the results between the groups of teachers with the length of service of up to 5 years and from 6 to 15 years, in which approximately one third of the respondents, 30% and 33% respectively, assessed the level of abilities to create their own lesson plans and write articles as high, 60% and 41% as average whereas 10% and 26% do not create educational projects and do not publish articles in educational journals. The teachers with the length of service from 16 to 25 years did a little bit worse – 31% assessed their abilities to create educational project as high, whereas 46% claimed their abilities in this respect to be average. 23% of the respondents are not involved in the preparation of their own educational projects and publishing them. More than half of the teachers (53%) with the length of service of 25 years or more claim that their abilities to create educational projects are average. 30% (4 teachers) state that they present new educational ideas, however, 17% (2 teachers) reveal that in their work they do not pay attention to new ideas concerning educational work with children.

However, the answers provided by the teachers participating in the study are contradictory. On the one hand, many teachers admit to have some problems with designing their own educational projects, on the other, they claim that they introduce innovative solutions to their process of education. It might be concluded that the teachers are aware of the problems connected with improving their teaching and training skills but nevertheless they make attempts at modernizing them.

4. Conclusions

The results presented point to two trends. On the one hand, the teachers undertake creative activities, manifested by the ability to analyse curricula and to select one of them, and by the improvement of teaching and training skills and attempting at obtaining additional professional qualifications. On the other hand, the teachers are not always ready to design their own curriculum or write individual educational projects, such as lesson plans or articles. Therefore, study plans for future teachers should include classes where you can learn how to build educational programmes and projects.

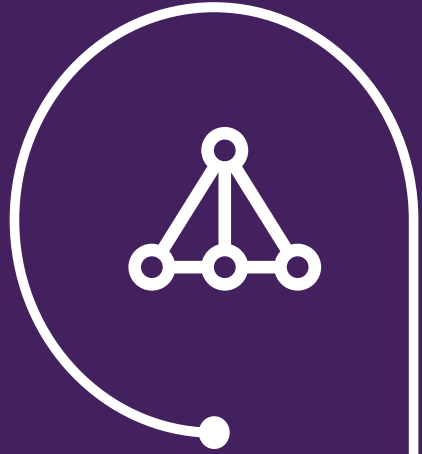
Looking at the self-assessment of creative competences of early school education teachers the overall conclusion is that such competences are developed at an average level. Nevertheless, this part of research can be summarized with an optimistic statement that the surveyed teachers have the ability to assess their work critically. This, in turn, guarantees the understanding of the need for continuous professional development, both in terms of knowledge and creative undertakings.

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¹Based on the monographs Anny Szkołak-Stępień A., *Mistrzostwo zawodowe nauczycieli wczesnej edukacji. Istota, treść, uwarunkowania (wydanie poprawione i rozszerzone)*, Wyd. ATTYKA, Kraków 2016, ISBN 978-83-65644-13-8, ss. 320.



Social Education/ Sociology

Spatial and social structure of the phenomenon of begging in Poland

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Abstract

The article presents the results of empirical research author on a very important social problem which is begging. The author presents the characteristics of the spatial and socio-demographic structure of begging in contemporary Poland. An attempt was made to determine the structure of age, gender and nationality of begging. The analysis of the civil status of respondents in the place of begging, income from begging and the purpose of their destination are also presented. The health of beggars was also discussed. The author also characterized the dynamics of the begging phenomenon during the research period.

Keywords: begging, social structure of begging, demographic structure of begging.

Introduction

Begging is one of the most complex social problems and still little known. The begging process is not something that appeared suddenly. It has always existed and accompanied the phenomenon of poverty, social exclusion, and many other

social issues. Over the centuries, the techniques and intensity of begging and the ways of its reduction have changed. Despite the passage of time and the development of civilization, we meet beggars all over the world, regardless of the wealth of a given society.

The subject of the study is the characterization of the spatial and social structure of the phenomenon of begging in Poland on the basis of its own empirical research. The concept of begging is used here in the sense given to it by the author of the article: *Begging is an action aimed at making voluntary transfers of livelihoods from donors to people that conduct to begging activities* (Król, 2010).

The above definition of begging requires some explanation. A one-time attempt of alms dictated by a temporary situation of a lack of financial resources cannot be taken as a lifestyle, because begging is a relatively permanent state (extended in time) asking for support, for alms. Beggars that are a social problem are always associated with social problems, therefore, it can also be defined as a style of life dictated by the complexity of social issues of the individual and family, whose intensity depends on the socio-economic, cultural and legal situation of a given person. In order for a person to decide to “be a beggar”, cultural conditions must be met, and the beggars’ roles must be accepted socially. It should be noted that there must also exist in society a legal norm that would allow a certain, socially acceptable type of begging. (Król, 2017)

1. Research methodology

The analysis of the socio-spatial structure of the phenomenon of begging in contemporary Poland, presented in the article, is the result of the author’s field research regarding this problem. 2 The analysis of the socio-spatial structure of the phenomenon of begging in contemporary Poland, presented in the article, is the result of the author’s field research regarding this problem. This material includes over 300 full research units from the area of Poznań and several selected Polish cities with a diverse population, such as Wrocław, Warsaw, Ostrów Wielkopolski, Środa Wielkopolska, Kalisz, Wałbrzych, and others. The selection of cities was deliberately random.

For the research, people were selected whose silhouette, gestures, behavior, or appropriate accessories and props were clearly part of the culture of images of begging. The research also included foreigners begging in Poland.

For the most appropriate research method, I accepted an interview with a begging person. I used the form of a free interview with elements of the narrative interview, which was immediately transcribed to the questionnaire after it was carried out. Interviews with beggars were the main element of research, because

² The first research was carried out in the years 1996-2001, and the subsequent ones in 2006-2008. However, from 2012 to 2017, the research results were supplemented with new interviews and observations from Poland.

it not only provided the information necessary to carry out the research analysis, but also showed that a well-conducted conversation with a beggar can accurately represent the history of begging. By means of a properly conducted dialogue, I tried to obtain information about the reasons for begging, choosing the place of begging, the begging techniques used, the economic, family and health situation, as well as the amount of income from begging. The interview questionnaire was supplemented with remarks regarding street events accompanying the conversation, commentary on the “begging figure” adopted by the respondent and his health condition.

Important methods of obtaining research material in order to deepen the analysis and characterization of begging were also included: analysis of various official documents made available in social assistance institutions, problem interviews with social workers, street workers, city guards, police, border guards and with non-governmental institutions’ patrons, as well as numerous observations carried out both in Poznań and other selected Polish cities. In the case of begging children, in most cases, I conducted interviews in the form of arranged conversations in bars or in cafés with modest refreshments. I also took part in a street experiment – playing the role of a beggar. The aim of the experiment was, firstly, to determine the emotions associated with entering this role, and secondly, to describe the interaction with the street space.

2. Spatial structure

The studies of the size and structure of the phenomenon of begging are the only way to estimate the number of people who are begging. It is a complex and difficult process, linked to many economic and social issues that directly or indirectly affect the extent of this phenomenon. The author’s information and research results contained in the article are to prove the main thesis, expressed in the statement that begging in contemporary Poland is an important social issue.

Difficulties in estimating the size and geography and the scale of begging result from the fact that there is a lack of systematic research in Poland regarding this phenomenon and treating the problem territorially. Unofficial data give numbers from several to several dozen thousand. There is also no current knowledge about the migration of beggars. The problem of geography and the scale of begging emerged during the author’s interviews with beggars, while questions arose about their whereabouts and movement. Valuable information about the change of their place of residence was also obtained from municipal help centers for families in various parts of Poland, through consultations with social workers, as well as from assistance, government and non-governmental institutions, from city guards, police and from numerous observations made during research. They indicate that the mourning of those begging or staying in a place of permanent residence results from the conscious choice of respondents. The most important, repetitive features of these choices in the population surveyed are as follows:

- Beggars from large agglomerations beg in their city.
- Coming from the villages and small towns, they move to large agglomerations.
- Begging homeless people go to places where there are hostels, night shelters and other help -organizations, often migrate from town to town.
- Foreign beggars in Poland migrate to big cities, in many cases they move in groups from town to town choosing large agglomerations.
- They focus on the city center, close to busy, larger objects and communication routes, during the hours of the greatest movement, using various social-techniques.
- In smaller towns, beggars can be found on market days, but these are isolated cases.
- In one day the begging person may change the place of begging depending on the likelihood of receiving alms, climatic conditions, and “beggar’s competition”.

Research shows that beggars usually appear in big cities. Migration of these people from smaller towns and even villages to larger cities gives a sense of anonymity and more frequent meetings with almsgivers. It may seem illusory to say that small urban or rural communities with a strongly integrated relationship seem to deal better with the problem of begging. Potential beggars from these small communities come to large cities to enter a completely new role – the “beggar’s role”. After returning to their permanent place of residence, they are normally functioning social units, they try to mask the real source of income and get rid of the “beggar’s stigma”. It should be noted that the choice of begging place within a given city depends on several factors. Above all, it is a place with a significant increase in traffic, where there is a high probability of meeting a potential almoner, and so city centers. These are also places with specific symbolism, e.g. church squares and concert halls. Places forcing the beggar to be in contact with the almsgiver – light intersections, busy bars and parking lots.

According to Światłowski (1995) the choice of a begging place is influenced by factors that create comfort of work, e.g. easy access, especially when a beggar has difficulty in moving, the possibility of settling down and finally a friendly environment creating a sense of security.

Table No. 1 presented below shows that the most popular places for begging are centers of big cities, railway and bus stations. Subsequently, church squares, large traffic junctions, car parks in front of supermarkets and fast-food bars. It should be emphasized that, according to the respondents, begging at the churches, is culturally and morally justified. The stereotype of a beggar who begs for alms at the church has so far grown into an aspect of Christian life that it is difficult to imagine a better background for begging. Roundabouts and the large intersections of streets are places where beggars use a change of traffic lights to reach the driver, using various

social engineering. In quick service bars, in restaurant gardens (spring, summer), begging children and homeless people were the most common.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of the place of practising begging

The place of practising begging	%
city center	26,9 %
Railway and bus stations	24,4%
In front of the churches	15,2%
Rondabouts, Communications intersections	15,4
bars	9,1%
In car parks in front of large stores and shopping centers	9,0%

Source: Prepared on the basis of the autor's own research

3. Social-demographic structure of beggars

The socio-demographic characteristics of the structure of the begging population presented in this part of the article are the result of data from the author's own research. When assessing the share of women and men in the begging population in Poland, I also included begging foreigners who constitute a significant percentage of the category of the surveyed population. I chose to study people whose silhouette, gestures or various accessories were clearly perceived as begging. In most cases, the language barrier was not an obstacle in conducting interviews with foreign beggars in Poland. In this respect I took children, treated as a separate category without division into sex.

3.1. Gender structure

The gender structure of begging women and men, taking into account Poles and foreigners, shows certain specific features. The vast majority of begging Poles are men, unemployed, homeless, victims of alcoholism, evicted, former prisoners of penal institutions. The share of men begging for Polish nationality in relation to the total number of Poles surveyed, i.e. 167 people, is 53.4%. The number of begging Polish women among the total surveyed Poles is (109) 35.2%. On the other hand, Polish begging children constitute 11.4% (36) of all Poles surveyed. Begging among foreigners concerns women who, as the main reason for begging, pointed to poverty and social exclusion in the country of origin. As they emphasized, they came to Poland to raise money for a better life for themselves and their families. Foreigners who deal with begging in Poland in many cases use small children for begging "as beggars props". Among the total number of respondents begging for- eigners women accounted for 44.9%, men - 36.7%, and children - 18.4%.

Table 2: Structure of the sex of begging

sex	Polish people	Foreigners
women	35,2%	44,9%
men	53,4%	36,7%
children	11,4%	18,4%

Source: Prepared on the basis of the author's own research

Summing up this part of the considerations, it should be stated that the begging men prevailed, as they constituted 44,6% of the respondents. Then, women represented - 40.3% of all respondents and children, which accounted for 15.1%. A smaller number of women among beggars are probably associated with more common homelessness among men, which is one of the reasons for begging. Among men begging a large group were people who left penal institutions. Women to a lesser extent than men undergo imprisonment, which is one of the most important reasons for homelessness.

A. Przymeński emphasizes that in the full population of homeless people in Poland, the share of women oscillates around 20%. Similar indicators are also provided by other European countries. In Germany, for example, it is 17%. They show that the greater vulnerability of men to becoming homeless is a universal tendency in our cultural circle (Przymeński, 1997).

3.2. Age structure

Research indicates that in the begging population, people of working age predominate. From the author's observation, it appears that they are increasingly younger people. Illustrations of the age structure are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Begging in age ranges

sex	Age ranges	
	od 19 - 55 lat	od 55-70 lat
women	72,6%	24,4%
men	88,2%	14,8%

Source: Prepared on the basis of the author's own research

Table 4: Begging children in age ranges

Age ranges	%
From 5 to 10 years old	50%
From 10 to 15 years old	26,8%
From 15 to 18 years old	21,4%
children under 5 years old	1,8%

Source: Prepared on the basis of the author's own research

The analysis of the data contained in Table 4 allows to conclude that among the begging children the most common is the category from 5 to 10 years of age the youngest children among the respondents³. Their begging is most often the result of the beggar's role, which was assigned to them by parents or guardians. Begging among older children in most of the cases studied results from making an independent decision about begging, dictated by the poverty of the family from which they come from or from the complex pathological factors of the individual and the environment in which the child functions. There were also cases where the decision regarding begging was dictated by the escape from the family home or from the care and education facility. One should also emphasize the participation in the begging of children under the age of five who were used by adults as "beggars props".

3.3. Marital status

Very important data on the population of begging people provide results of their marital status, which indicate different populations of begging women and men. The interviews conducted by the author show that the vast majority of begging people had difficulties in social life, but also in family life. Some have been left voluntarily by their families or they just simply see themselves deprived of the family for reasons of chance. Some, especially people with alcohol problems and drug addicts, have been rejected by their families because of their lifestyle. The marital status of persons begging with division into women and men is illustrated in Table 5.

As shown by civil status studies of begging women, about 36% of them are married women having a family. The next group are single women - 31.8% who declared poor contact with the family or lack of it. About 11% of women were married for some time and ended with divorce. A small part of the surveyed population is widows. However, as many as 17.7% of begging women did not give a clear answer to the question about marital status. This concerned women of a different nationality other than Polish.

Table 5: Marital status of beggars

I Marital status of beggars					
sex	Married	Single	Divorced	Widower, Widow	No answer
Women	35,7%	31,8%	11,59%	3,22%	17,7%
Men	7,9%	52,3%	31,7%	8,1%	0%

Source: Prepared on the basis of the author's own research

³ Zob. Król K., *Żebractwo dzieci i ich rodzin w świetle przepisów prawa, w: Pokolenie wygranych? Trzecia część badań nad sytuacją dzieci młodzieży procesie transformacji*, red. J. Sztumski, Katowice 2012.

The presented results of civil status surveys of beggars show that one group is definitely dominant – they are bachelors, who constitute 52.3% of respondents. The second group is divorced men – 31.7%. About 8% are widowers, and a little less, because 7.9% are married men. Studies show that beggars are rather lonely men.

3.4. The structure of education

Among the group of beggars studied, the low level of education in all age categories prevails. The structure of education begging women and men is illustrated in Table 8. According to the data analysis, the vast majority, as many as 58.5% of the begging women surveyed declared having finished primary education. About 35% are women with no higher other vocational education. The share of women with medium and incomplete instruction is 6.4%. There was no single begging case with higher education. It can be clearly seen that there are two main categories, one – women with primary education, the other – with vocational education. The level of education is an important element in the assessment of the level of professional qualifications. When applying this criterion, the level of professional qualifications of the studied group can be considered low and very low. The low level of education and professional qualifications belongs to a group of typical determinants of poverty, homelessness, unemployment, and thus the most common reasons for begging.

Men were also tested for their education. The results obtained indicate that this group is dominated by people with basic education and basic vocational education. There are fewer people with incomplete secondary education, even less with secondary education. Noteworthy is the fact that 2.4% of begging men have incomplete higher education and 0.4% finished higher education.

Table 6: The structure of education

sex	Education of beggars				
	basic education	vocational education	incomplete secondary education	secondary education	higher education
Women	58,5%	35,1%	3,5%	2,9%	0%
Man	35%basic education + 11,8% incomplete basic	33,2%	10,4%	9,2%	0,4%

Source: Prepared on the basis of own the author's research

3.5. The national structure

There is a national mosaic in the begging population. Foreigners make up 52% of respondents. And Poles represent 48% of all respondents. The analysis of the data shows that among the begging persons surveyed, a rather reasonable number of foreign beggars prevails. The numerical share of foreigners in the category of women and children definitely exceeds the same category in the population of

begging Poles. However, the begging men of Polish nationality outnumber the same category among foreigners. Poles account for 47.3% of respondents. The next largest group are Romanians – as much as 37% of the surveyed population. Then there are Bulgarians – 5.9%, citizens of countries from the former Yugoslavia (Croats, Serbs) – 5.1%, Moldovans – 3.2% and Ukrainians – 1.5%. During the study, there were also several cases of begging Belarusians with small children. In the vast majority of foreigners, as a reason for coming to Poland “on beggars” they reported: poverty, social exclusion and lack of work in their own country. About 20% of foreigners treat their arrival in Poland as an opportunity to get to Germany or the Netherlands.

3.6. Health condition

The population of begging people, contrary to colloquial opinions, does not consist only of people addicted to alcohol and drugs. According to the interviews conducted with them, apart from alcoholism and drug addiction, they most often suffer from: heart disease, eye diseases, kidney disease, liver disease, diseases of the musculoskeletal system, disability from birth, skin diseases (frostbite injuries in case of homelessness), mental health problems (mental breakdown, depression, and schizophrenia). As the author’s research shows, among homeless beggars, a quite large group were people addicted to alcohol, and their diseases were related to alcohol abuse and chilling the body. These people were characterized by mental health disorder. Studies have not determined whether these diseases are the cause or the result of homelessness.

3.7. Structure of income and expenses from begging

Empirical research has shown that the daily income earned from begging was between 10 and 60 zł.pl. The beggars emphasized that the amount of alms depends on the day of the week, the weather, the place of begging, the beggar’s strategy and also the begging prop. They pointed out that, more often, the passers-by suggested food and clothing products from the money offer. The collected material shows that the largest group among respondents, i.e. 42%, were people whose daily income from begging is from 10 to 30 PLN. About 25% are people with income ranging from 40 to 60 zł.pl. and 30% of respondents did not get answers to questions about income from begging. This group included mainly foreigners. Money from begging is spent on food, medicines, treatment, clothing, train and bus tickets, animal feed, operations. Children pleading in most cases claimed that they give money to parents. At the same time, they emphasized that they have permission to beg from parents or guardians.

3.8. Duration in begging

The duration in begging is quite diverse. When analyzing the data in Table 7, it should be stated that approximately 60% of the beggars examined exceeded the two-year duration in this procedure. For 7.3% of respondents, the beggars’ internship is over seven years.

Table 7: Duration in begging

Duration in begging	Up to 3 months	From 3 months to a 1 year	Over 1 to 2 years	from 2 to 5 years	From 5 to 7 years	Over 7 to 10 years
%	9,7	11,7	20,1	38,2	13,00	7,3

Source: Prepared on the basis of own the author’s research

It should be emphasized that the long beggars’ internship includes those for whom begging is a tried and tested way of survival, a lifestyle and finally a profession. Its causes should be seen in the impairment of an individual or family in various spheres of life. It affects people with a significant period of social marginalization. These people are often unable to live independently. In this group there are vagrants and homeless people. The process of entering “deep begging” is influenced by both objective factors, i.e. regardless of the will of the person, as well as subjective factors accepted or even co-created by begging persons. This process depends on the individual characteristics of a person and his or her fate. Part of the surveyed population begging for many years are people who temporarily or permanently have no chance of becoming independent or do not want to change anything in their lives, which is why begging is a tried and tested way of survival, a lifestyle.

3.9. The dynamics of the phenomenon of begging

The appearance of begging in Poland in the early nineties was identified with the process of systemic transformation. A characteristic feature of this period was the relative increase in poverty among individuals and their families. It should be emphasized here that begging, just like other social issues, such as homelessness, drug abuse, was present in Poland earlier, however, information about its size was revealed reluctantly in the centrally managed economy. Until 1989, no proper steps were taken to recognize the phenomenon of begging or homelessness and to try to estimate and define them.

A characteristic feature of the transformation period in Poland, apart from the typically positive changes, were the negative phenomena which often accompanied them. They included both the economic sphere of life and the level of social coexistence. As a result, there were new socio-economic phenomena, i.e. unemployment, poverty, increased crime, homelessness and begging. Growing social stratification caused, on the one hand, a group of wealthy people to grow, and on the other, a

large number of poor people were formed. It should be emphasized that the most important factor that caused a rapid increase in people living in poverty after 1990 was just unemployment. In the streets of Polish cities beggars begged for alms, which is a social category discovered in contemporary Poland anew.

In the nineties, among the begging people, as research indicates (Król, 2002), a large percentage were homeless. Due to the maladjustment of the existing help base for the homeless to the growing needs, the vast majority in the early nineties could not even count on temporary shelter (Przymeński, 1997). Changes in the way of seeing homelessness are clearly visible in the Act on Social Assistance adopted in November 1990, making homeless help an obligatory task of the social policy of the state.

The problem of homelessness has also been included in the new Polish constitution. In Chapter II, in the part “Freedom and economic, social and cultural rights” in art. 75, point 1, we find a record that states:

Public authorities conduct policies conducive to satisfying the housing needs of citizens, and in particular to counteract homelessness, support the development of social housing and support the actions of citizens seeking to obtain their own housing.⁴

In addition to the circle of homeless beggars discussed here, other groups should be mentioned, which in the nineties went out into the street begging. We include patients (alcoholism, AIDS patients), disabled people, pensioners, children, a large group of foreigners who came to Poland to beg in well-organized groups.

The dynamics of the phenomenon of begging in modern Poland is characterized not only by the increase of its scale, but also by the great diversity of the begging population itself. This diversity seems to coincide with the diversity of the circle of poor people, whom L. Stankiewicz (2002) describes as heterogeneous and distinguishes several categories: The first group of the poor is the so-called working poor. It is true that they have a permanent source of income, but its amount is not enough to exceed the poverty line set in this society. The second category is the unemployed poor. This group of poor people has little chance of crossing the poverty line, especially with long-term unemployment. The third group consists of poor pensioners whose level of permanent benefits does not allow for peaceful survival, implementation of housing obligations, treatment, etc. The fourth group is formed by poor pathologists (addicted to alcohol, drugs and others). They usually have a source of income, but locate it in stimulants. This group has little chance of getting out of their position, falling more and more into extreme poverty. The fifth group is made up of poor homeless people. This is the lowest category in the hierarchy of poor environments. The sixth group are the poor disabled and chronically ill. These people have usually a source of income (benefits), but they are forced to purchase medical supplies, which exceeds their financial capabilities

⁴ Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, Warszawa 1997, DZ.U 1997 nr. 79 poz. 483

(Stankiewicz, 2002). Among begging disabled persons, I also found those who had very low disability or social benefits.

The problem of begging has become particularly evident in large cities, not only for reasons of migration or aid solutions, but also the likelihood of frequent encounters with alms and anonymity of beggars.

Disturbing sizes of begging “imported” have been noticed in Poland since 1993. The number of beggars-foreigners from Romania, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia in some large cities exceeded the number of begging Poles. For example, research on the problem of begging in Poznań in 2001 showed that foreigners accounted for 57% of the population surveyed (K. Król, 2001).

Today, the scale of this phenomenon in Poland in comparison with the nineties is still worrying and the inclusion of the dynamics of this phenomenon in precise quantitative categories does not seem possible. The development of the approximate number of beggars can only be achieved by nationwide surveys based on the adoption of a common definition of begging and the same tools and research methodology. It should also be noted that today, apart from new begging techniques and figures, an important problem, but also dangerous and enormous concern, is the trafficking of people into begging, including child trafficking. Hence the last years were a period of intense legislative work in many countries – including the entire European Union – over the creation of legal provisions limiting various forms of trafficking in people, including begging.

4. Conclusions

As a result of the analysis of research concerning the social and spatial structure of begging, the following conclusions can be formulated: most beggars in Poland are men of Polish origin – unemployed, homeless, victims of addictions (alcoholism, drug abuse). Begging Polish women among all respondents accounted for 35.2%. Among the begging foreigners in Poland, women often beggar with small children. Most of the beggars studied are people of working age. A large number of respondents are people who declare a low level of education, and in all age categories, both among women and men. It should be noted that among the surveyed group there were three men who finished higher education studies. Analysis of the nationality structure showed that a large group of beggars were foreigners, that is 52.7%, including nationalities such as: Romanians, Bulgarians, Moldovans, Ukrainians and Belarusians. Most often these are well-organized groups of beggars with a specific organizational structure. The Poles constituted 47.3% of all respondents. Studies have shown that the selection of a meeting place depends on several factors, the most important include: traffic intensity, a place forcing direct contact between a beggar and a passer-by (city centers, light intersections, railway and bus stations, parking lots, squares at churches). Concentration of the process of begging takes

place in large urban agglomerations, among others due to the possibility of anonymity of beggars, a large movement in the space of cities (frequent contact with the almoner). The begging persons emphasized that the amount of charity depends on: the begging place, the begging figure, the weather, the beggar's prop, or the entire "beggar's strategy".

The begging declarations show that the money obtained from alms is spent on: food, stimulants, clothing, tickets for travel, treatment and others. Begging children in most cases claimed that they give money to parents. In most cases, young people spend begging money on stimulants, computer games and others. It should be emphasized that about 60% of the respondents exceeded the two-year duration in begging. However, for over 7% of respondents, the beggars' internship was over seven years. With a long begging internship, we can say that it is a way of life, a lifestyle and, in many cases, a profession. The author's research has proved that the dynamics of begging in contemporary Poland is characterized not only by the disturbing scale of the phenomenon but also by a very large differentiation of the begging populations themselves, and the path to begging is a range of many events, a peculiar causative circle in which the causes become effects and vice versa.

Counteracting begging falls within the sphere of social policy tasks, especially the activities of territorial self-governments. It is very important for social policy entities to gather and exchange experiences on the results of various programs serving the social reintegration of all those who for various reasons have succumbed to the mechanism of social exclusion. Entities of social policy at the self-governmental level, developing a strategy to counteract poverty, should include begging in it as an independent category of activity. It is also necessary, to a greater extent than before, to focus on social work with local communities in order to activate the environment, especially in the enclaves of poverty. Not without significance are also informational and educational campaigns undertaken in some large cities (Poznań, Kraków, Wrocław) addressed to potential alms-keepers.

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Finance



Security of the Banking System in Poland. Fundamental Assumptions

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Abstract

Today, security plays an underlining role in the functioning of the banking system. This is a value for which the legislator draws particular attention. Although the aim of banks as entrepreneurs is to achieve a profit, nowadays it is their security and the security of the entire banking system that should be the primary aim in their activity. At the same time, the degree of held security should be the main guide for the interpretation of the functioning of the banks and their supervision. The analysis presented in this study points to the fundamental assumptions concerning the security of the banking system in Poland. Moreover, it brings into the light, inter alia, the special role of the central bank, the bank deposit guarantee system and the banking market supervisor in this area, and, therefore, emphasizes the importance of the legal regulations which keeps up with the changes of society in the march of civilization.

Keywords: banking system, security, central bank, bank deposit guarantee system, banking market supervisor.

Introduction

The need to ensure and maintain the security of both the entire banking system and each of the banks separately is undisputed. This security is a special value, which not only the legislator, but also the bank as part of the banking system, and each of its customers are keen to stress. It is watched especially by banking market protection institutions provided by the legislator as regulators of this market.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that the security of the banking system in Poland is a subject of particular concern to the legislator who, by constructing legal provisions, pays special attention to it, trying to prevent threats to this security by preparing and adopting relevant legal regulations in this area. It establishes appropriate banking market protection institutions whose aim is to maintain security and stability in this market. These are in particular: the Polish central bank (National Bank of Poland), the institution of supervision over the financial market, including the banking (Polish Financial Supervision Authority) and the bank deposit guarantee system (the Polish institution which deals in running this system is the Bank Guarantee Fund). Today, security is also the main goal of banks. They are institutions of public trust, hence they should not be subordinated only to strict rules of profitability and profit.

The basic research method used in the article is the formal-dogmatic method. An analysis of the relevant subject literature will also be performed.

The contemporary Polish banking sector is included in a two-tier (two-level) model of the banking system. In the literature on the subject, it is rightly pointed out that today the basic feature that characterizes the banking systems of developed economies is their two-levelity, which was already pointed out in 1989, as one of the main directions of banking reform in Poland. In a two-tier banking system in Poland, the central bank, which is the National Bank of Poland, performs public functions, and it is not a commercial institution, does not provide banking services directly on the market and is therefore located in a banking system at another (higher) level than the operating banks. Thus, two tiers are indicated in the structure of the banking system: 1st the level of central banking and the 2nd level of operational banking (Fojcik-Mastalska, 2010). A common feature of modern banking systems, which include the Polish banking system, is the separation of the money issue functions that is entrusted to central banks, from other banking operations, mainly settlement and credit servicing, which is reserved for other banks (Koperkiewicz-Mordel, 2006).

As it has already been mentioned, currently in Poland there is a two-tier (two-level) model of the banking system, the core of which are operational banks (commercial banks), which differ fundamentally from the central bank; this applies to the purposes of their operation, legal position and the scope of their functions. The issue function is reserved for the National Bank of Poland as the central bank (Koperkiewicz-Mordel, 2006).

An important organizational and legal determinant of the banking system in Poland is the separation of legal regimes (i.e. tasks, organization and forms of operation) of the central bank, commercial banks and parbank institutions. It is connected with the separate legal regulations (normative acts) concerning these entities (cf. Kosikowski, 1999). However, one can see – at least in some instances – the permeation of legal solutions attributable to only one of these regimes. Therefore, the functioning of both tiers of the banking system should not be considered in isolation,

on the contrary - the type and nature of functional links existing between them (intra-system relations) have a decisive impact on the system as a whole. It is an expression of the adopted organizational concept and proves the level of maturity and coherence of the system, potentially providing its modernity and efficiency to the complex objectives it is to perform in the interest of the national currency (Fojcik-Mastalska, 2010, p. 26).

At the level of central banking in Poland, the National Bank of Poland is the central bank of the Republic of Poland. It is currently a constitutional institution. Pursuant to Article 227 s. 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April, 1997 (Journal of Laws No. 78, item 483, as amended) it is the central state bank responsible for the value of Polish money. It has the exclusive right to issue money and to set and implement monetary policy. This is further confirmed by art. 1 of the Act of 29 August, 1997 on the National Bank of Poland, which states that it is the central bank of the Republic of Poland (full text in the Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1373). The NBP pursues its own constitutionally and legally defined tasks, with the aid of its organizational units created for this purpose. These are the Headquarters and other organizational units (and in particular, its local branches). The bank operates throughout Poland (in light of Poland's membership in the European Union and the inclusion of the NBP in the European System of Central Banks, the definition of the territory of the Polish central bank seems to be too narrow and a novelization of art. 2 s. 3 of the Act on the National Bank of Poland, should be considered, to reflect the supranational activity of the bank), and its headquarters are located in Warsaw. The NBP has been equipped with legal personality and it has the right to use a seal with the national emblem. However, it is not subject to entry in the Register of Entrepreneurs in the National Court Register. There is a wider problem with this issue – which category of entities should the Polish central bank qualify for? The question is – what is the NBP? Only seemingly this issue seems to be easy to resolve. It is, of course, a bank, although the primary objectives of its operation are not profit-making (striving to maximize profits), as in the case of other (apart from the central bank) banks. It performs important public functions that determine its operation. In the light of binding legal regulations, the National Bank of Poland is a legal person that acts through its bodies. Pursuant to Article 227 s. 2 of the

Constitution of the Republic of Poland, the organs of the central bank of the state are: the President of the National Bank of Poland, the Monetary Policy Council and the Management Board of the National Bank of Poland. The National Bank of Poland performs a number of tasks that are extremely important for the state and the economy. They are strictly defined by law and they determine the status of this bank as an entity of major importance to the economy and functioning of the state.

The basic tasks of this bank include:

- care for the value of Polish money (see art. 227 s. 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland),
- maintaining a stable price level (art. 227 s. 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland and art. 3 s. 1 of the Act on the National Bank of Poland define this objective as the basic one, with the indication, however, that if this goal is not limited, the NBP will be obliged to support the government's economic policy at the same time),
- issuance of currency that is the legal tender instruments in Poland (art. 4 of the Act on the NBP grants the NBP the exclusive right to issue, which in the context of the nature of the issuing activity of the European Central Bank seems to be a highly controversial solution for the near future),
- determination and implementation of monetary policy (see art. 227 s. 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland),
- organizing money settlements,
- managing the foreign exchange reserves and foreign exchange operations within the scope defined by law,
- shaping the conditions necessary for the development of the banking system,
- acting for the stability of the financial system in the capacity of a financial institution within the meaning of art. 4 point 4 of the Act of 5 August, 2015 on macroprudential supervision over the financial system and crisis management in the financial system (full text in the Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1934, as amended),
- actions to eliminate or reduce the systemic risk referred to in art. 4 p. 15 of the Act of 5 August, 2015 on macroprudential supervision over the financial system and crisis management in the financial system,
- regulating the liquidity of banks and refinancing them,
- conducting banking services for the state budget,
- development of monetary and banking statistics, balance of payments and international investment position.

At the operational banking level, banks in Poland operate in three organizational and legal forms defined by law. These are state-owned banks, banks in the form of joint-stock companies and cooperative banks (art. 12 of the Act of 29 August, 1997 Banking Law - full text in Journal of Laws of 2017 item 1876, as amended).

At present, in the result of long-term privatization processes in the banking sector, only the Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (bank for special public tasks) remains a state-owned bank.

According to data published by the Polish Financial Supervision Authority in March 2018, banking activities in Poland were conducted by 616 banks and branches of credit institutions (6 less than in the previous year). 165,006 people were employed in the entire sector at that time (2989 fewer than in March 2017). The share of the 10 largest banks in the banking sector's assets was 70.7%. The number of bank branches in March 2018 was 13,388 (804 fewer than in March 2017) (*Situation of the banking sector in the first quarter of 2018*, Office of the Polish Financial Supervision Authority, Warsaw, 2018, https://www.knf.gov.pl/knf/pl/komponenty/img/RAPORT_O_SYTUACJI_BANKOW_2018_03_62844.pdf, access: 23.10.2018.).

The banking system, in addition to banks, also includes other entities or bodies, which are set up only to fulfill the tasks set out in law, in respect, inter alia, for banks. These are in particular:

- the Polish Financial Supervision Authority, and its legal status, has not been clearly defined in the Act establishing it - the Act of 21 July, 2006 on supervision over the financial market (Journal of Laws of 2018, item 621, as amended), however, due to the tasks it performs and its competences, its overall activity, the purpose of supervision over the financial market, the possibility of applying supervisory measures strictly determined by law, the Polish Financial Supervision Authority is the competent authority in the supervision of the financial market (art. 3 s. 2 of the Act on supervision over the financial market), it exercises part of the executive power in the State, and is a central body of public administration, a regulatory body, classified as a financial market protection institution (Komierzyńska-Orlińska, 2018; see also Komierzyńska-Orlińska, in print 2),
- Bank Guarantee Fund, with legal personality (its bodies are the Fund Council and the Fund Management Board - art. 6 s. 1 of the Act of 10 June, 2016 on the Bank Guarantee Fund, deposit guarantee system and forced restructuring - full text in Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1937, as amended), responsible for taking measures for the stability of the domestic financial system, in particular by ensuring the functioning of a mandatory deposit guarantee system and conducting forced restructuring (art. 4 of the Act on the Bank Guarantee Fund, deposit guarantee system and forced restructuring).

According to M. Zdyb (1999), the determinants of public order must be regarded as having constitutional, legal, economic and moral aspects. Banking order is one of the crucial elements of public order in the State. Herein, security is closely linked to public order and is a fundamental banking order.

The notion 'security' (Lat. *securitas*), today so inextricably linked to the functioning of the financial system, including banking, basically can be encountered in all scientific disciplines. As S. Pieprzny (2007) rightly points out, the notion is interpreted in different ways (depending on the plan and research purposes). From the dawn of human civilization, security has been an issue of grave relevance. Indeed, some even claim that the State was created so as to relieve the anxieties of individual security through providing shared security.

The most common definition of security in the broad sense is a designation that this is <<a state of non-threat, calm, certainty>>. In all the classic definitions of security, two basic elements are reflected: lack of threats and the sense of confidence. Lack of threats has an objective character. In relation to the subject or object protected, it is measurable. In many threat situations, one can, using specific measures, diagnose and determine the risk of their occurrence. The sense of certainty, especially when it concerns a human, has a subjective dimension. It is connected with its internal state (Pieprzny, 2007, p. 14).

One must agree with the statement that modern man feels safe when he is convinced that he is protected from threats by legal norms or fixed extra-legal standards. He has a sense of security when he is aware that if there is a threat, there are institutions, including those associated with the state or international organizations that will freely and fairly come to his aid (Pieprzny, 2007). A necessary condition for the development of every organized community, and especially the state, is to provide and protect individual and public safety. The threat or breach of security may be caused by an act or omission, or by the state of things or other phenomena. At the same time, the interest of the state and society is to ensure individual and public safety (Ura, 1988).

A modern Polish dictionary defines safety as a mental or legal state in which an individual feels confident, has a support in the other person or a well-functioning legal system, does not feel fear of reality. This is the opposite of threat and occurs in every area of social life (Pieprzny, 2007, p. 15).

It is right to say that the development of civilization is continuous and is primarily related to the raising of security standards. Safety requires protection, and the threat to it justifies the adoption of certain activities by competent bodies, the competent authorities. The primary determinant of social development, the development of civilization, is quite rightly based on the provision of security. Man himself has impact on human safety, as well as upon his surroundings. The degree of impact, today, is largely shaped by the law. In the legal language, security means that the individuals making up the state are subjected to legal protection. Security is of crucial interest, it is a value that is of vast worth. Hence, it is protected by the norms of the highest rank, which are contained in the Constitution (Pieprzny, 2007).

From a formal point of view, the concept of security protection usually consists of many elements, including, in particular: relevant institutions of protection, appropriate legal protection measures, appropriate procedures to protect the security. Hence, the crucial meaning is that security means having accepted legal norms (laws), regulating bodies, enforcement bodies holding the instruments necessary to enforce protection measures and appropriate procedures. It is also important to note here that in the provision of protecting safety, both public interest and individual interest must be protected at the same time. The subjects being protected are the state, society and citizens, while the object of protection is the functioning of the state and society in a broad sense, encompassing essentially every aspect of their action, together with their legal, moral and customary norms, which are widely recognized and respected.

Nowadays, the banking order and its security should not be seen only from the perspective of one particular state, because doing so would narrow the problem. The intensification of globalization and the related integration processes have significantly influenced the transnational nature of this issue. Still, the state is the basic normative-economic framework in which the basis for such order and security is created, and, therefore, is considered.

1. The essence of the security of the banking system in Poland

The security of the banking system is a fundamental value in Polish banking law. In subjective meaning, this security should be broadly understood as the security of the banks and related entities of the banking system, as well as the security of clients of the banks. It is extremely important that:

(...) one of the basic assets held by the bank is the trust of its customers, indirectly affecting the stability of the whole financial system in the state, on which the unstable functioning of the state depends. For the State, leading its financial policy, it is generally dependent on the financial entities, which often finance the financial needs of the State. The so-called 'infection phenomenon' is linked (contagion effect) with the loss of confidence for a financial institution. This phenomenon, through the so-called 'domino effect' (knock-on effect) can further embrace such entities and, consequently, lead to the collapse of many of them. For this reason, the State decides to intervene in the functioning of the financial market, creating a number of regulations and institutions responsible for the stable functioning of the market. The most important ones are: central bank, bank deposit guarantee system and banking supervision (financial supervision). They form the so-called 'Financial Safety Net', whose task is to prevent disturbances on the financial market, including financial crises (crises prevention), as well as crisis management in case of its occurrence (Nieborak, 2008, pp. 356-357; vide Kosieradzka, 2014, pp. 68-70; vide Kosieradzka, 2015, pp. 622-623).

The full range of institutional arrangements and regulations which are aimed at ensuring the safety of the financial system (including the banking system) and its protection against destabilization is deemed the Financial Safety Net. As aforementioned, its elements are the central bank, the bank deposit guarantee system and banking (financial) supervision (vide Kosieradzka, 2014).

Nowadays, security should be the bedrock of banking enterprises. It must be stressed that banks are entrepreneurs, not charities, so their aim is to make a profit, however, it is currently rightly noted in the doctrine that:

(...) banks are companies with a particular business activity and the legal independence of the bank as an entrepreneur means that it acts as a legitimate market participant, entitled to acquire rights and incur liabilities on its own behalf and for its own account (...). The activity of banks, although it is an economic activity in the most general sense, differs fundamentally from the typical activity of producing goods, providing services and trading goods, because it has more to do with the flow of capital and the trade of payments than the production and trade of goods. Financial services in developed market economies traditionally constitute a separate service sector (...) (Rutkowska-Tomaszewska, 2013, p. 48).

The specificity of banking activity, which results from the legal definition of the business activity termed 'banking' is contained in section 2 of the Act of 29 August 1997 Banking Law (joint text Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1876 with subsequent amendments),

(...) expressed in the burdening the means committed to the bank with any repayable entitlement with the risk also determines that the bank should be treated as an institution of public trust. Many legal solutions provide proof of this, and among them are: regulation of the banking business; identification of the premises, conditions on the fulfillment of which the establishment and commencement of activities by banks depends (see more: Rutkowska-Tomaszewska, 2013); special entitlements and obligations, which, in principle, do not have other entrepreneurs, protecting the interests of the bank's customers and securing the interests of the bank; defining the purpose and principles of functioning of the supervision over the activities of the banks and delegating authority functions in the field of public power to the supervisory authorities; special protection of depositors, which are public law regulations for the mandatory deposit insurance system by the Bank Guarantee Fund and established by the Polish Financial Supervision Authority (binding for banks) liquidity standards and other acceptable risk standards in banks' operations. All this means that the bank cannot be treated only - as it is in the economic sciences - as a 'service enterprise' which strives primarily to maximize profit. The essence of the bank's business, besides managing the flows of cash-flow, is risk management (as aptly noted Rutkowska-Tomaszewska (2013), according to the legal definition of the notion bank (section 2 of the Banking Law), the basic characteristic feature of banking activity is performing activities which burden the

means committed to the bank with any repayable entitlement with the risk), to which the financial means collected by the bank are exposed (see more: Rutkowska-Tomaszewska, 2013), therefore, the bank must first seek to minimize risk, and only in the next sequence - to maximize profit, which is in line with the latest trends in the field of financial market regulation (Rutkowska-Tomaszewska, 2013, pp. 49-50).

Safety, then, should be the underlying principle of banking activity and of banking supervision. The legislator repeatedly stresses the importance of security in the provisions of the banking law (as an example, one can indicate section 133 paragraph 1 point 1 of the Banking Law, where reference is made to the safety of the funds held in bank accounts; section 9f of the Banking Law, which draws attention to the need to ensure security and stability of the bank in the long term; section 37 of the Banking Law, where again attention is paid to the security of the funds collected in the bank; section 50 paragraph 2 of the Banking Law, according to which the bank is obliged to follow special care to ensure the safety of stored financial means; section 124 paragraph 2 of the Banking Law, where the legislator talks about the security of funds deposited in the bank and many other related issues). The security of the banking system, its transparency and its trust (Góral, 2010), are *sine qua non* values for this system, the activity of which is built upon healthy, market-based, fair competition (*vide* Komierzyńska-Orlińska, 2018).

In accordance with the 3rd section of the Banking Law, exclusive use of the words 'bank' or 'bank fund/loan office' is reserved for banks, and this, in turn, entails the provision of banking services in the strict meaning only by the banks (section 5 paragraph 4 of the Banking Law). In the 171st section and the 1st and the 2nd paragraph of the Banking Law, it is clearly stated that whoever, without authorization, manages an activity that consists in raising financial means from another individual person, or from legal entities or organizational entities which have no legal personality in order to gain, exchange or provide credits or loans or to encumber these funds with a risk in another way, can be subject to a fine up to 10 million zlotys and the penalty of deprivation of freedom to 5 years. The same penalty applies to anyone who conducts an activity to make profit contrary to the conditions set out in the law and who uses in the name of an organizational unit that is not a bank or to determine its activity or for its advertisement or the word 'bank' or 'bank fund/loan office'. In this context, it is emphasized in the doctrine that the prohibition on deposit and lending activities by entities other than banks and the severe criminal sanctions in case of violation of this prohibition, stem from both the need to protect the interests of bank customers (Rutkowska-Tomaszewska, 2013) and the need to protect their security.

It is valuable to note that it is in the best interest of the State to limit the negative consequences of the instability of the financial market (including banking market) by establishing regulations designed to ensure its safety. These form the essence of the financial market (including the banking market). Particularly in the context of

the smooth functioning of the internal financial market of the European Union, the need to submit the financial market to distinct and specific legal regulations is seen:

The specific legal regime of the financial market and its distinct nature from other market segments means that it is subjected to specific organization and supervision by the State. In the sphere of financial market functioning, the State's regulatory intervention was and is the largest. Organization and supervision are primarily intended to ensure the safety of funds collected in the financial market and to protect the interests of participants in this market (Jurkowska-Zeidler, 2011).

An underlying premise for regulating the financial market (including the banking market) and for establishing the banking supervision is the existence of systemic risk. The purpose of the regulation is to ensure the security and stability of the financial system (including the banking system) (Kosieradzka, 2014).

One of the manifestations of State intervention in the functioning of the banking system is the creation of institutions of the banking market protection. The legislator assigns these entities tasks that aim to protect the values that fill the content of public interest in the banking market (Góral, 2010). To the institutions of the banking market protection, one should include, in particular, the central bank, the bank deposit guarantee system and the banking (financial) supervision. L. Góral states that the values of the financial market, which are protected for the public interest, justify the creation of institutions of the banking market protection operating on this market, to protect values such as the proper functioning of the banking market, the stability of this market, its security, transparency and confidence, and to protect the interests of its participants (Góral, 2010).

As previously mentioned, the institutions of the financial market protection should include, in particular, the central bank, the bank deposit guarantee system and banking (financial) supervision. Altogether, these form a Financial Safety Net (including a Banking Safety Net).

The activities of central banks today are determined by the functions that they perform in the market economy. These are: the issue function, the function of the State bank and the function of the bank of banks. Crucially: "A very important function of the central bank functions performed within the bank of banks function is to ensure the safety (stability) of the banking system" (Moskal, 2015, p. 37).

In accordance with the 3rd section, 2nd paragraph, points 5 and 6 of the Act of 29 August 1997 on the National Bank of Poland (joint text Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1373), the tasks of the Polish central bank, the National Bank of Poland (NBP), are to regulate the liquidity of banks and their refinancing, as well as to shape the conditions necessary for the development of the banking system.

Adjusting the liquidity of banks and their refinancing are the tasks of the NBP performed by this bank within the framework of its monetary policy:

Adjusting the liquidity of banks by the NBP consists in using

administrative tools consisting of applying the obligation on the banks to create the required reserve, in whole or in part discharged to the central bank. In the framework of regulation of bank liquidity, the central bank implements monetary policy assumptions which have an impact on inflation by setting interest rates, reflected in the profitability of monetary policy instruments. On the money market, the NBP uses: open market operations, deposit and credit operations, obligatory reserve (...) (Zawadzka, 2014, p. 35).

In addition, the central bank acts as a lender of last resort for banks. The NBP is also to shape the conditions necessary for the development of the banking system (which is achieved through the central bank's efforts to maintain a stable and low inflation level) and to conduct analyzes of the situation on the financial market, especially in the field of its stability. The National Bank of Poland cooperates in this respect with the remaining components of the Financial Safety Net (Zawadzka, 2014): the bank deposit guarantee system (in Poland, the bank deposit guarantee institution is the Bank Guarantee Fund (the BGF)) and banking supervision (financial; in Poland, the institution which supervises the financial market, including the banking market, is the Polish Financial Supervision Authority (FSA)).

In the literature, it is indicated that the central bank acts on the banks operating within the two-tier banking system as the institution which is the most important source of liquidity for them. Using the instruments of monetary policy, the central bank can fund liquidity to the banking system, according to the needs of monetary policy implementation. But "Regardless of the role of «liquidity provider», the central bank is an institution that cares about the stability and security of the entire banking system. The central bank uses for this purpose, the instruments of monetary policy, ensuring a stable situation on the interbank market and ensuring appropriate conditions for the proper functioning of banks with adequate liquidity resources. The central bank, additionally, requires banks to provide current information on selected balance sheet items and complete financial statements at specified intervals. It thus acquires the data necessary for the proper use of monetary policy instruments in order to fulfill its tasks" (Kosieradzka, 2014, p. 72 and the literature cited therein),

as I have already pointed it out. As a Lender of Last Resort, the central bank should perform three basic tasks: 1. protection of the integrity and efficiency of the payment system, 2. prevention of disorders of liquidity of individual credit institutions threatened with insolvency, 3. prevention of disorders of the banking market which threaten to transform into a banking crisis (preventing situations of panic and mass withdrawals of bank deposits, in other words, preventing a situation called a 'bank run'), which would cause the spread of this problem to other banks (the 'contagion effect') (Kosieradzka, 2014).

Without going here into a detailed analysis of the function of the central bank as a Lender of Last Resort, it is worth noting that their information policy is also

an instrument used by the central bank to stabilize the banking system and thus indirectly influence its safety. The main tools for the information policy of the central bank are: 1. declaration by the bank of the held objective of stabilizing the financial system, including the banking system, 2. publishing reports about financial stability, 3. publication of announcements and public statements of the bank's authorities, 4. the law, 5. website. These tools are also used by the Polish central bank (see: the official website of the National Bank of Poland).

It should be emphasized that the fundamental, decisive, key condition for the effectiveness of the information policy of the central bank as an instrument for stabilizing the financial system (and thus influencing its safety) is the credibility and independence, and, consequently, the prestige of the bank (Komierzyńska-Orlińska, 2018, p. 113).

With regard to the security of the banking system, the central bank plays an important role in the functioning of payment systems. These are seen as the most important element of financial market infrastructure, and, in general, of the economy as a whole. The central bank has three basic functions that determine its role in the functioning of modern payment systems: 1. operational function (which consists in the creation and maintenance of payment systems by the bank), 2. the regulatory and supervisory function of payment systems in the country, 3. the function, in cooperation with other central banks and the private sector, of maintaining at the highest level the security of all payment systems (Szpringer, 2015).

The literature clearly emphasizes the decisive role of the National Bank of Poland in maintaining and ensuring security in the national financial system in the context of its supervision of payment systems, at the same time, indicating that it is the best institution to do so. The importance of effective supervision of payment systems is not to be underestimated for the stability of the banking system and thus for its security. Payment systems enable financial institutions, including banks, to 'effectively manage liquidity, facilitate the development of new financial instruments, provide a stable cash flow in the economy, and provide channels through which the central bank conducts and implements monetary policy' (Szpringer, 2014, p. 209) (Komierzyńska-Orlińska, 2018, p. 116).

Within the financial system as a whole, however, of primary importance are the guarantee schemes that operate in the banking system. This is because banks accumulate most of the financial surpluses of society and because potentially their activity is the area of spreading out risk within the financial system. Still, the role played by guarantee schemes operating in other sectors of the financial market, the insurance sector and investment services sector, is also important (Zawadzka, 2010).

An institution which guarantees deposits in banks (as well as cooperative savings and credit unions) in Poland and is responsible for the forced restructuring of financial institutions threatened with bankruptcy, thus acting in favor of the stability of the domestic financial system, is the Bank Guarantee Fund.

E. Rutkowska-Tomaszewska (2013) explicitly states that the proper functioning within the banking system of the bank deposit guarantee system is one of the most important features of an effective and legitimate banking system. Thanks to this system, in the conditions of banking crisis, it is possible to stem loss of confidence through utilizing intervention. Hence, it is a crucial element of crisis management. At the same time, the author notes that most of today's deposit guarantee schemes have been created as a result of previous banking crisis or through the restructuring of the banking sector.

There are differences in the design and detailed legal arrangements for governmental deposit-guarantee systems in different countries, but the purpose of such schemes is the same: protection of depositors and thus the maintenance of confidence in the banking system. During a banking crisis, by way of the deposit guarantee institution, it is possible to reduce or halt banking panic and massive assault on banks. The degree and effectiveness of the intervention, however, depend on the applicable guarantee limits and the reliability of the deposit guarantee system. At the same time, it is noted that adopting a full guarantee scheme is not the best solution, as this could lead to a weakening of market discipline (Ostalecka, 2008).

The Bank Guarantee Fund (BGF) operates under the Act of 10 June 2016 on the Bank Guarantee Fund, the deposit guarantee scheme and forced restructuring (joint text Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1937 with subsequent amendments). This Act contains solutions in accordance with European standards; this Act implements Directive 2014/59/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 establishing a framework for the implementation of corrective, restructuring and decommissioning measures for credit institutions and investment firms, and amending Council Directive 82/891/EEC and directives of the European Parliament and of the Council 2001/24/EC, 2002/47/EC, 2004/25/EC, 2005/56/EC, 2007/36 and Regulation (EU) No 1093/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council (EU) No 648/2012 (Official Journal of the European Union of L series of 2014 No 173, item 190 with subsequent amendments), and implements Directive 2014/49/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 on Deposit Guarantee Schemes (recast) (Official Journal of the European Union of L series of 2014 No 173, item 149 with subsequent amendments).

It can be stated that the Bank Guarantee Fund Act increases the stability and security of the banking system in Poland, and from this point of view, it is important to determine in particular the activities and tasks of the BGF and the manner of its operation in providing assistance to banks covered by the guarantee scheme (Kosieradzka, 2014).

In accordance with section 4 of the Bank Guarantee Fund Act, the purpose of the Fund's activities is to undertake actions aimed at stabilizing the national financial system, specifically, by ensuring the functioning of the mandatory deposit guarantee system and conducting compulsory restructuring. The tasks of the Fund in the area

of ensuring the stability and security of the banking system are, in accordance with section 5, paragraph 1 of the Act on the Bank Guarantee Fund:

- 1) performing the obligations resulting from the guarantee of deposits, in particular, making payments of funds guaranteed to depositors;
- 2) control of data included in the systems for calculating the entities covered by the guarantee scheme;
- 3) the restructuring of the entities to which section 64, point 2 of the Bank Guarantee Fund Act refers, by redemption or conversion of capital instruments;
- 4) providing a forced restructuring;
- 5) preparing, updating and evaluating the enforceable plans of forced restructuring and group restructuring plans;
- 6) collecting and analyzing information about the entities covered by the guarantee system, notably, for the preparation of analyzes and forecasts concerning the banking sector and credit union sector and individual banks and credit unions;
- 7) conducting other activities for the stability of the domestic financial system.

The amount of 100% guarantee is now the equivalent in PLN of 100 000 Euros (section 24, paragraph 1 of the Bank Guarantee Fund Act).

In accordance with section 35, paragraph 2 and 3 of the Act on the Bank Guarantee Fund, the subject of guarantee protection is the depositor's claim in the amount corresponding to the guaranteed funds, in relation to which, upon the fulfillment of the condition of the guarantee, he acquires the entitlement to a cash benefit upon the Fund. The cash benefit is payable in PLN, generally within 7 working days from the date of fulfillment of the condition of the guarantee.

The doctrine clearly emphasizes that the Bank Guarantee Fund was created to strengthen the security of the domestic financial market. Its establishment in 1994 “was a perfect fit into the emerging financial security infrastructure of our country, to a large extent, strengthening the National Bank of Poland in maintaining the stability of the financial markets” (Moskal, 2015, p. 217).

The role of Polish institutions of financial market supervision in the area of security of the banking system is also significant and meaningful. Since January 1, 2008, the Polish Financial Supervision Authority (FSA) has been overseeing the banking market in Poland. It is, thus, an institution of supervision over the entire financial market, including the banking market (see more Kosieradzka, 2016).

The purpose of supervision over the financial market, in accordance with section 2 of the Act of 21 July 2006 on financial market supervision (joint text Journal of Laws of 2018, item 621 with subsequent amendments), is to ensure the proper functioning of the market, its stability, security and transparency, to maintain confidence in the financial market, as well as to ensure the protection of the interests of

participants in this market. Beyond applying the tools of legal enforcement, it does this through providing reliable information on the functioning of the market, by pursuing the aims set out in, among others, the acts relating to particular sectors of the financial market, including the Banking Law Act.

According to section 133, paragraph 1 of the Banking Law, the purpose of supervision is to ensure: 1) security of financial means deposited in bank accounts; 2) compliance of banks with the provisions of the Banking Act, Regulation (EU) No 575/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on prudential requirements for credit institutions and investment firms, amending Regulation (EU) No 648/2012 (Text with EEA relevance) (Official Journal of the European Union of L series of 2013 No 176, item 1 with subsequent amendments), the Act on the National Bank of Poland, the Statute and the decision to issue a license to set up a bank; 3) compliance of the activities conducted by the banks in accordance with section 70 (2) of the Act of 29 July 2005 on trading in financial instruments (joint text Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1768 with subsequent amendments) with the provisions of this Act, the Banking Act, Regulation (EU) No 596/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 on Market Abuse (Market Abuse Regulation) and repealing Directive 2003/6/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and Commission Directive 2003/124/EC, 2003/125/EC and 2004/72/EC (Text with EEA relevance) (Official Journal of the European Union of L series of 2014 No 173, item 1 with subsequent amendments), delegated acts issued under Regulation No 596/2014 and the Statute.

The basic values for the banking market, which set the aims of banking supervision, are the security of financial means deposited in bank accounts and the compliance of banks' activities with the acts specified in Article 133 of the Banking Law. As stated by L. Góral (2011), these values are realized through actions taken by the FSA within the framework of banking supervision. In accordance with section 133, paragraph 2 of the Banking Law, these activities include in particular:

- 1) assessing the financial situation of banks, including solvency, quality of assets, payment liquidity, financial results of banks;
- 2) examining the quality of the bank's management system, in particular, the risk management system and internal control system;
- 3) examining the conformity of granted loans, cash loans, letters of credit, bank guarantees and sureties and issued bank securities with the applicable regulations;
- 4) examining collateral and timely repayment of loans and cash loans;
- 5) examining compliance with the limits referred to in section 79a of the Banking Law and the limits referred to in section 395 of Regulation No 575/2013 and assessing the process of identifying, monitoring and controlling concentrations of exposures, including large exposures;

- 6) studying compliance by the bank, as defined by the Financial Supervision Authority standards of acceptable risk in the banks' operations, risk management operations, including the adaptation to the type and scale of the bank's activity the process of identifying and monitoring the risk and reporting about the risk;
- 7) assessing estimation, maintenance and review of internal capital;
- 8) examining the performance of the duties of the banks to which section 56a, section 59a, section 59b, sections 92ba-92bd and section 111c of the Banking Law are referred to.

The scope of the impact of banking supervision on the activities of banks is determined by the law, which determines in what situation the supervisor can interfere in the activity of banks and what supervision measures to apply. Banking supervision is a legal institution, subordinated to the principle of legalism, and, at the same time, the violation of the law requires the reaction of the banking market supervisor, i.e. the Financial Supervision Authority.

2. Conclusions

The central bank, the bank deposit guarantee system and banking (financial) supervision, in creating a Financial Safety Net (including the banking safety net), play an important role in strengthening the security of the banking system in Poland. In the literature, attention is drawn to the fact that financial market supervision plays the most important role among the institutions that make up this network (see e.g. Ostalecka, 2008; Jurkowska-Zeidler, 2011; Mroczkowski, 2005). At the same time, it is noted that:

Because banks, despite the changing financial market situation, still have the strongest position on the market, gathering most of the financial surpluses of enterprises and consumers, and being as a source of funding for most business ventures, the dominant role in Safety Net is the role of banking supervision, and changes in its architecture determine the shape of the other elements of the Financial Safety Net. Without efficient and effective supervision the activity of the other Safety Net elements – the activity of central bank as the Lender of Last Resort and deposit guarantee schemes and investor compensation, it is not enough either for crisis prevention or for crisis management of any conceivable financial crisis affecting the financial market (Jurkowska-Zeidler, 2007, p. 588, 601).

The issue of the security of the banking system in Poland is multidimensional; this study presents only the most important issues in this respect. It should be borne in mind that, in particular, a healthy (relevant and independent) legal framework in which all are accountable has vast meaningful significance in the area of the security of the banking system in Poland and the enhancement of its trust. Beyond the aforementioned and the institutes brought to light in this study, other institutions that support the supervisory system (and security system) in the financial market

(including the banking market) in Poland include: the Financial Stability Committee (the FSC), the Polish Bank Association (the PBA) and the President of the Office of Competition and Consumer Protection (OCCP). In addition, corporate governance, institutions of corporate governance, and of external and internal audit in banks should be remembered. Moreover, judicial power, rating agencies, clearing houses, as well as the minister responsible for financial institutions play significant roles in supporting the supervisory system and banking system security in Poland. The work of these requires a separate analysis. What is more, such a separate analysis must include the effects and activity of the bodies of European Union financial supervision, highlighting, notably, their impact on the Polish Financial Supervision Authority (also see Komierzyńska-Orlińska, in print 1).

The analysis demonstrated that the Polish banking system can be described as safe and stable. This is done by legal provisions that create standards that prevent threats to the banking market, and place high demands on banks for their safe and stable functioning, and in the event of a threat to the security of the banking system and any individual bank, provide appropriate legal measures and procedures to protect this security. The functioning of Polish banking market protection institutions fits in the affirmation of the public opinion that banks are not only entrepreneurs *sensu stricto*, but also institutions of public trust, which should take into account the security of banking services in the first place. Further confirmation of the fact that the Polish banking system is safe and stable is its situation during the last banking crisis of 2007-2009: no bank active in the territory of the Republic of Poland were subject to bankruptcy or liquidation procedures. It is worth noting that after the crisis, according to data published by the Polish Financial Supervision Authority, at the end of July 2013, over PLN 720 billion of private individuals (i.e. from non-financial enterprises and households) were deposited in the Polish banking system. Within 3 years (period 2010-2013), the value of these deposits increased by over PLN 110 billion, which is 167 times the funds that were accumulated in a comparable period by Amber Gold (created in 2009, a limited liability company offering its clients highly Interest-bearing deposits that were to be secured by investments in gold and precious metals. In December 2009, the company entered in the list of public warnings, which is kept by the Polish Financial Supervision Authority, as an entity that adopts measures to charge risk without the required legal authorization. In August 2012, after numerous press publications, pursuant to court decisions, Amber Gold was put into liquidation and its CEO (and the main shareholder at the same time) indicted. There are some 11 thousand victims, whose claims are valued at a total of approx. PLN 660 million), which he proposed – as a part of a nationwide and intense advertising campaign – the interest on entrusted funds, which was several times higher than the offers of banks, at the same time claiming about their full security. The presented example shows that in the vast majority of recipients of financial services are not driven only by the desire to profit, and

they value the security of their financial resources, as well as the predictability and reputation of the service provider to a larger extent. Banks are also a key provider of financing for private entities (Radziszewski, 2013).

As at the end of July 2013, the debt of households and enterprises in banks due to various types of loans and borrowings amounted to over PLN 825 billion, which is more than 270 times the estimated value of loans granted by loan companies, estimated at PLN 3 billion. The significance of banks for the economy is also very high and systematically growing. According to the data of the Polish Financial Supervision Authority, the share of banking sector assets in GDP increased from 55% in 1999 to 85% in 2012. The largest share in this growth were loans to households (from 16% to 33%), especially housing (from 1 % to 20%) and deposits from household (from 24% to 32%) and enterprises (from 7% to 12%). This increase in banks' assets was accompanied by high efficiency and security of operations - growing profit and stable own funds securing the risk borne by banks (Radziszewski, 2013).

Moreover, the existence of public trust in banks in Poland is directly testified by the results of public opinion polls, which were carried out by TNS Polska on behalf of the Polish Bank Association. These studies indicate a systematic improvement of the banking sector's reputation (73% of respondents expressed their general positive opinion about banks, and 59% of them considered that banks were public trust institutions, 27% of respondents did not agree with this) (Radziszewski, 2013). However, according to the latest data published by the Polish Financial Supervision Authority (*Situation of the banking sector in the first quarter of 2018*, the Polish Financial Supervision Authority, Warsaw, 2018), as at the end of March 2018, PLN 1066.8 billion was deposited in the Polish banking system from private entities (households, private enterprises and non-profit institutions), which in comparison to the state of March 2017 means an increase of PLN 47.9 billion, although in comparison with the situation from December 2017, this means a drop by PLN 3.6 billion. By contrast, at the end of March 2018, a larger increase in household deposits was recorded - as compared to the situation as of March 2017: an increase of PLN 37.4 billion, and compared to December 2017: an increase of PLN 14.5 billion. It was noted that despite the acceleration of the annual deposit growth rate, the development of the deposit base remains under pressure of: low interest rate environment (and this reduces the propensity to save in banks) and return of inflationary phenomena (which causes that real interest rates on deposits become negative and consequently incline part of depositors to look for alternative forms of saving and investment) (*Situation of the banking sector in the first quarter of 2018*, Office of the Polish Financial Supervision Authority, Warsaw, 2018, https://www.knf.gov.pl/knf/pl/komponenty/img/RAPORT_O_SYTUACJI_BANKOW_2018_03_62844.pdf, access: 23.10.2018).

In general, the banks' lending activity was also improved, supported by the continued economic recovery, further improvement in the labor market, record high level of consumer and business optimism, low interest rates and modification of banks' part of the strategy towards an increase in the share of short-term retail loans (*Situation of the banking sector in the first quarter of 2018*, the Office of the Polish Financial Supervision Authority, Warsaw, 2018, https://www.knf.gov.pl/knf/pl/komponenty/img/RAPORT_O_SYTUACJI_BANKOW_2018_03_62844.pdf, access: 23.10.2018).

It can be clearly seen that bank customers do not have any concerns related to the state of security of the banking system in Poland. Treating banks as institutions of public trust, they entrust them with their financial resources, trusting that they are safe, and also frequently use bank credit and loan offer, incomparably more often than the services of other loan institutions operating on the market.

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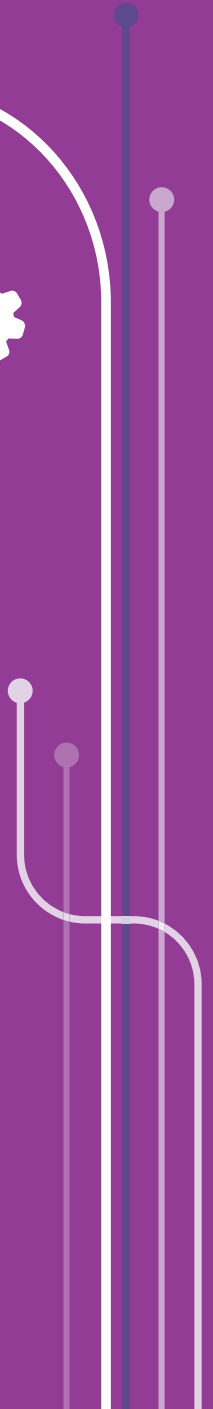
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Business/ Entrepreneurship



Organizational Culture as a Strategic Business Success Factor: Implications for Technological Firms and Startups

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Abstract

The world of contemporary business, in general, is becoming increasingly dynamic, complex, and competitive. The technology is arguably one of the sectors where this is visible. If organizational culture should enhance effectiveness, technological companies must pay a lot of attention to the values, attitudes, and assumptions that determine how they perceive, think about, and react to their various environments. This article shows some practices of technological leaders in this regard. The following case studies imply that organizational cultures of these top firms show a set of common features including the preference of informal leadership, reduction of red tape, or orientation on people. The innovations and teamwork are becoming so fundamental that top global companies consider them as basic assumptions.

Keywords: Organizational (corporate) culture, leadership, innovations, effectiveness, technological companies/startups.

Introduction

The world of contemporary business, in general, is becoming increasingly dynamic, complex, and competitive. The technology is arguably one of the sectors where this is visible. If organizational culture should enhance effectiveness, technological companies must pay a lot of attention to the values, attitudes, and assumptions that determine how they perceive, think about, and react to their environment.

Through the series of six case studies, this article shows practices of global technological leaders (Apple, BMW, ESET, Google, Hewlett Packard, and IBM) in the area of organizational behavior.

The goal of the paper is to identify common patterns that could serve as a benchmark for both existing and new technological companies in the area of organizational culture as a strategic business success factor.

1. Methodology

'Mini-case studies' of six well-known companies focus on the identification of key values and behaviors that are considered a cornerstone of global business success. Some of the most influential companies from the technological sector have been chosen as the subjects for studying. To increase objectiveness and relevance for the European businesses, the author also studied a top-notch German car producer as well as a globally successful company coming from his home country.

The final part of the paper summarizes the findings and distills the set of recommendations for both existing and new technological companies in the area of organizational culture. These are divided into three categories: the notions related to the strategic importance of the organizational culture, the issues of the organizational culture change, and the building identity vs. the best practices and the effective cultural models of the successful modern organizations.

2. What Is Organizational Culture and Why Is It so Important?

The organizational (corporate) culture is defined as a set of values and attitudes determining overall behavior of companies as well as how they perceive, think about and react to their environment (Schein, 2017). This short definition explains the strategic importance of this topic as it practically claims the fact that culture is responsible for what and how it is done in companies in virtually any area of their activities.

The author's finding shows that, for many companies the organizational culture is something too abstract, hard to grasp and fully understand. The survey done on the sample of 172 entrepreneurs and managers in the Slovak Republic in 2010-2012 shows that most of the respondents lack basic understanding of the concept and perceive culture mostly through some less important observable indicators (Kubička, 2015). Talking about shaping culture to become a source of competitive advantage is

therefore problematic due to a limited understanding of its fundamentals – values, principles, and basic assumptions.

The layer of observable **artifacts** is a physical manifestation of an organization's culture. That may include manner of dress, published lists of values, observable rituals and ceremonies, decorations etc. **Values** are concepts or beliefs that pertain to desirable end states and guide selection of behavior. Espoused values are the explicit values and norms preferred by an organization. Enacted values represent the values and norms that are exhibited or converted into actual observable behavior. Values that have become so taken for granted over time are called **basic assumptions** and guide organizational behavior (Nelson & Quick, 2006). The two lastly mentioned layers, specifically the enacted values and basic assumptions are the most important foundations of organizational culture.

3. How is Culture Shaped/Developed?

Kubička and Stropková (2013) state that organizational culture is shaped by four main components:

- Founders' values
- Industry and business environment
- National culture
- Senior leaders' visions

This is also a very important fact to understand. Although industry/business environment as well as national culture have significant impact on culture, the role of influential people in an organization (founders, senior leaders) is crucial in shaping and developing the culture.

Kreitner and Kinicki (2007) recognize three generic types of cultures. In **constructive** cultures, employees are encouraged to interact with others and to work on tasks and projects in the way that will assist them in satisfying their need to grow and develop. Such cultures are associated with achievement, self-actualization, humanism, encouragement, and affiliation. **Passive-defensive** cultures are based on an overriding belief that employees must interact with others in the way that do not threaten their own job security. Cultures like this are usually associated with approval, conventionalism, dependence, and avoidance. **Aggressive-defensive** cultures encourage employees to approach tasks in forceful ways in order to protect their status and job security. They are associated with oppositional power, competitiveness, and perfectionism.

4. Culture as a Success Factor: Principles and Practices of Top Global Tech Firms

Apple

The culture of Apple has always been based on the ideal that self-motivated **individuals will work harder if they don't have a boss micromanaging every action.**

Organizational structure is almost non-existent at Apple. The aim of this practice is to put as much **simplicity and freedom for cooperation** as well as to place decision making in the hands of people in the field. That makes Apple a confusing but delightful place producing wonderful things “people can’t get enough of”.

On the other hand, there is also a brutal and unforgiving sense of **accountability**. There aren’t many strictly lined-up processes at Apple, but there are two leading driving and coordinating practices. The first one is the weekly meetings that set the beat for the entire company. Steve Jobs explains these meetings quite simply; “Every Monday we review the whole business. We look at every single product under development”. The other is the DRI – directly responsible individual. Thanks to this practice, and in spite of the loose organizational approach, there is never any confusion about individual responsibility for stuff at Apple (Jadeja, 2012).

Thanks to the above, Apple has been able to maintain their startup-at-heart culture despite rising from a garage company to a real technological giant and world leader in their area over just a couple of decades.

Google

Google’s culture can be divided into four main aims: people, customers/products, goals, and ethics.

There are a surprisingly lot of commonalities between the cultures of Apple and Google. The most important feature of Google’s behavior is probably **aversion to bureaucracy**. Google’s culture emphasizes **informality, equality, involvement, and empowerment**. It also promotes a **family atmosphere** and it ostensibly fosters **inclusion**. It is also very explicit about promotion of **work-life balance** (Google).

Most meetings, which are going on at Google are done via technologies. There are also weekly meetings where everyone is expressing ideas and people can even suggest and work on their own projects. Google is also famous for their facilities that are designed to maximize comfort of employees and support their interactions. This also contributes to Google’s ability to keep the startup culture although Alphabet has become one of the largest corporations in the world.

There are also some drawbacks and problems in Google’s culture. It operates with very little bureaucracy (a major reason for this is to foster the rapid development of good ideas by engineers) which causes some observers to wonder whether things might be out-of-control. Likewise, some people are wondering: “Who, among Sergey Brin, Larry Page, and Eric Schmidt, is really in charge at Google?” In short, the aversion to bureaucracy raises coordination and control issues that have become even more serious after company has gone public. Also, there is a problem with the employees possessing regular full-time positions or even holding some shares enjoying the full benefits of Google’s culture and the temporary contract workers. The company has however been able to resolve most of these “issues” through clear division of responsibilities among the founders and CEO as well as for instance

the dual-class voting structure giving Brin and Page unchallengeable authority as shareholders. On the other hand, the problem of “haves” and “have nots” still represents some challenges putting a significant strain on Google’s culture (Nelson & Quick, 2006).

Hewlett Packard

The founders of the company that rose from a single-car garage to one of the biggest MNCs did more than just talking about the importance of employees. Jeffrey Pfeffer of Stanford University called this approach the people-centered organization. His research in both US and German companies shows that the people-centered practices presented below were associated with increased profits and low employee turnover (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2007).

People-centered practices:

- Job security
- Careful hiring
- Power to the people
- Generous pay for performance
- Lots of training
- Less emphasis on status
- Trust building

IBM

In the case study “IBM’s Donna Riley Strives for Collaborative Influence”, the authors Robert Kreitner and Angelo Kinicki (2007) focus on two leading principles of contemporary management of the legendary hardware producer. The first one is mentioned in the case title – **collaborative influences**. With the emergence and total penetration of Internet, IBM realized that in a highly complex world “siloe” thinking is an old style and **command-and-control leadership doesn’t work**. “It is really about winning hearts and minds – and getting people whose pay you don’t control to do stuff” (p. 27). Moreover, in an interconnected world, **horizontal, collaborative networks of people make more sense than rigid hierarchies**.

Leaders at IBM do not see people to whom they sell their products as customers but as clients. The difference is, IBM says, that a customer is transactional, whereas a client is someone with whom you build a long-term relationship. It is no longer about selling computers. This **client approach** may cause that a seller even discourages a client from buying a new one if it is not in his/her best interest to have it.

ESET

To have a diversified sample of companies, the author also chose a company from the country he lives – the Slovak Republic.

ESET, the producer of a top-notch antivirus software is considered one of few wholly Slovak-owned modern and globally successful technological companies. It

is a proof of the business whose vision is stronger than any obstacles it might face. The company started in the communist era in a living room of one of the founders.

The foundations of the company's philosophy are **accountability, reliability, fairness**, and innovativeness. It puts a lot of emphasis on talented and motivated people – and considers them the bottom line of the company's success. The team-building events, trainings, health, pension, and social programs contribute to **high satisfaction and low fluctuation** of its employees (Schuh, 2012).

BMW

For the same reason as picking a company from an emerging economy, the author decided to include a case of a non-US-based, non-IT firm.

The prestigious German car producer misjudged the consumer market in 1950s and got to serious financial problems at the end of the decade. It almost went bankrupt. This near-death experience is continually retold and is one of the first things newcomers learn about the company.

One of the bedrock values at BMW is therefore **innovation**. The old ways are particularly vulnerable at the times of crises, so BMW decided to **get rid of the top-down mentality and change to rather informal networks enhancing communication and creativity which**, even today, is untypical for corporate Germany. Everyone is encouraged to speak out, BMW owners drive a machine that was born of thousands of brainstorming sessions.

“The modern, artsy, open-air plant feeling reflects company values and demonstrates commitment to **breaking down barriers among workers, designers, engineers, and management**” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 270). Openness encourages coincidental meetings and exchange of ideas. In other words, people meet because their paths cross naturally. Another important value is **commitment to workers**. It isn't easy to get a job with BMW, but once someone gets one, he or she gets unparalleled conditions and **job security**. **Rituals** building bonds among diverse groups, connecting people's hearts with the company soul are commonplace at BMW. To the traditional German machinery and technological value of **quality**, BMW adds **flexibility** going far beyond what their competition could offer when making an identical car only every ninth month.

5. Implications for Existing and New Technological Companies

Strategic importance of organizational culture

Besides the facts above, the implications in this regard are built upon an earlier work by the author in his publication coauthored by Andrea Stropková *Effective Organization and Information Processes* (2013). The most important ones include the following:

- Paying attention to culture right at the beginning is equally as important as market knowledge, core competences or strategy.

- Managers/owners must understand the concept and how it influences everything in their companies.
- They should also try and define what makes their companies unique.
- Important is also thinking about what will make their companies successful in various areas (employees, business, customers, products, etc.).
- Companies and especially their top managers should do a lot of self-reflection and change their attitudes if they are not the “winning ones”.

Changes in organizational culture are difficult but possible

Another set of implications deals with organizational development and how to change organizational culture if it does not fit the environment or if it simply is not the “right” one. Many of these correspond with the findings by Nelson and Quick, 2006.

- General rule of management – if something does not work, change it (even if it is corporate culture).
- Exchanges at the top levels are not always possible although they are the quickest way to achieve change in culture.
- Organizational development – develop every part of organization (starting with management), build teams, and ask people – involve them in decision-making and problem solving, and thus unleash their personal initiative.
- Do a lot of self-reflection (as an organization), detect mistakes and find ways to come up with the right decisions quickly.

Unique identity vs. best practices of modern organizations

Lastly, there are implications towards building a unique identity of organizations vs. general “winning” values recommended for all contemporary business (regardless of industry but with special importance for technological sector and startups).

- Culture is a complex thing – values can aim at the way we are doing business, customers, employees etc. which still provides a lot of space for variations and finding an organizational self.
- On the other hand – there are principles, values, and practices common for all successful companies: openness, cooperativeness and a lot of communication, less formality and more power to employees, continuous learning, creativity and innovation, or leadership enhancing initiative. Some of these have become so taken for granted that a lot of companies no longer stress them – especially innovation and teamwork.
- Every company has a culture, but what they need is the right culture.
- Do not forget about results and accountability – it’s still business.
- Some well indented values can bring certain problems – e. g. Google’s aversion to bureaucracy causes some observers to wonder whether things might be out-of-control. These can usually be solved with rather simple

but systematic solutions not requiring extensive formalization and red tape.

- A lot of signs and values mentioned in this part are typical for progressive companies and even the ones in emerging economies start promoting them. Pixel Federation, one of the most successful Slovak tech startups is systematically building what is called a learning organization (Šicková, 2018).

6. Conclusion

Organizational culture, if understood and managed well, can become one of the strategic sources of companies' competitive advantage. Managers and entrepreneurs must therefore develop their knowledge in this area and do a lot of self-reflection. This is even more important for tech companies as they exist in a highly complex, dynamic, and competitive field. This article also provided some implications for tech leaders facing challenges regarding development and changes in culture.

Promoting values such as openness, cooperativeness, creativity, continuous learning, or power to people are examples of the ones that successful, learning organizations have in common. These values could be divided into three main categories: informal leadership, red tape reduction, and focus on people. Aspects such as innovativeness or teamwork are becoming so taken for granted for leading modern companies that they are considered to be basic assumptions necessary for their survival. On the other hand, organizational culture is such a complex matter that even though there is a certain set of values recommended for all companies, there is still a lot of space for variations and finding a unique organizational identity.

The goal of this article was to show new and existing technological companies how organizational culture of the leaders in their industry enhanced their business success and quick growth. The chosen sample was intentionally limited to the really most known names supplemented with the Europe- or Slovak-based companies to provide a quick insight/digest for the readers. Even though the case study approach is very suitable for this kind of qualitative research, the methodology is to be refined. It is recommended that more firms must be studied and more research has to be carried out in order to be able to come up with general conclusions in such a complex and dynamic topic as organizational culture including its impact in various industries, countries, company sizes, and other aspects.

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