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ACCEPT PLURALISM

Tolerance of Diversity in Polish Schools: the Case of Roma Children and Ethics Classes

Michał Buchowski
Katarzyna Chlewińska

Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań

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ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

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MICHAŁ BUCHOWSKI & KATARZYNA CHLEWIŃSKA

ADAM MICKIEWICZ UNIVERSITY



**WP3: National Case Studies of Challenges to
Tolerance in School Life**

**D3.1 Final Country Reports on Concepts and
Practices of Tolerance Addressing Cultural Diversity
in Schools**

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Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century in Europe (ACCEPT PLURALISM)

ACCEPT PLURALISM is a Research Project, funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Program. The project investigates whether European societies have become more or less tolerant during the past 20 years. In particular, the project aims to clarify: (a) how is tolerance defined conceptually, (b) how it is codified in norms, institutional arrangements, public policies and social practices, (c) how tolerance can be measured (whose tolerance, who is tolerated, and what if degrees of tolerance vary with reference to different minority groups). The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium conducts original empirical research on key issues in school life and in politics that thematise different understandings and practices of tolerance. Bringing together empirical and theoretical findings, ACCEPT PLURALISM generates a State of the Art Report on Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Handbook on Ideas of Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Tolerance Indicators' Toolkit where qualitative and quantitative indicators may be used to score each country's performance on tolerating cultural diversity, and several academic publications (books, journal articles) on Tolerance, Pluralism and Cultural Diversity in Europe. The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium is formed by 18 partner institutions covering 15 EU countries. The project is hosted by the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies and co-ordinated by Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou.

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Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań is one of the largest academic centres in Poland. The University employs nearly 3,000 teaching staff and serves 50,000 students in 14 faculties offering BA, MA and PhD programmes. Students can choose from 190 majors. AMU cooperates with over 100 partner universities abroad. Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology is one of the leading anthropological institution in the region that offers specialised courses on identity, ethnicity, migration, multiculturalism and cultural critique.

Michał Buchowski is a Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Poznań and of Comparative Central European Studies at European University Viadrina in Frankfurt/Oder. He also lectured as a Visiting Professor at Rutgers University and Columbia University. His scientific interest is in Central European postsocialist cultural and social transformations as well as ethnicity and migration. Currently he serves as a Head of the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology in Poznań, President of the European Association of Social Anthropologists and vice-Chair of World Council of Anthropological Associations.

Katarzyna Chlewińska is a PhD student in the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at AMU. She works on tolerance towards minorities, including sexual ones.

Contact details:

Michał Buchowski & Katarzyna Chlewińska
Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology
Adam Mickiewicz University
ul. Św. Marcin 78
61-809 Poznań, Poland

Fax: + 48- 61 829 4710 4685 770

E-mail: mbuch@amu.edu.pl & kacha@amu.edu.pl

<http://etnologia.amu.edu.pl/go.live.php>

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Executive Summary

This report on the ‘Tolerance of Diversity in Polish Schools: the Case of Roma Children and Ethics Classes’ presents selected issues related to the practical application of the idea of tolerance to cultural diversity, as well as to worldview pluralism in Polish public schools. The chosen case studies, i.e., the education of Roma in one of the Polish cities, as well as the controversies around arranging classes on ethics as an alternative educational offer to religion classes and the presence of religious symbols (crosses) in schoolrooms, may at first sight appear as barely interrelated, but we think that together they accurately show the attitude of the various actors in the education system (teachers, students, headmasters, educational authorities and bureaucrats) to the slowly but steadily growing multiculturalism of the Polish society, and to the increasing plurality of worldviews shared by various groups and individuals. Together they contribute to the collapse of the image of an ethnically and religiously homogenous nation.

In statistical terms, multiculturalism in Polish schools is minimal. Ethnic minorities and immigrants comprise merely 2-4% of the whole population (see Polish report in WP1). Official data also indicate that there are only up to four thousand foreign students attending Polish public schools – a drop in the sea of five million pupils. However, this data can be inadequate because the methodology of their gathering is patchy. Many children coming from minority, immigrant and foreign families can stay unregistered. The public opinion is not really interested in the issue, which is perceived as marginal and unimportant. Only conflicts about the implementation of multicultural education, which surface now and again, attract media attention.

Our research shows that the Polish educational system has constantly been reformed and adjusted to the changing social and political situation (the collapse of communism, EU integration, global educational challenges), but little attention is paid to teaching multiculturalism, securing curricula adjusted to ethno-cultural diversity, or implementing an alternative to training in religion, i.e. classes in ethics. These shortcomings are probably part and parcel of the Polish school system’s structural problems and are at least partly related to the underfunding of this sector.

We chose the education of Roma because it is a permanently unresolved problem that Polish authorities cannot effectively tackle. Various efforts to increase Roma participation in education either failed, or raised serious objection – e.g. the ghettoization of this minority’s children. The initiative undertaken in Poznań is an attempt to make a breakthrough that is free of bureaucratic restraints and takes local circumstances into account. With the support of local educational authorities, school headmasters, teachers and Roma minority activists, the schools ran by the ‘Bahtale Roma’ Foundation have attracted quite a few Roma children. The Foundation’s results are much more promising than the centrally administered ‘Programme for Roma minority’. The latter was initially tested and implemented in southern Poland where Roma people also live in concentrated communities, but proved to be inapplicable to the Poznań region, where there are fewer Roma who are much more dispersed. Rigid educational standards combined with a policy which is unattractive for the Roma has resulted in a high level of school absenteeism among them.

In the first part of the report, we wanted to show the challenges and dangers faced by public schools in their attempts to offer alternative educational paths for Roma children as well as to analyse the discourses on tolerance and cultural diversity surrounding such initiatives.

The second case addresses a complex issue of the organisation of ethic classes that are meant to be an alternative to religion classes commonly held in public schools, as well as the presence of religious symbols (crosses) in schoolrooms. As long as cultural diversity is recognised in Polish schools, although not necessarily actively supported or venerated, worldviews other than the dominant one are negated or simply ignored and dismissed. The undisputed domination of Roman-Catholicism and its transparent omnipresence allows educators and administrators to find easy excuses for not arranging

classes in ethics. Students show passivity in this respect. Their disinterest is paired with a special sort of cunningness. Very good and excellent marks in religion help to raise the grade point average in the final certificate. They also show/exhibit conformism towards their parents' expectations and cultural tradition.

One of the features of ethnographic case studies and long conversations is that they cannot be evaluated in sociological terms of representativeness. This kind of analysis, based on semi-structured in-depth interviews and qualitative methods, gives insight into the nature of the functioning of the Polish educational system with regard to multiculturalism and pluralism. In comparison to other European countries, the number of minorities and immigrants in Poland is tiny, but the problem of inefficient educational practices concerning members of these groups is indicative of the perspective of tolerance towards cultural diversity in a country which has a growing immigration rate and is intensively subjected to global cultural trends and influences.

Materials were gathered between January and May 2010 in schools and institutions responsible for education in Poznań. Interviews were conducted with teachers, headmasters, bureaucrats, administrators, scholars and one student (see Annexes I and II). In addition, we also studied documents related to education, as well as media resources and literature on multiculturalism and pluralism in Polish schools.

Case 1

Designed for Roma communities in southern Poland and implemented by the central authorities, the programmes for increasing Roma participation in education have proven inadequate in regions and cities with a dispersed Roma population, such as Poznań. Simultaneously, most of the interviewed educators do not see particular reasons for employing special methods of teaching, or for implementing extraordinary means to encourage the Roma to attend school. A prevailing view is that equal rights and duties apply to all and that a unified policy in the national state should be executed. Only few see the necessity to adjust the educational curricula to Romani culture. However, even in such cases respect for Roma culture is not shown. The recognition of otherness is possible only when it is excluded a priori from the established mainstream with its entrenched patterns of values and attitudes. Other cultures that are present in Poland are perceived as a colourful folkloristic supplement to the 'transparent' and 'normal' Polish culture. Also, some Roma associations tend to see folkloristic activity as the main objective of their existence and prefer not to interact with educational authorities. The Bahtafé Roma Foundation, which is discussed in this report, goes beyond this pattern. Working in Poznań and its vicinity, the Foundation's activists have implemented an innovative project which is adjusted to the local circumstances. Roma students are offered classes which are adapted to their cultural needs, and are held in a special school that is organised in fact for them. However, this experiment also raises fears of the ghettoization of Romani children.

Case 2

The lack of tolerance towards worldview pluralism in Polish schools is widespread. The commonly accepted, or at least commonly followed cultural order in which Roman-Catholicism assumes a dominant position, fosters intolerance towards those who undermine it. The few individual endeavours to challenge the 'natural' presence of religious symbols in schools are quelled, and the demands of securing teaching in ethics as a substitute to religion lessons are ridiculed or simply ignored. Even the decision of the European Court in Strasbourg ('Lautsi vs. Italy' case, see: p. 27 of this report) which was in favour of a person asking for this constitutional right has not changed the situation. On the political scene, there are only two parties that made it into the Parliament in this Fall parliamentary elections, i.e. Democratic Left Alliance, and the so-called Palikot's Movement, which in their programme claim a ban for religion classes in public schools. Together they have won only 18.26% of votes and currently have 67 seats in *Sejm*, the lower chamber of the parliament (Państwowa 2011). However, even if they would have a majority in it, such a ban is hardly imaginable in contemporary Poland. Well-organised, led by religious priests and authorities, having their own media and resources,

the Catholics would definitely stage massive protests and block any action in this direction. Although the proportion of persons questioning the presence of religion in public education is slowly growing, there is no momentum for forming any social movement that would defend the worldview neutrality of the state. Incidents of protest can trigger public debates in which various views are articulated, but these discussions are short-lived. Defenders of the existing state of affairs immediately refer to the moral values of religious teaching and get an upper hand in these disputes. The Polish model of religiosity which is strongly embedded in Polish culture, entails a nearly universal participation in religious rites of passage (baptism, first communion, confirmation, church wedding, funeral). In order to partake in these rituals, individuals have to join and successfully pass religious training. Thus, to a certain extent, tradition makes students attend these classes, which by political decision are held in public schools. In result, crosses hang on the walls of classrooms, a vast majority of schoolchildren participate in religious training, and the dissatisfied persons stay silent.

Overall, paying lip service to tolerance is practiced in the Polish educational system. It is grounded in a historical discourse of its obvious presence in Polish tradition. However, in reality most teachers and their supervisors are hardly aware of what the contemporary liberal meaning of tolerance in the educational system is. Cultural otherness is accepted as an exotic adornment of life that from time to time can be staged to the public, or even mentioned in a classroom. The existing miniscule minorities prove the assumption of the exercised in the past, but also still found in the present 'Polish tolerance'. However, virtually all persons interviewed overtly or implicitly opt for a unified model of education that is 'Polish' in the 'Polish school', because it is the 'Polish state', in which 'Polish people' live. The notion of 'normality' is very often evoked. It reveals a strong commitment to the idea of a 'leading culture' (German *Leitkultur*). It actually represents a much more radical version of this policy, because for the majority of Polish educators it is self-evident, and their statements do not result from prolonged deliberations about multicultural experiments and actually existing ethno-cultural diversity. The demographic situation, i.e. the low number of minorities and immigrants, at least partly explains this attitude. A similar point can be made about the attitude towards the secular character of the state and its institutions, especially schools, as well as to worldview pluralism. Students that are willing to practice tradition and are conformist attend classes in religion that are conveniently taught in school buildings and are integrated into the weekly class schedule. Because most citizens are baptised Catholics, the arguments against religious instruction in public schools are preposterous for the supporters of it. Advocates on both sides of the intellectual and/or political barricade are entrenched in their views and are unable to accept the opponents' arguments, but they have to tolerate each other out of necessity and in the name of (the Polish) democratic tradition. At stake is the principle of tolerance/acceptance/respect that is challenged by the struggles over social imagery and control of people's minds and habits. So far in these struggles the hegemonic position of Roman-Catholic denomination remains very strong, but practically unchallenged.

In the face of the presented challenges, a number of possible recommendations: (a) improving the cooperation on the level of municipal institutions and policy makers, for the preparation, implementation and evolution of the most effective solutions in Roma education; (b) providing qualitative research on the expectations and visions of Roma activists that would result in establishing common goals for the future; (c) modifying the curricula at all stages of education in order to extend the knowledge of cultural diversity in Polish society; (d) introducing social campaigns promoting tolerance and multiculturalism; (e) putting more effort into stimulating discussion among policymakers, officials and citizens on the presence of religious symbols in public space in Poland and the place of multiculturalism in public discourse and social practice.

Keywords

Tolerance, Roma education, religious tolerance, religious pluralism

1. Introduction

In line with global trends and European guidelines, Polish education in the last two decades has become not only a subject of thorough and comprehensive reforms (many of which turned out to be unsuccessful versions of the old reformative ideas), but also of extensive studies. Most of the latter were inspired by the idea of monitoring the education system in order to enhance its efficiency. They were also a result of the comparison of achievements of Polish students with their peers from other countries conducted at the beginning of the New Millennium.

For several years after the systemic transformation, a strong and far-reaching myth prevailed in the Polish self-image, which claimed a superiority of the Polish educational system over similar systems in Western Europe and the United States¹. This myth was painfully verified in the process of growing Polish involvement in international research and education networks, the most prominent example being the PISA report², which was carried out in the group of 15-year-olds, and was based on an evaluation of the effectiveness of the education system. In the study carried out in the year 2000, Polish students ranked at the tail end, ahead only of Greece and Portugal (Białecki and Haman 2010: 8), which caused a big shock among educational authorities and led to an avalanche of ideas about radical reforms of teaching methods.

Additionally, along the need for raising efficiency and competitiveness of the educational system in Poland, increasingly more attention is being paid to the monitoring of how the core values – such as, multiculturalism – are being promoted in the framework of the schooling system. The practice of multiculturalism is far from ideal not only because of the relatively low rate of children of non-Polish origin in the structures of public education, but also because state solutions to the challenges of cultural diversity are minimal. This relatively bleak situation is deepened by persisting difficulties in the cooperation between the central ministries and local educational authorities.

Following Michael Waltzer, who utilises a distinction between tolerance as an attitude and tolerance as a practice, the Polish school can be characterised as operating in two different, and not always overlapping realities. In what follows, we will try to present this discrepancy. It has to be admitted that several improvements have been made in this respect. The new core curriculum has been in force since 2008. It was preceded by several years of educational changes introduced by successive governments. Unfortunately, this was a rather chaotic process commented on by one of the headmasters in the following way: ‘please do not say anything about the reforms – we [teachers and headmasters] don’t do anything else, but adjust from one reform to the other’ [MG]. Both the curriculum and all additional guidelines and publications supporting school teachers and managers strongly emphasise the need for promoting the ideas of multiculturalism and tolerance towards diversity. Calls for implementing diversity in education policies appear from all sides with a relatively great frequency.

This is a visible change from the previous regulations of the Ministry of National Education (hereafter also MEN)³. Before 2008, the need for the promotion of these ideas was not expressed directly and

¹ In the period between 1990 and 2005 Poland experienced a nearly 5-fold increase in the number of university level students (from about over 400 thousand to just under 2 million), combined with more than a four-fold increase of the number of universities and colleges in 1990-2008 (from 112 to 456). Educational desires and the significant increase in educational opportunities have caused problems in keeping standards in the quality of education (EAOEA 2010: 21).

² OECD/PISA, a Programme for International Student Assessment Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development is an initiative aimed at ensuring, through periodic surveys, the analysis of the effectiveness of educational systems in European countries, OECD countries and non-members. In 2000, 32 countries (28 OECD and four non-members) took part in the program, while in 2003, already 41 countries participated in this comparative study (30 OECD and 11 non-members).

³ The name of the Ministry is indicative of the way education of children and young people in Poland is understood. In Polish it is ‘Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej’. The term ‘naród’ (from which ‘narodowej’ is derived) translates into

appeared rather as a general necessity for teaching dignity and respect for other people in the school life. Since Polish accession to the European Union (2004), closer attention has been paid to developing specific multicultural guidelines for teachers at all levels of the educational ladder. It has not been, however, accompanied by securing new teaching tools and proper training for educators, which would assist them in implementing novel tasks in the field of multicultural education.

Moreover, like many practices in other areas of social and political life, 'crisis intervention' is a routine *modus operandi* in the area of education in Poland. Instead of planning long-term policies for the benefit of all actors involved, the authorities react hastily when strong conflicts or new disturbing phenomena are revealed. For instance, classes about Jewish culture usually are offered only when pupils have been caught using anti-Semitic expressions; and a lecture on Roma culture is organised only when children from this minority are bullied in the school. As one of the interviewees said: 'If there are Romani children in the class, this topic is discussed. If not, then we talk about human values in general' [EN].

Thus, state educational policy is mostly geared towards the local authorities' actions and responsibility, i.e. in fact no general policy is applied (Czerniejewska 2008: 55). Despite the adoption of all EU legal recommendations in the field of education and protection of minority rights, a discrepancy between European provisions and their actual application is a salient characteristic of the educational system in Poland.

The Ministry of National Education invites schools to cooperate with NGOs which are prepared for and can initiate the promotion of multiculturalism (inter alia, through co-organised extracurricular activities in schools), as well as positive attitudes of students and their families towards cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. These commendations are neither mandatory nor universal. They take place mainly in the so-called 'good schools'⁴ and often function as attractive or decorative appendages to the schools' curricula, rather than comprise a permanent feature in teaching programs or general educational policy. The majority of teachers and their superiors does not see a need for this type of education, mostly because of the small number of migrant children and children representing national, ethnic, or religious minorities. As an employee of the Provincial Board of Education (*Wojewódzkie Kuratorium Oświaty*) in Poznań, the capital of the Greater Poland (Wielkopolska) region (voivodship)⁵ stated:

'Many more initiatives of this kind [aimed at promoting multiculturalism and monitoring schools in this respect] are carried out in regions where such problems exist. Warsaw puts a strong emphasis on the integration of refugees, because they have facilities there. We do not have them [refugees], so there is no problem, the phenomenon does not exist' [WCH].

This statement renders the prevailing approach of most local and state officials: If there are no alarming events or actual conflicts, there is no reason to speculate about abstract problems. Polish schools are on their way to decentralization that has begun in the 1990's, they are slowly being transformed into a network of autonomous units, with gradually growing links to the local environment (Dolata 2005: 3-4). However, the core curriculum is mandatory for all schools, and local programs and initiatives (eg. programs targeted to children of Vietnamese immigrants in Warsaw, see: Głowacka-Grajper 2006: 133-135) are rarely reflected in general guidelines.

In 2008, within the framework of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, MEN promoted multiculturalism in schools. Since then, Multicultural Days, School Festivals of Culture and Diversity,

English as 'nation', which here is understood in an 'ethnic,' not 'civic' sense (see: Polish report in the WP1 in this project).

⁴ The concept applies to school facilities in better neighbourhoods, which are attended by children from wealthy families, and which are usually ranked highly in the rankings of the pupils' achievements in the city or region.

⁵ Poland is a centralist state divided into 16 administrative regions traditionally called 'voivodships'. Many of them have a long and distinctive provincial history. Poznań (ca. 560 thousands dwellers, close to 900 thousands with close suburbs) is the capital of the Greater Poland voivodship (Wielkopolska).

and similar initiatives have taken place, but in most cases they turned out to be one-time events. An employee⁶ of the Provincial Board of Education in Poznań was somewhat embarrassed when she could not find a report on the activities undertaken within the framework of this programme. During the interview she said that:

‘there was a report on multiculturalism, I guess, but in the meantime the Ministry of Education reformed us, so I cannot don't know where it is at the moment’ [JCH].

This statement aptly expresses a predominant stance of the local educational authorities towards the importance of cultural pluralism and the events promoting multiculturalism.

Press reports and direct conversations with teachers, pupils and their parents indicate that the introduction of tolerance and respect in school life and their enforcement in daily interactions does not look particularly optimistic. While local officials and employees of the Board of Education declare that they are not aware of any actual physical violence based on intolerance towards ethnic or racial others [JCH, PP], cases of racist or anti-Semitic insults are common at all school levels. One can read about them in media releases or hear about them from the students (Rasizm 2011). It is self-evident that attitude to others and multiculturalism are closely related to the issue of tolerance towards unconventional conducts in public life.

Tolerance towards intolerant behaviour and language in a given institution depends to a large extent on the school's executive management's attitude and sensitivity. The headmaster's personal perception of the issue can shape the everyday practices in a given school. One of the teachers expressed this clearly: ‘the headmaster always has the last word’[AG]. This explains why local educational officials frequently mentioned the autonomous decisions of schools' authorities that have to be made in cases of conflict or difficult situations related to interethnic relations⁷.

A tolerant or sensitive attitude toward multicultural ethics is not the priority in educational curricula. Schools are ranked according to their teaching efficiency. The teaching agenda is still anchored in an old ‘memorising’ style of knowledge acquisition. Tests are heavily based on this type of accumulated wisdom. In other words, the main criterion for the effectiveness of education is the number of points in the final exam, and – only additionally – the so called ‘assessment of conduct’ (*ocena z zachowania*). The latter in fact reflects the level of students' adaptation to explicit or unwritten rules of behaviour in a given school, but does not refer his or her general manners, social life skills and opinions about social relations. Teachers are aware of this discrepancy and acknowledge that the students' demeanour and attitude towards social issues, including tolerance towards ‘otherness’, in particular ethnic and religious others, should be given more value in the educational process and in the evaluation of individuals. One of the tutors in the International School of Poznań⁸ said that ‘in the Polish school, contents of textbooks are in the first place - what the child should know is crucial. It is not entirely clear, what kind of students we want to have [at the end of each stage of education]’ [AT]. This

⁶ The cited employee of the Board is a person designated to deal with multicultural issues in schools in Wielkopolska, who at the end of the interview critically stated that the Board has no people with a sociological background who could competently approach these issues, and mentioned that her assignment to this area in the Board was completely random.

⁷ The authority of headmasters and their large impact on the overall character of a given school has been clearly manifested on various occasions in the course of the research. Usually, teachers and officials suggested that only meeting with the headmaster of the school will produce valid information, and not – what would seem more obvious – teachers having non-Polish pupils in the class, or experiencing difficulties in teaching foreign students. The headmaster is the ‘face’ of the school and ensures that the information about events in the school is appropriate (politically correct) when given to external parties.

⁸ The International School of Poznań is a member of the Bachelor International Organization, an institution with a mission statement emphasising the comprehensive development of openness and communication skills. In comparison to the core curriculum of Polish public schools, its philosophy of teaching may be called ‘progressive’, or even revolutionary, as it promotes good attitudes, and not only knowledge. Half of the students are Poles whose parents pay for international education, and the other half are foreigners whose parents prefer international education for their offspring to the regular Polish one.

statement suggests that the students' attitudes and behaviours towards cultural diversity are not a real concern for the public education officers.

The current ethnic and religious situation in Poland, i.e., by European standards a very low rate of students coming from minorities and immigrant communities in relation to the Polish majority, can serve as an 'excuse' for this situation. However, this argument totally misses the point. Teaching tolerance toward otherness and the education about multiculturalism has a much wider aim and meaning in contemporary Europe and world than just being a tool for solving local conflicts or addressing problems existing here and now. All in all, it seems that with respect to the promotion of multiculturalism and advocacy of pluralism, the Polish educational authorities and ordinary teachers can be reproached for their passivity and disinterest rather than negligence.

2. School diversity in Poland

In order to see the issues discussed in a wider context, let us give some numbers relevant to multiculturalism in Polish schools.

To determine the number of foreign students (i.e., non-Polish citizens) in schools is not an easy task (see Table 2 below). It is also virtually impossible to verify the number of students who are members of national, ethnic and religious minorities holding Polish citizenship, simply because schools do not keep records on nationality/ethnicity and the religious affiliation of students. As all Polish citizens, they have a right to free public education, which is compulsory between age six and eighteen. In addition, the strong link between the school system of civil registration⁹ (concerning not only school students, but all inhabitants of the country) and the formal demand of residence registration (*meldunek*) can lead to absurd: if the school has no information regarding the registration of residence of a given pupil coming from a minority group, the child does not exist for this school. This fact is extremely important in the context of the so-called compulsory schooling rule¹⁰, i.e. the legal obligation imposed on parents that all people residing in Poland has the duty to send their children to school (not necessarily public school). This educational duty also extends to immigrants. However, in practice it quite often happens that the rule does not apply to certain minorities, particularly the Roma, who often do not register their residence. Because of this administrative blind spot, which sometimes leads to the situation where children do not appear in school records, headmasters cannot take any legal action to enrol these children into the education system (in a given school district).

Table 1. Schools and students (state and private schools) (EAOEA 2010: 52)

Type of school	Number of pupils (in thousands)		Number of schools	
	1999/2000	2008/2009	1999/2000	2009/2010
Primary School	3958,0	2294,4	17743	14067
Gymnasium	615,3	1381,4	6121	7204
Secondary School	864,0	688,0	2156	2451
Vocational School	1552,3	880,0	8066	5206
Additional secondary School	205,5	344,1	2328	3369

⁹ In 2005, the Education Information System (SIO) was introduced. This is a platform created to collect and store public education data. It is being constantly reconstructed in order to adjust to changing legislation, including the latest law on personal data (the last change was made on 12 May 2011, which resulted in another suspension of the SIO for an unspecified period of time).

¹⁰ The Education Act explicitly states the obligation of school education. This law applies to all children aged between 7 and 18 years, living in the Republic of Poland, and therefore also the children of refugees or asylum seekers – in other words, all children residing on the territory of the country, regardless of their legal status. This makes primary and secondary school education universally compulsory.

The Central Statistical Office (GUS – acronym of *Główny Urząd Statystyczny*) determines the number of foreigners in Polish schools. According to GUS, the total number of immigrant students currently oscillates around 4000; they barely comprise () 0.06% of the total student population below university level. Although Polish non-citizens can teach in Poland, there are also only 775 foreign teachers employed in the Polish educational system (Szelewa 2010: 25), a fringe in the army of six hundred thousand schoolteachers.

Another difficulty in the precise identification of ethnic belonging of foreigner children attending schools in Poland stems from the fact that the headmasters, who are responsible for the gathering of this kind of data, specify only whether a child comes from a member state of the EU or from a third party country. Current MEN regulations do not provide for the acquisition of more detailed data in this respect.

Table 2. Number of foreign students in Polish schools (Szelewa2010) [in thousands]

Type of school	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004	2004/2005	2005/2006
Primary School	2,6	2,1	3	2,8	2,6
Gymnasium	0,5	0,7	0,8	0,7	0,6
Secondary School (<i>Liceum</i>)	0,6	0,7	0,8	1,1	0,8

3. Changes in education after 1989

Post-1989 *structural* changes in the education system began to be introduced relatively late in Poland, together with the reform of the healthcare and social welfare systems in the late 1990s. The main changes concerned the organization of education (e.g., allowing for the establishment of non-public schools, enhancing the role of local authorities and parents in the functioning of the school), the content of already partly modified textbooks and curricula, and last but not least, the values promoted in schools. An important part of these reforms, implemented already at the very beginning of the 1990s, was the possibility of teaching religious classes in public schools¹¹. This regulation has caused several re-emerging controversies revolving around the issue of a secular constitution of the state that were amplified/ by the slowly but steadily growing secularisation of Polish society.

In the 1990s, the state began to delegate the responsibility of managing schools and kindergartens to local governments, which has proven to be very beneficial to the educational facilities and schools' functioning. The local authorities have proven to be more effective managers than the state which is detached from local affairs. The process was accompanied by a significant change in the way of thinking about the funding of education. The state-granted resources are correlated to the number of students participating in the system; local authorities can, if they can only afford it, allocate their own resources for educational purposes.

Soon after this structural transition, in the period before the Polish accession to the EU (May 2004), the educational system faced further challenges prompted by the necessity of its adaptation to EU requirements. The main changes were related to the modernisation and computerisation of schools, the need to raise teachers' competence (e.g., continuous vocational training), the introduction of external examinations, and the reform of the structure of the schooling system. Secondary education was split into junior level gymnasiums and senior level lyceums. In result, children attend elementary schools (6 grades), gymnasiums (3 grades) and lyceums (3 grades). In the transition from one stage to the other,

¹¹ Religious classes in public schools were banned by the communist authorities only in 1961. Religious education classes, which were widely attended between 1961 and 1990, took place in classrooms arranged by the Church parishes.

final exams are taken. By successfully passing the secondary school (lyceum) final examinations final examinations, called *matura*, (German *Abitur*), one can enter university level education.

Actually, due to the change of government in the autumn of 2001 and the changes in education policy associated with it, the reform of 1999 had not been fully implemented. This was especially true for structural changes and alterations in curricula at the secondary school level. In particular, it was the inconsistencies between education in junior (gymnasium) and senior high school (lyceums) that constituted the main reasons for implementing another reform program in 2009 (EAOEA 2010: 20-23).

Because of several political changes and the diverse visions of the way education should look like related to them, the 'Polish school' is endlessly looking for a more coherent policy. This instability (mitigated by the fact that the currently ruling coalition has a chance to win the upcoming elections this year), combined with the formal and practical challenges of an increasingly visible cultural diversity of the society, gives a picture of a chaotic and constantly transforming area, as the case studies chosen for the purpose of this research will further illustrate.

4. Methodology and Research Design

This report is based on the analysis of scientific literature, documents circulated by MEN and the Ministry of Interior and Administration, reports and expert documents on minorities' education in Poland, articles in newspapers, and qualitative interviews conducted for the purpose of this study. The latter were conducted between February and May 2011 with employees of educational institutions, teachers, headmasters and NGO activists engaged in the efforts aimed at improving the education and integration of the Roma minority in Poznań and Swarzędz¹² (case study 1), as well as with people involved in the disputes about the presence of religious symbols in school buildings and in public education (case study 2). Interviews were preceded by several weeks of preparations which often focused on identifying people willing to take part in such interviews and meetings. We have to say that the subject of interrogations evoked a lot of unease among the people inquired to the degree that they were sometimes suspicious about the purpose of our research.

We also used a snowballing method in the process of interviewing in both case studies. Each interview lasted at least 60 minutes (on average app. 80 minutes), was recorded and transcribed. In the body of the report, citations from the interviews end with the initials of the interlocutors.

The interview guides and the list of interviews can be found in Appendixes I and II of this report. During the interviews conducted by one of us (Katarzyna Chlewińska), many questions were asked about the use of the material. The interviewees also expressed their concerns about the possibility of quoting them and, above all, about disclosing their names. In several cases, the interlocutors asked for turning the recorder off, because they thought that some contents may prove problematic and threaten their jobs.

During the classes on ethics, group discussions were conducted. The group consisted of three high school teachers (teaching history, and a subject called 'knowledge of society'), the researcher and one student (classes on ethics as equivalent to 'religion' are very poorly attended). The participants did not agree to take record of the meeting. In the course of preparing and conducting interviews, there was a clear reluctance and lack of understanding for the idea of a group discussion on the issues of multiculturalism and tolerance, especially among the employees of education-supervising institutions and some teachers. This confirms our previous finding that tolerance appears as something obvious in Polish society, but at the same time public expression of opinions on socially sensitive topics, such as minorities' rights and the hegemony of the Roman-Catholic religion in Poland, raise some fears. In result, we actually failed to persuade more people to participate in the focus groups. To us, it is a piece

¹² An economically vibrant town with more than 30 thousand inhabitants, a part of the Poznań agglomeration.

of information important in the context of the topic studied and in fact supporting our view on the general attitude towards the debate on multiculturalism in Poland.

The structure of the interviews is given in Annex II, however, we have to emphasise here that we have conducted semi-structured interviews, treating the guidelines merely as a helpful tool for keeping the basic scheme of the interview. Spontaneous comments of the respondents were particularly desired as the views on the topics addressed during interviews are often rooted in stereotypes. Simultaneously, questions about the situation of national minorities and the attitude toward religion proved to be quite embarrassing for many informants. In any case, we made all possible effort not to impose answers.

Some basic socio-demographic data about the informants, such as ethnicity or nationality, gender and workplace, are given in the list of interviews in Annex I below. In total, 16 interviews were conducted with employees of the Educational Board (*Kuratorium Oświaty*), the Department of Education of the Municipality of Poznań, teachers, principals, the head of a Romani NGO, a lawyer who works in the field of human rights, and one high school student.

Persuading the representatives of educational institutions to participate in the interviews was also a relatively difficult task. These institutions usually designate a person responsible for communication with the media and other outside parties. Therefore, it is difficult to obtain a greater spectrum of opinions held by the people working in them. Interviewees were mostly women, which reflects their numerical dominance in the Polish education system.

Interviews were conducted by one person, usually in the workplace of the informant. Only in one case it was conducted in a café, since the interlocutor did not want to talk at her workplace. She was afraid of being accused by her superiors of spreading unauthorised information about sensitive issues to someone from the outside.

In the first case study, we accepted the principle that interviews should be conducted with the representatives of the educational authorities as well as with the teachers involved in a bottom-up process of reforming and improving the education of Roma children in Poznań and its vicinity. We made this decision for several reasons. On the one hand, it is practically impossible to find Roma families willing to participate in an interview. The same applies to Roma children in public schools. It has to be said that their commandment of Polish is inadequate, particularly in the lower grades. On the other hand, experts and politicians at the (inter-)national level, whom we wanted to interview, were extremely elusive. Also, most of them are not very competent in their area of responsibility. Unfamiliar with the issues related to multiculturalism, an issue virtually absent in public discourses, they felt unprepared for a meaningful discussion about Roma education in Poland and refused to give an interview. (Some were ready to talk about the events organised by the European Union – such as the ‘Multicultural Year 2008’.)

From reading the scientific literature in the field of education (Głowacka-Grajper 2006; Kwadrans 2007, 2008; Sułkowska-Kądziółka 2007; Weigl and Formanowicz 2007), one can get the impression that the *Program for the Roma community* (see below), despite its flaws, has given some good results and has improved the quality of education of this minority. However, opinions of volunteers and NGO workers are hardly heard and rarely taken into account in official documents and recommendations for schools and teachers. Local ideas and practices are not promulgated by the Educational Board in other regions. As a matter of fact, cross-regional meetings and trainings are not on the agenda of this institution.

As for the second case study, i.e. classes on ethics and religious symbols (crucifixes) in schools, it has to be stressed that this is an issue barely present in Polish scholarly literature. It is usually raised by lawyers deliberating the similarities of legal systems in Europe (e.g., a book on this topic is being prepared by one of the interviewees, an employee of Poznań Human Rights Centre). It seems that this problem is in a certain way denied because it is also very rarely a subject of concern in the everyday life of students and their parents. It sometimes concerns intellectuals and is from time to time

addressed by the media. The supporters of a purely secular model of education are a minority in the public debate, while advocates of religious education and the presence of religious symbols in school premises do not see a point in starting the debate again. Newspaper articles, as well as documents on ethics classes issued by the MEN or by local educational authorities are prompted by rare conflicts about the issue.

In our interpretation of materials we applied the method of qualitative discourse analysis. We have looked for meanings and concepts emerging in the discussion on specific issues. Common ideas and statements have been integrated into themes that are of our interest and that are helpful in understanding the attitudes of our interlocutors to tolerance, diversity and pluralism in school life.

5. Case Study Selection

Our case studies were selected for two major reasons: their importance to the education system as a whole, and their significance for the issues of tolerance and multiculturalism. While in Poland multiculturalism is not hotly debated (most probably due to the miniscule proportion of migrants and minorities – see: Buchowski & Chlewińska 2010), we think that the case studies discussed here address some questions that are indicative of the currently on-going as well as future debate on this topic. Seemingly, the two topics are not closely related, but they touch upon the crucial challenges for ‘Polish multiculturalism’. On the one hand, the problems of Roma children education demonstrate the character of general, often implicit assumptions underlying the practices observable in the state education system in relation to immigrants/foreigners and minorities. On the other hand, there is a question of the dominant role of Roman-Catholicism in Polish society, which is correlated to the presence of this religion in public spaces and the strong position of the Roman-Catholic Church in politics. This situation spawns debates about the relations between the nominally secular state and the Church, and leads to postulates of revising these relations in many domains of life, also in education and daily practices in schools.

At the same time, two additional criteria were a factor in our selection of case studies: the severity of the problem, i.e. a desire to focus on those aspects of education which cause long-lasting unsolved problems; and, the relevance of attitudes towards and practices linked to diversity and tolerance in Poland, which are mostly hidden to the public. We think that these two cases provide glaring examples of the ineptitude of policy makers and education officials in this field, and they expose their ignorance towards basic principles of a liberal society in Europe.

The ups and downs of the education of the Roma

At the state level, the education of the Roma is covered by the ‘Program for the Roma community in Poland’. The Program aims to improve the level of education among Roma children through increasing graduation rates, improving attendance and the learning outcomes of Roma children and youth, and facilitating the Roma youth to continue their education in secondary schools and institutions of higher education. The first case study deals with a local response of Poznań activists, educational officers and teachers to the failure of the implementation of the Program, caused in this particular situation by the Roma families’ dispersion in the area. It also exposes the main attitudes towards members of the Roma minority in the schooling system.

Crosses and religion – the Polish school in need of religious tolerance?

The second case study addresses the fledging debate undermining the established ideological order in Polish schools. It analyses the protests against the removal of crosses from classrooms, which were commonly present there since the fall of communism, and the public reactions to them,. Rare attempts at removing some of the crosses followed the European Court of Human Rights sentence passed in 2009. The same applies to the debate on teaching classes on ethics for students who do not attend religion classes. A particularly intense debate was engendered by a family that sued their son’s school (in principle, the Polish state) to the Court of Human Rights for not fulfilling the obligation to organise classes on ethics.

6. The Ups and Downs of the Education of Roma

Introduction

The Roma's nomadic lifestyle is a well-identified, culturally rooted excuse for their offspring low level of school attendance. As a matter of fact, some practices of the nomadic lifestyle have not completely disappeared. Despite the fact that Roma were banned to travel in their caravans almost five decades ago, many of them in most parts of Poland¹³, including western provinces, are forced to move within the country and beyond it in order to earn a living, simply because they are still unable to find regular employment.

As just mentioned, some 'experts' explain the disinterest of Roma in education by their 'nomadic' lifestyle which is embedded in their culture. Moreover, cultural patterns allowing 14-year-old girls to marry and give up on education, are another common and easy justification for the low rates of educated Roma. It is also said that Roma fear to lose their identity, which reinforces their reluctance towards state education. In result, school is imagined as a punitive institution that threatens the sustainability of the group and the preservation of its heritage (Głowacka-Grajper 2006: 47).

Many Roma face unemployment caused by industrial restructuring and the collapse of state enterprises. Indeed, in the communist past, Roma found employment in industrial plants in many regions. Nowadays, the majority of Roma in Poland live in relatively bad conditions, have no or very limited access to social services and health care, which is, at least partly related to their illiteracy, especially among adults. The latter, in combination with a disregard shown towards education by Roma themselves, impede the so-called 'social advancement' (Czerniejewska 2008: 151).

All these factors constitute a seemingly consistent explanation of the yet unresolved problem of the creation of an efficient education system for the Roma minority in Poland, especially in the regions with a high dispersion rate of members of this group, which is also the case in Wielkopolska. Library research on the subject and the interviews conducted in the framework of the ACCEPT Project lead to similar conclusions. However, one may ask if this image is not an outcome of a strongly entrenched belief that because of their unbridgeable cultural distinction, it is impossible to work out an effective educational strategy for the Roma minority in Poland.

The issue of the education of Roma children appears as a problem not only for the Polish state, but also for NGOs and Roma leaders. At the beginning of the 1990s there was an idea to create separate 'Roma classes'. This idea was actually implemented with the help of teachers from local communities in which Roma live. Classes were established on the assumption of a short-term utility: teaching helpers should serve as an aid in the early stages of school education for the Roma children who had difficulties with the Polish language caused by the fact that Romani was used at home, as well as the fact that they lacked any pre-school preparation. By 1998, nearly 30 classes attended by 430 pupils were set up, mainly in the southern and north-eastern parts of the country, where there are areas of higher Roma concentration. However, this initiative was stopped due to the growing protests of Roma community leaders who perceived this solution as leading to the 'ghettoization' of their group, at least in the domain of education (Czerniejewska 2008: 155; Kwadrans 2008: 232-238).

In result, state and local authorities abandoned the idea criticised by Roma activists and searched for less controversial and more systemic solutions. The most popular ones are the attempts to include Roma schoolchildren into the existing system of general public education. Such practices should lead to the promotion of integration through education and other domains of life. Ideally, it should also

¹³ They are divided into four main groups – Lowari, Kalderashi, Polska Roma and Bergitka Roma.

mean that authorities, bureaucrats, public servants and social workers start to perceive Roma as citizens equal to all others.

As mentioned, currently at the state level, the education of the Roma is covered by the general 'Program for the Roma community in Poland' (see: Zawicki 2010: 121), which is financed, supervised and coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior and Administration. (It is noteworthy that most minority-related issues are handled by the Ministry also responsible for public security!). It is declared that the Program should improve Roma children's achievements in education by reducing the practice of skipping classes and reducing cultural and mental barriers.

The implementation of this project started in the mid-1990s. Actually, it was initiated by grass-root activists from the Małopolska voivodship (Smaller Poland) in southern Poland, a region where Roma can be found in numbers larger than average for the country, and where they are often concentrated in local township communities. In the next step of the project, these small-scale educational activities were formalised in the form of a more coordinated program under the auspices of the central government (Kwadran 2007: 242). The Pilot program in Małopolska alone, realised in the years 2001–2003, proved a common opinion among the teachers working with Roma students – opinion that they lack a basic knowledge of Polish, and should be given the initial education and socialisation provided by pre-school education in the so-called 'zero-classes'.¹⁴ No wonder that in the recommendations based on this Pilot programme experience, it was stated that it is particularly important to facilitate access of Roma children to kindergarten education in order to prepare them for further education.

At this point one important conclusion referring to a significant shift in educational policy can be made. As we have seen, initially the idea of teaching children in special Roma classes prevailed. It was based on the assumptions that they comprise an isolated group that is culturally homogeneous and that their social and cultural difference prevents integration into mainstream society. Later, due to criticism and the failure of the policy itself, this idea was replaced by another one, based on the principle of integration in commonly attended classes. In classrooms, teachers were aided by Roma assistants – specialists trained for this task and ready to act in a multicultural environment. A special emphasis was put on the necessity of bridging socio-cultural differences existing between Roma children and their peers at the initial, pre-school stage of education, which was to enable these minority students to catch up with others (See: *Sprawozdanie z realizacji... 2010, 2009, 2008* [Reports on the implementation of the 'Program for the Roma community in Poland' in 2010, 2009, 2008]).

Roma assistants – Roma community members – provide comprehensive support for Roma students in dealing with the school environment, help to build a positive image of the school and the benefits of education for Roma children, ensure emotional support for Roma pupils, advise teachers and educators in identifying the needs and problems of individual students, and mediate in situations of conflict. The introduction of Roma assistants improved the efficiency of schools in the education of Romani children and made all students more familiar with multiculturalism as a phenomenon. Similar practices, based on the experience with the Roma, have been currently introduced in the education of refugee children, e.g., Chechens. However, it is still questionable if today one can really speak of a coherent state educational policy in this respect.

Also, the policy towards the Roma proved to be only a partial success. Shortly after the turn of the century, it appeared that such a policy did not in fact result in a greater inclusion of the Roma as a group into the majority society. The number of children benefiting from the public school offer systematically decreased. This problem became especially severe in regions with few Roma families, while the situation was somewhat better in the areas of their bigger concentration. Elders in Roma communities, often illiterate, have not been able to benefit from any form of assistance. In order to see the picture in a proper perspective, one should keep in mind that in a given context, a lot has always

¹⁴ Currently, 'class zero' preparatory education can take place both in schools and kindergartens.

depended on the attitude of the Roma parents and community leaders on the one hand, and the local communities' majorities' good will to improve the living conditions of Roma people on the other.

All in all, the governmental programs and the initiatives of foundations and associations implemented with the goal of creating effective tools for Roma integration in the mainstream education system left all stakeholders with the feeling of unfulfilled promises (Paszko and Czysz 2010: 75). With this in mind, we can start the analysis of the above mentioned case study, i.e. to scrutinise the response of Poznań's school communities and authorities to the challenge of establishing an effective tool for the improvement of the education of Roma and their children.

Schooling Roma in Poznań

In Poznań, as in most cities and provinces of western Poland, the number of Roma is difficult to determine because of their mobility. Census data from 2002 refer to 1086 Roma living in Wielkopolska (more than 3.3 million in total), while in the city of Poznań (ca. 570 thousand inhabitants), only 155 Roma are listed (Chrabąszcz and Gałęcki 2010: 37-38). Anna Markowska is a very prominent Roma leader in the city and she is president of the successful 'Bahtale Roma' Foundation¹⁵ (which in Romani means 'Happy Roma'). According to her, the picture is even more confusing. She thinks that there are circa 100 thousand Roma in Poland, and more than a hundred big families about whom the authorities have no knowledge at all in the heart of Poznań alone¹⁶. She emphasises that:

'it's true that there are not many Roma people here [in Poznań], but it doesn't mean that the problem does not exist. In Poznań there are over a hundred families,. The social welfare officers complain that too many Roma ask for assistance, and at the same time the authorities claim that the problem does not exist' [AM].

Chrabąszcz and Gałęcki (2010) also emphasise that the dispersion of the Roma in western parts of the country is a myth, since it is a general feature of the whole group in Poland. This scattered and unstable pattern of settlement might be the major reason for significant differences and inconsistencies in the official estimates of the number of Roma in Poland. Indeed, statistics show that there are about 12 thousand Roma in the country, while Roma organisations claim that their number reaches 20 or even 40 thousand.¹⁷ However, despite all these demographic uncertainties, the fact is that in Małopolska there are villages with Bergitka Roma who have settled there for generations, a phenomenon unknown in Wielkopolska. Therefore, attempts to transpose experiences directly from there have proven problematic in Poznań.

Local authorities, which in principle support Roma organisations, see Bahtale Roma's¹⁸ undertakings in the field of education positively. The Foundation itself decided not to cooperate with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration within the framework of its above mentioned Program for Roma, since they perceive the bureaucrats' stand as rigid, disregarding local conditions and inflexible in the very domain of educational matters. Bahtale Roma has been trying to implement an alternative

¹⁵ <http://www.bahtale-roma.pl/index.php>

¹⁶ A review of the data is impossible at this point. However, the officials strongly argue that these blown up numbers are a part of Roma organizations' 'propaganda'.

¹⁷ This discrepancy in the number of minority members given by officials and by minority activists is a common pattern in Europe, particularly in Central Europe. However, the difference in numbers claimed is especially striking in the case of Roma.

¹⁸ Another significant organisation in the vicinity of Poznań is the association of 'Polish Roma'. Their activities focus more on (1) media releases, (2) the participation of its activists in events combating stereotypes about Roma and other minority groups, (3) the promotion of tolerance, and (4) active participation in groups engaged in the cause of minorities and their rights. Several attempts to meet the leader of this organization failed, so it is impossible to confront the strategies of these two Roma NGOs in our report. The headmistress of a school in Swarzędz, where this organization has its office, said that their activities boil down to the regular organisation of the Roma Culture Festival. All her attempts to start a discussion about the encouragement and facilitation of Swarzędz's Roma children in public schooling have been left unheard.

educational program, based on the experience in schools run by the Foundation. Anna Markowska stated:

‘We do not work with the Ministry of Administration, and the Ministry of Education understands better that we cannot do everything at once, we are not able to move every Roma to one district. So we are doing it by ourselves, and it is worth doing’ [AM].

The Foundation is currently managing, in cooperation with and the help of various public school headmasters and local educational authorities in Poznań, late afternoon schools open to all persons who have Polish citizenship and who were not able to complete their education, or prefer extraordinary forms of education.

Every Roma who wants to move from the public school to one of those supervised by the Foundation gets permission from the Board of Education. Since local educational authorities are currently more flexible towards Roma and their education, they eagerly support virtually all non-governmental initiatives in this field. This attitude is no doubt related to the shortages of other governmental programs, especially the one discussed above.

To explain this mechanism, one should remember about the often rigid attitude and dominant position of school headmasters described in the previous sections. Usually, headmasters, referring to the principle of equal treatment of individuals independently of their ethnic background, deny the promotion of Roma students to higher grades on the basis of their excessive absenteeism. There is no room for more flexibility. In this context, the local Board of Education gladly issues permission to transfer students to the afternoon school run by the Foundation. Thanks to this arrangement, teaching results statistics in regular schools are not spoiled. Moreover, the stakeholders are not forced to be differently tolerant to various students, to support individuals by all means nor at any expense. Simultaneously, the unwritten rule is that in the schools run by the Foundation, a flexible attitude towards school attendance is commonly known, but what is equally commonly recognised is that what really counts (there) is the quality of the material prepared for classes. This means that with some intellectual effort and lower respect for discipline, Roma students have the opportunity to finish a school operated by the Foundation

The Bahtale Roma Foundation school experience leads to the following conclusion: Despite formal guidelines to promote the integration of Roma within the general educational system, it is better for all parties involved not to force Roma children to participate in the state sponsored integration programs. Regular schools are not ready for a proper implementation of the centrally advocated policy because of the lack of material resources and willingness to create a space for exercising cultural diversity.

A relative success of the Primary and Secondary Music Schools run by the Foundation encourages it to make plans for a further expansion of the curricula by including in it the general subjects taught in all schools¹⁹. Thanks to this, they could be transformed into regular public schools with additional

¹⁹ The Foundation is in charge of the following schools (they were open one after the other since 2006) :

1. Primary School for Adults (opened in 2009) – the program consist of a a one-year course designed to complement the education of those who did not completed the first stages of education. It is open to ever Polish citizen, and free of charge, but Poles are minority in it; it is attended mainly by Roma adults whose number varies **between 55 and 100**.
2. Evening Gymnasium for Adults.
3. Evening High School for Adults.
4. Complementary High School for those who have partly completed secondary education.
5. Primary and Secondary Music School – the Foundation plans to expand their offer and include obligatory curricula subjects into their curricula, and transform them into public schools with special music education.

To indicate the scale of this initiative: Roma community in Poland is estimated at 12,000 people (*Census 2002*) and at about 1000 people in Wielkopolska (Mazur 2010: 41). Board of Education in Poznan has information about 50 students of Roma origin at all levels of education in public schools.

classes in music. The Board of Education has some plans to apply the elaborated by Foundation schooling model in other o Wielkopolska's towns.

Practices in these schools represent an attempt to break the deadlock involving, on the one hand, a failure of universal education mechanisms in confrontation with the challenges related to the education of Roma, especially those who live in dispersion and, on the other hand, the lack of awareness that Roma should be integrated into the education system in a flexible and sensitive way. The activists involved in the particular project discussed here (and, as mentioned earlier, this is a joint initiative of open-minded headmasters, teachers who are not afraid to advocate tolerance in a multicultural social environment, members of the Foundation and the municipal and provincial authorities) are conscious of the difficulties involved in their undertaking, but they perceive it as a promising pragmatic solution that has many advantages in the view of the failure of other programs.

As for the authorities, their support can be interpreted as a response to the growing awareness of the lack of flexible social and educational policies in an increasingly multicultural Poznań. Accommodating multicultural challenges is an official responsibility of those authorities. It is thus fair to say that a reciprocal change in the perception of the relationship between local communities and local government does actually take place. These are admittedly only the first steps, but the desire to create alternative scenarios for socially relevant issues is comforting in this so far ethno-culturally homogenous country.

In the next sections we are going to investigate the material gathered during the interviews and we will attempt to point to the main challenges and projected scenarios for the grass-roots education of the Roma minority.

General Impressions from the Fieldwork Experience

The first striking thing in the interviews on the education of Roma – which were conducted among teachers, headmasters, activists, education officers and local educational authorities – is that almost every single interviewee had a great difficulty in defining the phenomena and concepts related to the Roma population. The interlocutors frequently use the word 'Gypsy' (a name which only recently has become officially politically incorrect), rarely correcting themselves afterwards. Education officers have a significant difficulty in talking about a different culture and finding neutral terms when defining it. It gives the impression that the interviewees look for words which would satisfy the interviewer and which would be interpreted as proving their 'correct' attitude towards minority groups. Terms such as 'they', 'stranger', or 'others' often appear in moments of hesitation. At the same time, in many conversations the interviewees make a straightforward statement on tolerance and openness towards others (often in the plural form), for instance: 'Polish people are very tolerant', 'we are open, others should learn from us' [EP]. They assure the interviewer of a high degree of tolerance towards the Roma or members of any other minority. Asked directly, they hardly ever remember experiencing any conflicts or problems with teaching Roma, or with negotiating with other social actors: 'the cooperation has always been very good', is a frequently repeated phrase. When in the course of the conversation any conflict is mentioned, the interlocutors are reluctant to give details.

Main Challenges for Teachers and School Managers

The challenges emerging in the education of Roma can be divided into several major categories. The first includes everything that is associated with cultural difference. It is considered by teachers and administrators to be the main cause of 'problems' in public schools and in the schools mentioned above, i.e. those less formal and granting a greater tolerance towards different behaviours.

The issues related to what one teacher called '*the normal behaviour*', i.e. the presence in class on a regular basis, and the conduct of children whose 'codes' were learned at the beginning of the first grade, seem to be the most often referred obstacles. Teachers frequently cite stories from everyday school life in support of their belief that the Roma must be taught some basic 'good manners', because only then can real education start:

‘One day a student came to class without a pen. I gave him one a few days earlier. He didn’t take it with him and had nothing to write with. Well, this is his problem. I’m trying to teach them that when you get something, you have to take care of it. The **standards** are to be maintained, e.g. that the phone is switched off during the lesson. They need to learn these things’ [KL].

Another teacher is more pointed when he states:

‘These are the **barriers** that can interfere to some degree. This year, a Roma student came to the middle school exam and I asked him politely to take off his jacket, but he refused. However caustic it may seem, one may say that they need to be dressed in order to be safe at the time when they want to flee... Some things are in the cultural system, we cannot change this culture, even if it is not polite to write an exam in a jacket. He didn’t take it off. If I had forced it on him, he would have left the room. His father, who is a little bit more enlightened than others, although he did not finish any school, sent the son to school, because otherwise he would have run away’ [PB].

This passage reveals yet another element of the student – teacher relationship: it is easy to see a *patronising* vocabulary and a pre-established assumption of cultural superiority.

Another teacher pointed to the discomfort established in the class by Romani students using their language, assuming that the domination of one (Polish) *language* is not only correct, but also *undisputed*:

‘When they start talking about something in Romani language, and a Pole stands next to them, he gets confused. We had to demand that it not be done and it doesn’t always work quite so well’ [KL].

From the teachers’ point of view, ‘standards’ and ‘order’ are the key words used in the description of Romani students’ deficits:

‘[The sources of the problem are] mainly the disparities in knowledge and the mastering of certain skills that are necessary in school. They [Roma students] have skills that allow them to function fully in their communities, but they have problems with analysing, synthesising, reading comprehension, etc. We use the method of trial and error here, because we do not have regular textbooks. But pupils are eager. There is also some/a small problem with attendance, their regularity differs from our **standards**’ [KL].

‘I had to teach them how to keep **order**, throwing cigarettes and waste paper into the trash. But after all, I have the same problems with youngsters, they also need to learn it’ [KL].

Another significant obstacle in shaping proper relations between Roma students and the school are the internal *norms of Romani culture* that are the most frequently cited reason for Roma’s maladjustment to the universal educational system.

‘I think that the main problem is that the school interferes with the family model. They marry quickly, take a wife, have kids. One of our pupils, Marek, who finished primary school, already had a wife and a child. And it is disrupting, because when there is a child, you have to take care of it – and they don’t come back to school. This factor is more important than the alleged intolerant acts towards Roma that sometimes happen in schools’ [EN].

This opinion expressed by the school headmaster in Swarzędz who had only one Roma child attending her classes indicates a strong tendency to attribute the problems arising during schooling to the characteristics of *Romani culture*. This type of interpretation of the existing difficulties excludes the examination of other possible factors involved, i.e. those related to the structural determinants of the educational system. The attitude of a large part of the officials and public school employees can be

expressed as follows: ‘the reasons for [the setbacks] must be sought in isolation, in the cultural closure [of the Roma]’ [EN].

Generalisations seem to be the main rationale of the experienced *otherness*:

‘Mainly because we are dealing with a different culture, we need to be very careful not to offend the student, because the Romani culture is not identical with the Polish culture. There are other requirements... these people are very close with their family, whole families come to class, also families with young children. I need to show a great deal of patience’ [MG].

‘I watched this student, Natalia, and I noticed that in the 6th grade history class these cultural differences in education started to appear. They [Roma] look at things differently. For us, some things are important, while this girl was living in a different reality, in the Romani world. She was constantly saying: “our customs this, our tradition that”’ [EN].

Mutual stereotypes

Some teachers openly admit that one of the factors adversely affecting the relations between Poles and the Roma are the *prejudices* transmitted to successive generations in all social strata:

‘I think that the situation in schools would be improved if the stereotype of Roma in the common consciousness was changed for the better. It might not be so visible with children, but ... (...) When **Gypsies** come to the store, everyone holds their wallets and bags close to their body, me too.’ [EN]

One can get the impression that in response the Roma ignore the attempts at disciplining them through the education of their children. Maybe this behaviour can be interpreted as a deliberate sabotage of assimilating them into dominant society, a kind of cultural resistance.

‘This Should Not Be Tolerated, Why?’

The low effectiveness of the education of Roma is, inter alia, attributed to the fact that the institutions represented by both officers and headmasters do not enforce the law of compulsory education. Deputy Director of the one of Secondary Schools, stressed the need of a strict execution of this law:

‘We [Poles], as a society, we do not learn from the mistakes of others. In Slovakia, the state has adopted one good, important rule – there is no mercy, when it comes to the duty of parents to send their children to school, they must comply to the rule. We have this situation in the case of Roma – if you say that they may be absent in some classes or you don’t react to high absence rates, the effect is that Roma children in Poland abandon school and everyone will be is happy with this’ [PB].

A similar view is shared by the employee of the City Department of Education (*Wydział Oświaty Urzędu Miasta*):

‘mandatory education should be imposed. This should not be tolerated, why? [not complying to this duty should be punished]. If I do nothing, I give silent acquiescence’ [EP].

The claims to treat Roma from the common, *dominant civic perspective* are put forward together with opinions that there exist vast differences between ‘them’ and ‘us’, which are also recognised as another reason for Roma’s educational maladjustment. The following statement clearly expresses this perception:

‘They have no religion, only a catalogue of ethnic rules, they have this council that considers all internal matters, they are locked up so much’ [PB].

‘Roma **are not** like this – they come to class and do not treat the school as a place with certain rules and canons: they eat during teaching, talk, walk around like ten-year-olds, they can mobilise themselves [i.e., focus their attention] for 10-15 minutes only’ [PB].

Rigid Rules

One of the distinct topics is also the clear need for changes in the curriculum, and the methods of evaluation and classification of Romani students. Teachers and headmasters share the opinion that it is not possible to achieve results with the current *rigid rules* that define educational success:

‘A 29-year-old Polish woman approached me once, she started her adult life quite early (...) and she hadn’t finished the last semester of the primary school [in the pre-reformed system of 8-grade primary school]. She was working in a company, was a **normal person** living in a **civilised** way. She was interested in starting secondary education. Her request to the Board of Education was rejected, officials informed her of the necessity to finish 6th grade of a primary school, then 3 years of junior high school [gymnasium] and after all that, her secondary education [lyceum] dream could be fulfilled. (...) This system has no gaps, but someone should have the right to decide on a different form of determining the stage of education one is currently at, otherwise we face absurd situations’ [PB].

As mentioned earlier, local education officers have changed their philosophy of dealing with Roma students in the course of time and try to ease the obstacles that are in the way to obtaining the best possible education results by Roma children. ‘In the case of Roma children, the Board tells us to turn a blind eye to the lack of evidence of earlier stages of education’ [EN]. With the officers’ blessing, teachers and headmasters have prepared the ground for greater flexibility in response to the specificity of Romani children's education, which gradually increases the number of pupils completing some level of education. They have used the goodwill of the authorities in an attempt to increase these statistics, and it is a proof that something can be done in this respect.

‘I stick to the rules, but not very stiffly. If in a school for adults Roma... come and present their skills ... if you refine them, work at home. I’m not very strict with the level of absenteeism’ [MG].

Nevertheless, these absenteeism numbers and teaching results are still disappointing and in fact demonstrate a partial failure of the education system²⁰.

Implicit Motives

Apart from all these culturally-based dimensions invoked by the interviewees, in order to describe their encounter with another culture we have to mention one more issue, the one reappearing in many conversations and hovering over all the attempts to create a new quality of education.

From time to time, teachers and headmasters mention the financial aspect of the Foundation’s educational initiative, namely the fact that the Foundation encourages Roma in their educational efforts in a rather unconventional way – by granting them scholarship for each day spent at school. One of the teachers clearly states that Roma adults attend the evening school only because of the financial benefits:

‘Their attitude towards the Foundation is fully demanding. It is not a secret that the Foundation must “wheel-and-deal” to encourage them to go to school. In the Primary School for Adults, most people know that this is a purely financial incentive. Of course, the

²⁰ Assuming that more than 100 Roma families reside in Poznań [AM], which amounts to at least 400-500 people, the fact that the Board of Education database consists of 38 students enrolled in public primary schools [JCH] and the number of students in secondary schools run by the ‘Bahtale Roma’ Foundation is between 20 to 30 [PB], is a rather unsatisfactory outcome of the efforts described within the framework of this report.

Foundation may have problems with that, but the question is whether the officials understand this complex interrelationship' [PB].

The Foundation's president states openly:

'And we help those who attend our school. We apply for scholarships, 50 PLN per person per one day spent in school, and it allows the family to deal with schooling for a day. So there must be some material support, without it the Roma will not manage'[AM].

She emphasises it quite distinctly: 'Financial support is extremely important. As long as it does not exist... the schooling will not be effective' [AM].

If we consider not only these strongly voiced opinions of some officials concerning the Roma attitude toward financial support for schooling, but also their demands in other areas, i.e. claims concerning the method of teaching and assessment of Romani children in public schools [JCH], it appears that the education of Roma is a multi-faceted issue. Whereas different social forces are intermingling here, it still remains without a plan for the future.

Conclusions

The above-presented case of a grassroots organisation promoting education of Roma in schools raises a few questions. First, it seems that, what regards the education of Roma, there is a certain level of bureaucratic schizophrenia among both local and central authorities. On the one hand, the authorities support the Roma minority (when financing educational programs and their evaluation), but on the other, there are limited results of governmental initiatives. Could it be the lack of will that causes the long-lasting neglect in the field of the education of the Roma? There is no decisive activity directed at creating a well-functioning alternative to the current practices. And the authorities seem to believe it is the minorities' duty to match the majority culture. Roma have to know their responsibilities if they want to live in peace. Some efforts are made not to provoke accusations of intolerance and discrimination in the education system, but there is no really programme designed to change the inefficient education system. It seems that grass-root initiatives, similar to the one of the Bahtale Roma Foundation, are most promising, since they take into account local context and needs.

Looking at the issue of Roma education from the perspective of the three-fold concept of Accept (Tolerance – Acceptance – Respect), those responsible for education make a good use of the concept of tolerance, but they would not use it to meet the others' needs. The universal state education requirements apply to everyone; this is the only message which the officials seem to send to the representatives of the Roma community. The officials clearly hinted that they see no other possibility of cooperation than the enforcement of universally applicable rules to all children, regardless of their origin or nationality. This is usually followed by a statement that changing these rules occasionally may happen only by good will of particular officials and teachers, and that this should not actually take place at all. These strategies of coping with 'the Roma problem' are accompanied by vigorous declarations of tolerance as a 'natural' feature of every Pole, especially of teachers. Therefore, it is not the question whether acceptance or respect is the next level. Officials believe that it is not their duty to pay respect to Roma's culture and practices, but the Roma who should accept the reality of the education system in Poland and respect the majority's assumptions.

Oddly enough, the fact that Roma are usually Roman-Catholics speaks in their favour from the perspective of civil servants and teachers. It gives officials hope that Roma will eventually 'civilise'! The ideal is the assimilation model rather than striving for mutual respect for differences. This is consistent with the interviewees' conviction that only 'Polishness' legitimates and determinates the rules, and that it defines the so-called normality. The model of a national culture reinforces the desire for homogenization.

As for the group of activists, i.e. the people devoted to real improvement in the educational situation of the Roma in Poznań, there is a remarkable similarity of discourses used to legitimise the activities in

favour of the Roma community. They also use arguments about the necessity to civilise them and to impose or restore normalcy, teaching them a proper range of reactions and behaviours. One can say that this group aims at the acceptance of diversity rather than merely tolerating it. It also has more experience in direct contact with the members of the Roma community. They are therefore more likely to express their awareness of the need to change the general attitude towards the Roma and sometimes even support their right to remain culturally distinct. However, the tone which prevails in the analysed discourse is patronising. No argument for respecting the cultural difference of Roma appears in the state-based educational process. Even the activists running the Romani organisation would rather improve better use of the existing system than introduce new rules of the dialogue between the majority society and the Roma. The initiatives presented in this part of the report which are aimed at creating and supporting public schools co-managed by the Roma, can cause a return to the tradition of segregation. Having an alternative school as recommended by the elders, Roma pupils and students will not be interested in the inclusion into mainstream education.

There is improvement in the education of Roma children, and there is a need of good will from the Romani activists and community elders, as well as city officials and ordinary teachers. It also requires the educational institutions' employees and school headmasters to develop local strategies for coping with high school absenteeism of the Roma children, as well as to prevent the wasting of funds and implementation of ineffective or inefficient plans and programs. The key issue seems to be the cooperation on the level of municipal institutions and policy makers, as well as among volunteers and NGO activists, for the preparation, implementation and evolution of the most effective solutions and new ideas of local education professionals.

7. Cross and Religion: the Polish School in Need of Religious Tolerance?

Introduction

The second case study chosen to illustrate the discourses on tolerance in the Polish school system relates to the issues of ethics and the presence of crucifixes in the classrooms.

We have decided to combine these two cases because separately they do not cover all the aspects we would like to refer to in our discussions on the cultural diversity in schools. Juxtaposing these discourses should give a better understanding of the debate on the possible oppositions to the existing ideological and cultural hegemony of the Roman-Catholic Church in the Polish public sphere. At the same time, it is a good starting point for the discussion on the relationship between state and religion, and the ways it affects the education system.

Classes in ethics and crosses in classrooms are relatively new concerns of the public debate. They are related to the invisible hegemony of the Roman-Catholic-based worldview and the strong influence that the Church has had on the state politics after 1989 (as well as the Church's role in Polish history, especially in the previous communist decades) [cf. Weigel 1992]. Research and scholarly publications on how the Church influences the mainstream discourses in Poland are still relatively few, and information on the calls for ideological pluralism appear occasionally and are considered rather bizarre excesses (e.g., the ones in schools are ascribed to rebellious young people²¹).

Originally, we planned to describe the conflict around the possibilities of classes in ethics in Ostrów Wielkopolski, a city in southern Wielkopolska, as it was one of the most widely commented events regarding pluralism in public schools. Unfortunately, it turned out to have little impact on the debate,

²¹ One of the teachers cited the following story: 'After the appeal of the European Court regarding the case of crosses in Italy, TV reporters were travelling to schools, looking for various freaks. The TVN television station's evening news announced that even the atheist teacher is a supporter of crucifixes. My own statement had been completely changed and used improperly' [KM].

despite the fact that the case was brought to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg.

The detailed stand taken by the Provincial Board of Education on this matter will be presented later, but it should be mentioned that this case was perceived by the local educational authorities as a local conflict between the parents and the school's headmaster. In result, no conclusions had been drawn from the decision of the ECHR. Poland did not lodge a complaint appeal when the final verdict was rendered. The whole affair, from the first intervention of the parents in the Board of Education till the final verdict, took over 8 years²². Czesław Grzelak, an entrepreneur from Wielkopolska and declared agnostic, together with his wife decided to fight for their son's right to participate in ethics lessons. The parents had been sending letters to all sorts of offices and councils, including the National Ministry of Education (MEN) and the Ombudsman, but they had been constantly dismissed. Finally, with the assistance of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, they reached the ECH. As a result, their son Mateusz did not participate neither in ethics nor in religion classes until he completed secondary school.

The parents won the trial, however they had not received the demanded compensation of 150 thousand zlotys (see: Sentence of the ECHR on Grzelak vs. Poland [ethics at school]²³) and the matter died out very quickly. This was the prime reason why we have decided to connect the issues of ethics with the contestation of religious symbols in order to sketch a more detailed picture of the diversity/pluralism debate in Polish schools.

A spokesperson for the Provincial Board of Education stated that:

‘According to the government, (...) Mateusz often provoked his colleagues by mocking religious symbols and students participating in religion classes. The class teacher informed parents about the behaviour of their son, but they did not react.’

This is the whole course of events, given in detail.

‘The headmaster of the school contacted the Department of Education in Poznań in order to verify the possibility of organizing such an inter-group class. Because this was impossible due to the low number of interested students and parents, the school suggested that he do some other things in the common room or library’ [ES].

In her view, the family did not act entirely fairly towards the teachers and the headmaster of the school. But the official stand is that anyone can investigate their claims concerning educational rights before the court, including Strasbourg.

‘The parents used their right to protest, the case came to light and the sentence made it clear to many school headmasters as well as leading authorities that such an obligation exists. Local authorities have to find a teacher and spend money and this is now strongly emphasised’ [ES].

When asked for a diagnosis of such problems, the spokeswoman pointed to the structural changes in Polish schools as a major source of conflict and as information which is sensational to the press.

‘Problems like this one used to be solved within a multistage structure – starting from the teacher, then the headmaster, then external inspector. Now, there is no such supervision and therefore, those parents who cannot reach an agreement with the teacher make a complaint directly to the Board's inspector. Most parents simultaneously also write to members of local

²² GW 2010-06-15 [Strasbourg: Polska dyskryminuje uczniów, którzy nie chcą chodzić na religię http://wyborcza.pl/1,75478,8015624,Strasbourg__Polska_dyskryminuje_uczniow__ktorzy_nie.html]

²³ For a short summary of the sentence see: <http://www.non-discrimination.net/content/media/PL-14-ECHR%20judgment%20Grzelak%20v.%20Poland.pdf>

government and to the local press. This is a typical attempt to resolve conflicts that can be found in the contemporary Polish school' [ES].

The question of ethics classes, their organization, scope of the curriculum and their incidence in Poland is another example of the existing discrepancies between the official stance of the education authorities (local Boards of Education, Ministry of Education and Municipal Departments of Education) and the discriminatory practices in schools. However, the primary case in our study is the introduction of religion as a subject taught in primary schools after the political transition of 1989.

Religion in Public Schools

The introduction of religious classes into schools was carried out in 1990 as the result of an agreement between the newly re-established democratic state represented by the Minister of Education and the representatives of the ecclesiastical authorities [KM]. Some commentators draw attention to the pressure exerted on the government by the Roman-Catholic Church, resulting from the clergy's desire to immediately restore the state of art from before 1961 (see footnote 11) (in this respect)? and to make religion a part of official life and education. Thus, religion was officially assigned a special cultural meaning and social importance. The government reluctantly agreed to the request and schools opened to religion classes under the instructions of the Minister of National Education of 30 VIII 1990.

Many people questioned both the fact of reintroducing religion and the way it was done, and they kept trying to prove that the move was illegal. However, in 1991 the Constitutional Court dismissed the Ombudsman's – Ewa Łętowska's, complaint and ruled that the law had not been violated. Interestingly, no contradictions with the regulations concerning the functioning of education at that time were found, although, the 'Law on the development of the education system' from 1961 was still in force. Religious teaching defenders also managed to prove that these classes were not introduced to the school as an institution, but only to school buildings.

On 14th April 1992, Minister of National Education issued a regulation on the conditions and manner of teaching religion in public schools and kindergartens. The next Ombudsman found that this regulation also violated many democratic rules, in particular the constitutional principle of the secular character of the state, however, a complaint to the Constitutional Court was also dismissed. Religious education in schools was finally authorised by the new Polish Constitution adopted on 2nd April 1997²⁴. Article 53 § 4 states that 'the religion of a church or religious association with regulated legal status can be taught in schools, but the freedom of conscience and the religion of others shall not be infringed'²⁵.

In the case of minors, the decision about attending religious classes is taken by their parents, and after reaching 18 years of age, it lies with the students themselves. Formally, the submission of a declaration of attendance is required to attend these classes. In fact, schools very often enforce the practice of negative statement, which is required of students who do not want to attend these lessons. Regulations specify that the statement can be expressed in the simplest form and does not need to be renewed in subsequent years, but may be changed. Therefore, there are no obstacles to changing the declaration during the school year or after becoming a major²⁶.

During the course of religion or ethics classes, the school has the duty to provide care and educational activities for students who do not attend any of the courses, which is also a possibility that is becoming

²⁴ *Dziennik Ustaw*, 16th July 1997, No. 78 pos. 483.

²⁵ At first glance, it seems that the word 'can' leaves an open space for a final decision with respect to the presence of religion in schools. However, according to constitutionalists, this interpretation is incorrect, and the cited part should be understood as describing the non-obligatory nature of the subject. This makes the withdrawal of religion from schools possible only if the constitution is respectively amended.

²⁶The interviews indicate that resignation from religious classes after receiving the sacrament of Confirmation is a common practice among growing numbers of students. The sacrament is a prerequisite for receiving a church wedding in the future [AS].

an increasingly popular alternative. Usually the duty is fulfilled by an obligation to spend this time in the library or it is not implemented at all, so usually students are allowed to do what they want, which is an illegal practice.

The school should organise courses in ethics if no less than 7 students declare their willingness to participate in them. If this requirement is not met, courses should be organised for inter-class or inter-school groups. The rules for the submission of statements of attendance in it are the same as in the case of religion. Interestingly enough, religious classes are held as mandatory 2 teaching hours per week, while the number of teaching hours of ethics classes can be limited to one by the headmaster's decision:

'We have 4 students willing to attend ethics classes, and it is the average in every school. I think they start about 7.10 early in the morning, one and a half hours a week. This was the only time satisfactory for everyone, it's their decision' [AG].

Apart from the inconveniences concerning time and place, there can be different reasons for the students' lack of interest in religion/ethics lessons:

'I think that it [resignation from both religion and ethics] results from calculations of time economy. They have so many classes every day and lots of *extracurricular activities*. And some do not attend religious teaching because it gives them an extra free hour. Religion class was meant to be at the beginning or end of the school day, but it is rarely the case. (...) There is no pressure exerted by parents, because very few parents are convinced of *the usefulness and validity of ethics lessons* for their kids' [AG].

The Provincial Board's employee states very clearly that there are numerous ambiguities surrounding the organization of ethics classes:

'As for the Ostrów Wielkopolski case, if there was an alleged lack of ethics classes, than it is the city council's responsibility. The regulations regarding the organization of classes on religion and ethics are so framed that in order to organise such a group, at least 7 participants are required. And there is also a demand that **parents must submit a written document**, so that the school could organise these classes. It is, so to speak, an exploitation of parents' ignorance. If parents do not know that they have to write an application, the class will not be organised. The school must be officially approached. If you have a larger group at a given school, such activities should be organised. If there are not many children wanting to participate or if parents are successfully discouraged to write an application, it solves the problem from the point of the view of the school' [JCH].

'Some kind of interschool groups [for ethics lessons] were planned, but I do not know how they functioned. The problem is of organizational nature: location, hours of instruction, distance. I suspect that some *parents refrain from attempts to organise ethics classes for their children* for this reason' [JCH].

From one of the high school's²⁷ teacher's perspective, the matter is not controversial, it rather indicates a lack of interest in additional classes shown by students:

'85% of our students attend religious classes. We have offered them the possibility of participating in such activities [classes in ethics], but no one came forward. The student has a choice: either religion or ethics, or nothing at all. And some students benefit from this choice. We have had here 3 students of other faiths, but they had religious instruction in their churches. However, this is certainly a problem that asks for an effective solution. I cannot tell you why no one reports the willingness to attend classes in ethics. Parents were informed. We

²⁷ This high school in Poznań, of which KL is headmaster, is considered to have a Catholic spirit, but it is also quite 'progressive'. Young people have the opportunity to study in classes with a multicultural profile, but at the same time the school organises marches to commemorate events of strongly patriotic and religious character.

are open to the organization of such activities. Of course, depending on the number of students, it would have adequate form. But the fact is that more and more students resign from lessons in religion' [KL].

This interviewee made a critical reference to the introduction of religion into schools, which indicates growing attempts to reconsider the sense of this culturally 'obvious' rule prevailing in schooling:

'When religion was introduced to schools, it became one of the elements of the curriculum and it had lost its uniqueness. In the catechetical room [separate rooms in the parish for teaching religion], it could have not been appreciated, but it was embedded in a local social environment. And I see that an increasing number of students is discouraged from attending religious classes: they don't resign but rather they do not sign in in the first place. Youngsters are more aware of their right of not doing it' [KL].

The difficulties related to the organisation of classes in ethics incited attempts to develop a new perspective on the issue, but they lasted very shortly:

'One MP proposed that ethics courses could be taught via the Internet (e-learning), but it also raised various opinions. The defenders of the equality in educational opportunities claim that if we want to teach ethics by e-learning, the same should apply to religious lessons. Only then everyone would be equal' [ES].

On the final certificate, grades from religion or ethics (or information of non-participation in any of these classes, the so called dash) appear next to the mark on 'assessment of conduct'. The grades applied are the same as those in all other subjects. The regulation prohibits making public any information specifying the denomination. However, when it appears on the school certificate in Poland (perhaps with the exception of small areas in the east of the country where classes taught by Orthodox teachers/priests are also held), one can be sure that it is a grade in the Roman-Catholic education. It has to be said that marks in religion and ethics classes do not influence the student's promotion to the next grade. The situation gets more complicated when it comes to counting averages in teaching results. The law does not regulate this matter, but an amendment issued by the Minister of National Education²⁸ regarding the rules of issuing certificates, diplomas and other school related documents, provides that religion is not a compulsory subject and should not affect the average ratings of a student. However, this rule has recently been changed – and nowadays, if a student is given a score lower than 'five'²⁹, it is often associated with her/his resignation from those classes:

'Lessons in religious education are **assessed** and **count** in the calculation of average ratings. Grades [in religion classes] are rarely lower than a 5. I personally fight for a 6 because it looks cute. Our evaluation looks like this: we have an exercise book with generally nothing in it. It's a paranoia, we are almost adults and our assessment depends on an empty exercise book and a crossword puzzle' [AS].

On the one hand, the European Court of Human Rights confirmed that children *have the right* to attend classes in ethics. At the same time, statistics and common experience show that neither children nor parents are really interested in them. On the other hand, the Court's decision has not changed much in the approach of various authorities to the structure of the organization of these classes and did not result in a wider debate on the problem. A similar remark applies both to the issue of teaching religion in schools and to the presence of religious symbols in schools' (public) premises.

'I think that the matter of classes in ethics has been resolved. We haven't had any reports showing that there is a problem. But recently, there has been a wave of press articles regarding the 'cross in the school'. And it is rather a question of the relationship between students, the

²⁸ *Dziennik Ustaw*, 31st January 2000, No. 6, pos. 73.

²⁹ In the Polish system grades are ordered from lowest to highest, i.e. 1 is failure, while 5 is very good. Exceptionally excellent (6) can be issued.

headmaster, and the Student Council. There are two possibilities, and one of them is to have separate classrooms for religious teaching with a cross in it. But in many schools there is no special room for this. If students report any concerns or problems, some innovative solution would be recommended. I know that in some schools a priest would bring the cross with him to the room where religious class was held' [ES].

Crosses/Religious Symbols in Schools

The educational regulations allow for placing crosses in classrooms. Symbols of other than Christian religions are never mentioned in them. The law also permits the recitation of prayers before and after school, which 'should be an expression of the common aspirations of students as well as the tact of teachers and educators'³⁰. To a large extent, a new impulse for the discussion on the presence of religious symbols in public spaces was given by the verdict on the 'Lautsi vs. Italy' case, which precisely addressed the issue of the presence of crosses in public schools:

'The problem is so complex because the cross hanging in a school is a sign that supports the Catholic³¹ religion, but at the same time the lack of a cross may be interpreted as a sign of an atheistic school. Thus, a lack of a cross can also be a sign. This argument was used by an American lawyer, an orthodox Jew Joseph Weiler, who defended the Italian government in the Lautsi vs. Italy trial, the legal case concerning crosses in Italian schools. He argued that the absence of a sign is not neutral. But how to neutralise space then? By hanging all possible emblems and signs? **I think that Poland does not have this problem.** What happened in Italy was problematic, because there is a statement by the minister that **ordered** hanging crucifixes'[RW].

Besides this international incentive, a local stimulus also occurred. The interviewee refers to the events induced by the catastrophe of the presidential plane which took place in April 2010 in Smolensk, Russia. This tragedy ensued unexpectedly in the so-called 'war over the cross', and actually increased the negative attitude of the majority of citizens towards close ties between the State and the Catholic Church in Poland:

'In my opinion, the issue of the cross on Krakowskie Przedmieście³² was a breakthrough, it was really something. **It had a very big impact**, and people who had been **hesitating, decided to abandon classes in religion** afterwards.' [KL]

The cultural significance of the cross as a symbol of the struggle with the communist regime is a factor that cannot be underestimated (cf. Mach 1993; Kubik 1994), also when one discusses education. In the first decade after the political transition it was a widely accepted part of the public space. More contemporary debates, however, highlighted the need to discuss the cultural basis of certain attitudes and to redefine them:

'In contemporary Poland this message [a cross in the public space] is not necessarily only religious, it also has another sense, as it was a symbol of the struggle against communism. Twenty years ago, the attempts to restore the presence of these symbols for many people were

³⁰ It should be emphasised that the student cannot be forced to recite it which is guaranteed by the Constitution (Article 53 § 6).

³¹ In speech practice 'Catholic' in Poland by default means 'Roman-Catholic' Church or denomination. In the citation given, we follow this practice.

³² There is no room for a detailed description of the case of the cross in front of the Presidential Palace in Warsaw. The statement 'cross from Krakowskie Przedmieście' refers to several months of demonstrations and conflicts between the supporters and opponents of placing a cross commemorating the plane crash victims in which the President and several other top state functionaries died.. In public debates, these events have been raised to the rank of an open war between orthodox Roman-Catholics and a more-secular minded part of the society.. The whole 'battle' triggered a debate on the position of the Roman-Catholic Church in Poland. For an anthropological interpretation of the event see: Murawski 2011.

a declaration of freedom. We want the cross, we want to have it, as once we were not allowed to. So our Polish experience also has this dimension' [RW].

Without a doubt, the matter of crosses in school classrooms raises more intense emotions than classes in ethics. In response to the events in other European countries, high school students of senior classes in larger cities (such as Warszawa, Kraków, Poznań, Wrocław) tried to provoke a debate on the meaning of a traditional worldview in their schools. It resulted mainly in bits and pieces of information in the evening news. However, these events stirred quite heated discussions on religious tolerance and state – Church relations, especially in the Polish school. As one of the interviewed teachers stated:

'When Gypsies are considered, the dividing line between 'us' and 'them' is very clear. The problem of religion is more complex. On the one hand, we [Poles] **see ourselves as tolerant**, but we also see ourselves as 100% Catholics, and when those who are not Catholics want to remove the cross, an outcry arises. Before it gets to the management [headmaster], the initiators of such actions are already restrained by their colleagues. And it all happens in schools like ours [considered to be one of the best high schools in Poznan]' [AG].

'After the students' attempts to remove the cross from the classrooms in Warsaw, or perhaps in Kraków, our students wanted to check the reaction in our school, and they made a fuss. The students council suppressed their initiative, probably with the help of the headmaster. The activists 'burned their fingers' and stopped fighting' [AG].

Long before the public debate on the cross, a history teacher in one of the high schools in Poznań decided to take off the cross from the wall in his classroom, because he wanted to be an advocate of a secular education. At the end, he failed to do so – the headmaster asked him to make a compromise with her and to stop the expected protests. He recounts:

'Then the **headmaster said**: but you know, the press will go crazy if you remove the cross, **you know how it is**. She proposed a solution, to which I agreed, sort of a compromise, although I think it was too far-reaching, but let's say that a compromise solution was adopted – various religious symbols were to be hung in my classroom. One of them was the Catholic cross, plain, without anything, the one used in the Protestant world, and the typical Orthodox cross with additional beams. And they **all hang side by side**.' [KM]

'It ended with the headmaster's decision; according to the rules she has the right to decide whether the cross stays in the school or not. We [teachers-activists] learned that it is all up to the management of the school. The headmaster always has the final word. And at our school these matters [crosses on walls] are not discussed. It ended with hanging three crosses on the wall: Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant. When TV-reporters come to school, this is the room which is shown to them. Who would think of such an outcome? It is a symbol of the impossibility of change, definitely not a symbol of tolerance' [AG].

Conclusions

The case of classes in ethics is a complex issue. On the one hand, we are dealing with a very small number of students who attend or would like to attend these classes country-wide. This makes this subject marginal in a 'statistical sense'. On the other hand, it is precisely this small number of students participating in these lessons that makes this problem significant from the standpoint of the rudiments of universal education. In any case, the public debates reiterating from time to time on this topic show that the problem remains both burning and unresolved.

The situation in which most students attend classes in religion, as school statistics clearly show, somehow supports the attitude of those who consider it 'obvious' in an almost religiously homogenous society. However, a closer analysis of the rules and realities of conducting religious education allows for different interpretations. It can be argued that religion taught in schools is a relic of the first years

following 1989, when the Roman-Catholic Church's position was justified by a broad social agreement. Within several years, the public opinion changed significantly, but this has not resulted in changes in the system of public education. Religious education takes place in public (and religious) schools. Simultaneously, in most cases the possibility to attend classes in ethics is fictitious. Critics of the idea of teaching ethics treat the efforts to secure such an option for students as unnecessary. From time to time, policymakers try to mend the problem; in some cases they say, it would make sense to commend the teaching of ethics to priests or religious teachers. It would be a cheap and simple solution that would nevertheless settle anxieties. Teaching ethics even in this way might serve as a token of the place supposedly accorded to liberal and pluralist ideas in Polish culture.

One of the informants [KM] told us a small but meaningful anecdote. He has a habit of showing his students a film about an Islamic school in one of the villages in north-east Poland which is inhabited by Polish Tatars. The documentary is presented within a framework of a series of classes about Islam in the history course. The documentary displays traditions cultivated by Tatars and also shows pictures shot during religious classes held on the weekends. He said that it always shocks him that no single student pays attention to the fact that there is a cross hanging on the wall in a classroom full of children learning Islam (classes are held in a local school building). It seems quite telling and it demonstrates what ideological and religious pluralism in Polish public schools looks like in practice. There may be various interpretations of this indifference or lack of perception. First, both majority and minority students take it for granted that crosses hang in public schools in Poland. Second, and related to the first, is that this cross is simply transparent and does not bother Muslim teachers and students in the class. Third, being aware of the sensitivity of the problem, Muslim teachers are afraid of raising the controversy by putting down the cross and are 'happy' that they can carry out their own education in a public school.

The presence of crucifixes in public schools, which for most people is transparent due to the conviction of a homogeneous ethno-religious composition of Poland, was not in fact discussed long after the political turn of 1989. Social changes, combined with the legislative recommendations of the European Union resulted in discussions on the presence of the Roman-Catholic Church in public life and of Christian symbols in public space. Several claims for re-secularization have been made. This is a complex debate between a rather small group of conscious citizens supporting the lay character of the state who try to convince religious authorities and religious 'fundamentalists', and who are supported implicitly by the silent majority and grassroots who simply 'do not care'. The students' dispassionate attitude towards religious education and crosses on walls in their school buildings mirrors to a certain extent the character of Polish ritualistic religiosity that is habitually practiced and embedded in national tradition. For those who support the current state of the art, the hegemonic status of Roman-Catholicism fully justifies its obvious presence in public education and space. Opponents are unable to make significant changes, because the attempts to implement the ideals of liberal tolerance and the actual pluralism of views and practices are discarded on the basis of this very ethno-religious domination and arguments that 'we' have to defend our right to entertain freedom of religious practices and cannot allow to be terrorised by the minority. In more radical cases, fundamentalists claim that the supporters of exaggerated tolerance endanger the nations integrity.

Nobody really asks students about their actual needs and what they want. Even the parents that are critical of the existing status quo, for the sake of peace and tranquility, do not contest it and do not strive for the implementation of more liberal principles. In result, this kind of deadlock persists and it is only occasionally interrupted by some events that attract media attention and stir some debate on the place of religion in European countries (like the Lautsi vs. Italy case or the Grzelaks suiting Poland in the European Court in Strasbourg).

From the perspective offered by the three-fold concept accepted in the Accept Pluralism project (let us remind it: Tolerance – Acceptance – Respect), the conclusions have to be different than in the case of Roma education presented above. It is noticeable that the problem of religious education and religious symbols has been so far raised only with respect to students at the level of Lyceum (senior high

school), and very rarely at the level of Gymnasium (junior high school). A question of tolerance, acceptance, or respect for worldviews other than the dominant one at the secondary level of education, seems to prove that for the majority, the problem either does not exist, or this domination is recognised as a 'natural' part of life. However, individual cases, such as the Grzelak one, had some influence on the education system as a whole. Several school principals/headmasters realised that there are parents that insist that their rights which are guaranteed by the law have to be respected. Still, in general, Polish schools practice an unspoken intolerance towards those who reject the perpetuation of the established and 'obvious' order. Only after the sentence had been passed in the Grzelak vs. Poland case, schools started to show a more tolerant attitude towards parents opposing the obviousness of the religious education and in some cases, have made some efforts to create options alternative to religious classes/create alternatives to religious classes. Minimal tolerance or so called gritted teeth tolerance has been achieved. Nevertheless, most persons responsible for education rarely show acceptance or respect for this kind of demands and various individuals still find it difficult to fulfil their desire to attend classes in ethics.

As for the crucifixes in classrooms, general intolerance towards those demanding their removal prevails. Opponents of the status quo define their appeals as a fight for the neutrality of public space and the secular character of the state. (Of course, one – following Joseph Weiler – can consider a blank wall in the classroom, in which a cross has hung for decades, a denial of neutrality.) However, in this reality neither acceptance nor respect for the active supporters of religious neutrality in public spaces granted in the constitution, is exercised; we would even say that in many cases, intolerance towards such demands is openly shown.

From another perspective, there seems to be no good solution to the impasse with regard to securing classes on ethics and the presence of crucifixes and other religious symbols in schools. A viable negotiation process should start with a debate between the Educational Boards and other officials, priests, teachers, parents and students, on the need for religion and ethics classes in schools, their form, content and status in the whole curriculum, as well as on the presence of religious symbols in the school premises. The next step in changing the situation in favour of more tolerant and pluralistic practices would be to work out a consensus on the expectations of all actors involved in the organization of these classes, both educators and recipients, and the way these agreed points could be implemented. A creation of space for such a debate held in a mutually tolerant and respectful atmosphere would be the first and necessary step towards the acceptance of pluralism in schools in Poland. Unfortunately, at this point in time this optimistic scenario seems rather unfeasible. In some schools such steps have been undertaken, but the meetings often ended up in verbal attacks on the initiators of these "iconoclastic" discussions.

8. Concluding Remarks

The two case studies have been selected in order to shed light on the issue of tolerance and multiculturalism in Polish schools. Teaching Roma, particularly Roma children, as well as the issue of classes in ethics as an alternative to classes in religion, and the legitimacy of the presence of religious symbols at schools, from time to time spur public debates, which help to understand the attitude of educators to ethno-cultural and worldview pluralism.

The application of the Three-Fold Concept of tolerance to the material gathered allows the following interpretation: *the model of minimal tolerance prevails*. It is based in the myth of the Polish inherent and historically grounded tolerance.[?] The cultural differences of other groups are recognised, but at the same time they are tolerated merely to a token degree – they can be practised at home and celebrated during festivities (a phenomenon that we call 'a tolerance for folkloristic pluralism' – see Polish report in WP1). There is no room for integrating the minorities' cultural practices or views nor for the implementation of all educational rights in public life. In this respect, Polish practices fall short of the norms as they are defined in plural and liberal states. According to schoolteachers and school

authorities, educational policy ought to be unified, and the integral cultural core values should be conveyed to all students irrespectively of their ethnic and cultural background. This situation appears as 'obvious', inherent, taken for granted, and not subject to special considerations. Many interlocutors are 'culturally blind' to the issues of pluralism and tolerance and unaware of the ways they are conceptualised in other 'western democracies'. Instinctively, the majority of Polish educators support and eagerly implement an *assimilationist* policy. A similarly 'totalising' attitude is traceable in stances taken toward worldview tolerance: the *supremacy* of the dominant Roman-Catholicism and of Christian symbols is accepted and disputed only by few. Since Christianity is a tradition shared by nearly all, so to say statistically justified, religious teaching can or even should be held at school.

In the case of schooling for the Roma minority, both officials and teachers support the model of *a unified education*. It is legitimised by the 'civilizational mission', in this case modelled on the 19th century intelligentsia's attempt to civilise the masses of unenlightened peasants in a partitioned country. The possibility of adjusting school curricula to the Roma peoples' culture or expectations is not mentioned at all. Including some knowledge about their culture in these curricula, or making allusions that their cultural values or lifestyle are worth popularising, is a completely alien idea. Roma's cultural features and habits are treated as an obstacle in the way to a successful education. The thought that Romani culture contains valuable elements, or has enriching potential for existing norms is inconceivable. Roma are distinct and distant, which implies a notion of cultural racism. No partnership can be seen in the writing and publishing of special textbooks for Roma, and little partnership can be seen in the reforming of existing curricula to make them square to Roma's cultural images and needs. They should simply assimilate to the dominant culture (*Leitkultur*), which is *normal* and obvious. Roma's failures are caused by their cultural habits, which shows that cultural determinism is a popular view among educators. The most successful programs are developed at the local level by young volunteers, advocates of tolerance, and those vividly interested in Romani culture. As the case in Swarzędz shows, getting financial support for local undertakings is not the main problem³³. The persisting stereotypes about Roma and the images of a unified educational policy in a dominantly Polish state are the main obstacles.

Therefore, there is no acceptance for the Roma cultural distinction in the Polish educational system. The Bahtale Roma Foundation's efforts to increase Roma children's (and adults') participation in education are partly successful, but again, they can also lead to the ghettoization of children. The Foundation's schools, though officially open to all interested – and financed from public funds – in practice attract Roma students. In this way, a segregation of children actually takes place. One of our interviewees has paid attention to this problem, and warned against the further expansion of this kind of an educational model: 'in the end we'll face the situation when they won't come to normal schools' [EP], especially that they meet mostly their kin in the Foundation's schools; one should also not forget that the financial gratification for attendance involved can obscure the educational drive of students. One has to admit that the functioning of this school is a result of the cooperation between the major stakeholders, i.e. bureaucrats, teachers, headmasters and Roma activists (although not all take part in it and the Roma organisation in Swarzędz is against the Bahtale Roma initiative³⁴), and represents a novelty in the field of multiculturalism, but it is hard to call them spectacular; between fifty to a hundred students attend the Foundation's schools at all levels of education. Its educational assumptions and methods do not diverge significantly from the existing standards. One can

³³ As president the Bahtale Roma Foundation, Anna Markowska admits that funds devoted to the education and other social and cultural purposes of Roma are considerably high, especially that there are not that many Roma in Poland. The main shortcoming in the field of education is the lack of a coherent strategy that would take into consideration the local demographic patterns and economic possibilities.

³⁴ As mentioned, the many attempts to interview the Roma Association in Wielkopolska were unsuccessful. This organisation criticises the Bahtale Roma initiative, which is based in Poznań, for facilitating segregation.

summarise the whole issue by saying that the education of Roma in Poland is caught between a Scylla of ineffectiveness and a Charybdis of segregation. The ideas implemented in Swarzędz represent a move in a good direction, but do not assure full success.

The case of classes in ethics and the presence of religious symbols in public schools funded by a nominally secular state illustrates the intricate relations between the Roman-Catholic Church and the Polish State. It hardly fits the Tolerance – Acceptance – Respect model. The case rather shows a reversal of this model, i.e. a common intolerance towards those few who voice their protest against the violation of the principle of secularism in public life. Most teachers and educational authorities perceive them as provocateurs who disturb the existing consensus. The latter is justified by a hegemonic cultural order in which the domination of Catholicism is presumed. This popularity of religion among the population is rarely disputed and also justifies the lack of real interest in organising classes in ethics, which are an equivalent for religious classes. The major group of actors in the education system, i.e. pupils, represent a similar attitude – they show disinterest and simply accept the status quo.

All in all, one can say that the Polish school is merely tolerant to cultural distinctiveness and intolerant toward persons questioning the domination of Catholicism and its right to occupy an assumedly secular public space.

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Annex I

List of interviewees (in alphabetic order) [All interviews were recorded and transcribed in Polish.]

1. [AG] – female, history and knowledge of society teacher in a ‘good’ high school in, feminist activist, declared atheist [27 April 2011]
2. [AM] – female, chair of ‘Bahtale Roma’ foundation, NGO activist working on the improvement of life conditions for the Roma community in Poznań; education is one of her areas of expertise; she is the leader of the team coordinating actions concentrated on improving the education of Roma described in this report [4 March 2011]
3. [AP] – female, headmaster of Kindergarten no. 186 in Poznań, first pre-school institution in Poland offering a special group for foreigners’ and migrants’ children – the so called ‘multicultural group’ (the program closed after a year) [5 April 2011]
4. [AS] – female, high school student, interested in politics, attending both religion and ethics classes due to personal interest [5 May 2011]
5. [AT] – female, Primary Years Program Coordinator in the International School of Poznań, one of the two schools in Poznań teaching in English? Where English is the language of instruction [26 February 2011]
6. [EN] – female, headmaster of Primary School no.1 in Swarzędz, interested in the multicultural history of the town, used to teach 3 Roma pupils [13 April 2011]

7. [EP] – female, employee in the Department of Education in the Municipality of Poznań, responsible for kindergartens and solving difficult problems in the department; she coordinated the multicultural group in Kindergarten no. 186 [17 March 2011]
8. [ES] – female, spokesperson for the Educational Board of Poznań [7 March 2011]
9. [JCH] – female, employee of the Educational Board of Poznań, responsible for primary schools, previously a headmaster of a big school [10 March 2011]
10. [KL]– male, headmaster of a high school in Poznań, coordinator of the Foundation’s school for adults, teaching geography and math [14 March 2011]
11. [KM] – male, history teacher in a ‘good’ high school in Poznań, he removed a cross from the wall in his teaching room, declared atheist [21 April 2011]
12. [KZ]– male, Representative of the Regional Police Commander for Equal Treatment, often engaged in solving tensions of multicultural nature [19 February 2011]
13. [MG] – female, vice-principal/headmaster of Gymnasium no. 25 and the Foundation’s school for adults in Poznań [6 May 2011]
14. [PB] – male, vice-headmaster of Gymnasium and Lyceum run by the foundation, activist, former headmaster of a big school for adults [8 March 2011]
15. [PP] – male, Governor's Representative for Minorities, actively engaged in supporting NGOs working for the benefit of minorities in Poznań, focusing his personal interests on the Roma community [22 February 2011]
16. [RW] – male, academic, head of Poznan Human Rights Centre, lawyer, declared Catholic [24 April 2011]

Annex II

Interview-guide for semi-structured interviews (list of issues)

I. Case Study 1: Education of Roma

II.

1. Teachers, headmasters, vice-principals

Part A (general information)

1. Personal information – name, occupation, specificity of the connection to the education system (previous history of employment), role in the present work place
2. Role in the process of organizing and/or running the Foundation’s school(s)
3. Previous experience in teaching Roma pupils before starting cooperation with the Foundation’s initiative
4. Previous experience in teaching any other non-Polish pupils/students
5. Personal experiences of contacts with non-Poles

6. General opinion on multicultural policies in Poland
7. General opinion about multicultural policies in Polish schooling system (documents, textbooks, curricula) – general knowledge and own encounters within the work history period

Part B

1. General opinion about the Roma minority education level, state programs and their effectiveness
2. Main challenges for diversity in Polish schools
3. Examples of good/bad practices of accommodating diversity in school life
4. Memorable episodes, events related to teaching Roma children
5. Memorable episodes, events related to contacts with Roma parents
6. Main challenges in cooperation with officials
7. Main concerns related to the future of Roma minority education
8. Diagnosis of the most pressing problems in the education of Roma (other minorities)
9. Proposals of solutions to the most severe problems
10. General opinion on tolerance towards minorities in Poland
11. General opinion on tolerance towards minorities in Poland in schools
12. Personal meaning of the term ‘tolerance’

2. Local officials

Part A

1. Personal information – name, occupation, specificity of the connection to the education system (previous history of employment), role in the present workplace, main responsibilities
2. Role in the process of organizing/coordinating multicultural education; [*if applicable*] role in supporting the process of the Foundation’s schools’ functioning?
3. Previous work experience in cases related to Roma pupils in the history of employment
4. Previous work experience in cases related to minorities other than the local Roma community
5. Personal experiences of contacts with non-Poles
6. General opinion on the multicultural policies in Poland
7. General opinion on the multicultural policies in the Polish school system (documents, textbooks, curricula) – general knowledge and own encounters within the work history period

Part B

1. General opinion on the Roma minority education level, state programs and their effectiveness
2. Main challenges for diversity in Polish schools
3. Examples of good/bad practices of accommodating diversity in school life observed in school life
4. Memorable episodes (both positive and negative) or events related to contacts with Roma children, parents, activists
5. Main challenges in the cooperation with other officials, school teachers, school headmasters
6. Main concerns related to the future of Roma (and other) minorities' education
7. Diagnosis of the most pressing problems
8. Proposals of solutions to the most severe problems
9. General opinion about tolerance towards minorities in Poland
10. General opinion about tolerance towards minorities in Poland in schools
11. Personal meanings of the term 'tolerance'

III. Case Study 2: ethics classes

Part A (general information)

1. Personal information – name, occupation, specificity of the connection to the education system (previous history of employment), role in the present workplace
2. Previous experience in teaching any other non-Polish pupils/students [*if applicable*]
3. Personal experiences of contacts with (1) non-Poles; (2) Poles of other religious convictions/atheists
4. Religious conviction (voluntary)
5. General opinion about multicultural policies in Poland
6. General opinion about multicultural policies in the Polish school system (documents, textbooks, curricula) – general knowledge and own encounters within the work history period
7. General opinion about pluralism in public thesphere/debates
8. General opinion about the pluralism of views in schooling
9. Attitude towards the Roman-Catholic Church's presence in the public domain
10. Reasons for consent to participate in the interview

Part B

1. General opinion about pluralism in the workplace/school [*if applicable*]
2. Main challenges for diversity in Polish schools/Polish society in general
3. Knowledge of the Ostrów Wielkopolski case
4. Knowledge of incidents concerning the discussions/event around crosses and ethics classes
5. Examples of good/bad practices of accommodating the pluralism of views in school life (observed)
6. Memorable episodes (both positive and negative) or events related to religious pluralism
7. Main challenges in the cooperation with officials, teachers, headmasters when pluralism is considered
8. Experience of events/statements in favor of a lack of pluralism in school life
9. Personal attitude towards religion and ethics classes in schools
10. Main concerns related to the future of education
11. Diagnosis of the most pressing problems connected to religious pluralism
12. Proposals of solutions to the most severe problems
13. General opinion about tolerance towards diversity (not only cultural) in Poland
14. General opinion about tolerance towards diversity (not only cultural) in schools
15. Personal meaning of the term ‘tolerance’

