

WP5 Research Report No. 1

***Children's experience of growing up
transnationally***

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1. Introduction

This TRANSFAM WP5 report presents selected results of *Children's experience of growing up transnationally* sub-project of the study. We seek to focus on the topic of identities of children who are raised in the families of Polish immigrants to Norway – a topic rarely covered by Polish research. This can be explained by a plethora of reasons including difficulty in accessing migrant children of an early age (especially if they are partaking in institutionalized care), having to adhere to strict ethical guidelines and obtaining parental as well as child's consent, having a suitable place for conducting a study (home, school setting and their advantages/disadvantages), being skilled and knowledgeable about research methods appropriate for children, anticipating and mitigating potential risks and psychological costs of a study. Furthermore, a particular reluctance may also stem from a subconscious concern: what will happen if the mass-migrating Poles do not return? And, if they do return – who would they be? – Our Norwegians, our Germans, our Englishmen? With an increasingly non-contested figure of 2 million of Polish citizens missing, conservative-right-wing groups oftentimes frame migration as a national apocalypse.

The importance of the topic discussed here is especially relevant in the context of Norway becoming a new immigration country for Poles after 2004, and, even more so – in the face of financial crisis impacting other Western European economies. The number of Polish immigrants (and particularly – families with children registered in the flows) is annually increasing.

The objective statistical background proves the urgency for conducting research dedicated to children from a multidimensional perspective which includes Polish and Norwegian cultural background, as well as social, institutional and legal factors (Igllicka & Gmaj 2014). Importantly, it appears that both Polish and Norwegian cultures are rather pronounced, with national values permeating many spheres of daily lives and limited preponderance for multicultural optic in policies, institutional and practices. In this context, the tensions that the children may experience are a particularly valuable area of inquiry.

2. Methodology and fieldwork

An attempt at a sociological analysis of national identifications among migrant children is in this article based on the following data sources: (1) semi-structured interviews with children (a total number of 30), (2) participant observation in the research situation (children's rooms), and (3) Sentence Completion Method issued to older children (19 tests total, SCM was available in three

language versions – Polish, Norwegian and English – and a child could freely choose which one they would like to complete). The main issues in the questionnaire of a semi-structured interview combined with drawing(s) and Sentence Completion Method¹ were, as follows: (1) Family and leisure: relations with parent(s) and sibling(s), wider kin in Poland and Norway, types and frequency of contacts, patterns of spending time and leisure (hobbies and interests), (2) School/learning and friends/peers: assessing peer groups and networks, relations with teachers and assessing receipt of support from school, language competences, (3) National identifications and choices and future plans. The participants were children aged 6 to 13, born in Poland, living permanently in Norway and currently attend Norwegian primary schools.

According to an earlier-conceived research scheme, each meeting with a child would start with obtaining written consent of a parent and a verbal consent of a child who was to participate in the study. After the consent was obtained, a child would usually invite a researcher into his or her room. At that point the research meeting began with either drawing and/or interview probing. The researcher always brought a selection of art supplies (paper, crayons, pencils etc.), which were much welcome by children. The initial warm-up task aimed at building rapport (Punch 2002: 328) was often a request for drawing (something that pertains to) child's family and/or a conversation about kinship. If a child did not want to draw, he or she would usually concurrently propose a different activity such as browsing photographs, playing a game on the Xbox, having a snack/meal together, playing with a pet, and showing off one's hobby/collection (e.g. rocks from various parts of the world). The interview-probing was ongoing and some of the early questions were: Who belongs to your family? Where do they live? How (often) do you talk to them? How often do you visit Poland? Where do you spend your vacations, free time, holidays? and so on.

Overall, the children were positively disposed ('open') to spending time with the researcher and enjoyed the meetings and her company. That means that under the ethical symmetry rule, every effort was made to ensure that a child does not feel pressured by the researcher to talk about every topic of the inquiry. Children seem to have experienced the joy of the meeting, which was helpful for looking at their agency (Mason & Danby 2011, Sargeant & Harcourt 2012). The children shared their worlds, stories, experiences, interests, affections to specific people and places. When discussing their sympathies and antipathies, as well as the feelings of (non)belonging, the children often referred to a variety of geographical spaces (e.g. in phrases such as "in my home country – Poland" or "in 'our' Norway") and used descriptors as "here" and "there" for places they perceived as "closer" or "more

1 The following sentences were analyzed for the purpose of examining national identification preferences: 1) I like Poland because..., 2) I like Norway because..., 3) In Poland I don't like..., 4) In Norway I don't like..., 5) My home is..., 6) When I grow up I want to live in....

remote". In practical terms, many children directly declared their national belonging, while for others an observation of their rooms provided a canvass for drafting ideas about appropriate probing questions that led to the data on national identifications.

3. Polish migrant children's national identities

As noted already in the previous sections, we attempt to present the topic of children's identities due to the utmost importance of this topic in the context of the numerous Polish migrations to Norway paired with a growing visibility of children for this particular flow. Exploring this topic, we apply the well-known conceptualizations of national identity and the so called 'cultural valence' (adoption of culture) developed in Poland by a famous sociologist Antonina Kłoskowska in her 1996 book "National cultures at the grass-root level" [published in English in 2001]. These frameworks, which move beyond a hybrid, fluid and fragmentary concepts of identity, refer to what is relatively persistent and constitutes a basis or a core of 'Polishness', rigorously described as the culture (language and literature, religion), the tradition-led practices (e.g. Christmas Easter, family bonds, children's names), history (partitions, uprisings, wars, Solidarity movement). While this theory does not mean an unambiguous identification or a necessity of assigning an individual to a single place, culture, or flag, it allows for discovering the cultural differentials. They also facilitate belonging in the increasingly shared spectrum of transnational experiences (fashion, life's style, electronic gadgets, and virtual communications). Adopting this particular analytical frame of Kłoskowska does not signify that the showcased identifications are stable, persistent and existing in their pure form. It rather means that identities are processual, constructed and resulting from the fact that mobility took place at a certain moment in time, in a specific space, and, finally, it was conditioned by a plethora of identifiable objective and subjective reasons. Concurrently with the life-course of a child, they are likely to change multiple times, take a form of an "identity journey" (dwelling in travel, being "on the road"), or even appear as particular turning points, dramatic and conflict-centred identities that need to be "reworked anew" to a point of a national conversion process.

Among the four delineated types of valence (Polish: *walencja kulturowa*, adoption of culture) and their respective identity-crucial features are: (1) uni-valence (inherent and integral national identification, uni-directional in nature), (2) bi-valence (dual/bi-national identity), (3) ambivalence (uncertain national identification), and (4) poli-valence (cosmopolitan identification). On the latter, we note Lash and Urry's (1994, cf. Trąbka 2014: 27) understanding of cosmopolites' interest for places they visit and culturally different people they meet, as well as Hannerz's (1996) treatment of

cosmopolitan traits focused on transnationality and de-territorialized lifestyle. These understandings are important for that they showcase competencies – an approach picked up for other identifications as well.

Following the preliminary data analysis (interviews, participant observation and Sentence Completion Method tests), we decided to employ the framework of Antonina Kłoskowska's for our discussions. Children's declarations on the subject of their national identities were particularly interesting and crucial for interpretations. Children's declarations included clear statements like "I am Polish" or "I am Norwegian", as well as equally fascinating declarations like "I am Polish and Norwegian" or "I am not quite sure who I am". Children further invented additional territorial locations for their belonging on the basis of their international holiday journeys and other factors. Kłoskowska's framing not only fits well the analysis, but they also remain a valid and contextualized framework for looking at national identities in the Polish context. After deciding on Kłoskowska's framework, we have thoroughly analysed which types of identifications appear among the declared identities of the respondents and what kinds of explanations are given for those specific choices.

During the ongoing analysis of the empirical data, it was confirmed that Kłoskowska's types of valence (*typy walencji*) do not appear among children in their "pure" form, but rather in various levels of intensity, depending not only on the family situation, but also on the broader social and institutional contexts. Nevertheless, each of the types has a dominating core of "Polishness" and/or "Norwegianness", or, alternatively, "ambivalence" or "cosmopolitanism" feature.

The in-depth analysis in this article focuses on the data from meetings with 32 children from Polish-Polish families. This includes 30 interviews (two group interview with siblings), observation and 19 tests from the SCM. Across the 32 individual declarations, the bivalent Polish-Norwegian identity is most commonly manifested (14 children, 6 girls, 8 boys). For as many as 9 children (1 girl, 8 boys) we discovered ambivalence and uncertainty. Five children with an integral unidirectional identity displayed a Polish orientation (2 girls, 3 boys) and four respondents showed a unilateral Norwegian identity (3 girls, 1 boy).² We tackle these four types of identifications in the analyses below, using both the interviews and supporting material from SCM tests.³

2 The gender dynamics is interesting even at the first glance and we will examine the proportion of boys and girls in each category more thoroughly in a future research paper.

3 Sentence Completion Method's use was tailored to children's anticipated language preferences and available in Polish, Norwegian and English. For the 19 completed tests (11 filled in by girls and 8 by boys) children chose a Norwegian version 11 times, Polish version 6 times (though one was filled in in a combination of Polish and Norwegian), and English version twice.

A. Bivalence Poland and Norway

Some of the general and pronounced characteristics of children declaring bivalent orientations include using both Norwegian and Polish in their private spaces, celebrating both the Polish and the Norwegian holidays, consumption divided between Polish and Norwegian products, dishes (cuisines), as well as culture texts (newspapers, books, TV programs, movies), cheering Polish and Norwegian sportsmen and sportswomen, and, last but not least, a wish to live in Norway and/or in Poland. For children in this group both national and social spaces – Polish and Norwegian – are relatively well-recognized, discovered, familiar, and, most importantly – well-liked. We present a selection of children’s statements on the matter below.

Adrian (aged 10, migrated at the age of 4):

S: Do you like it here in Norway overall? You have been here for quite some time now.

A: Yeah, well, it can get a bit boring [...]. I am really missing my grandma’s apple pie, Polish milk and also the yoghurts, Kubuś [Polish juice brand], as well as many, many things [...].

S: And where would you like to live?

A: In a place that is a blend of Norway and Poland.

S: A blend of Norway and Poland, right?

A: Yeah.

S: And how do you do that?

A: Somehow.

Alicja, who is now 9 years-old and migrated at the age of 1, filled in here SCM as follows:

Lubię Polskę, bo *for det er varmere*

Lubię Norge, bo *for jeg har mange venner*

I like Poland **because it is warmer** (has a warmer weather than Norway)

I like Norway because (orig. from Polish) **because I have a lot of friends** (here in Norway)

Children name a plethora of reasons, such as friends, family, climate, school successes, and excellent language skills (to the point of not being recognized as a foreigner in Norway due to accent) for explaining their concurrent affinity with Poland and Norway. The listed reasons are considered significant “here and now” and validate children’s links to both countries. Answering the researcher’s question about blending or managing the two national identities, a child does not give specific

solutions, but rather believes that somehow it will simply be done. What is noteworthy across many narratives is that children's identifications are not fixed but rather fluid and in certain situations point more to an ambivalent type. Within the bivalent identification (as well as in univalent Norwegian one), children accentuate these particular competence that make it possible for them to feel well "at home" in Norway and prevent them from feeling "out of place" or "unwelcome" due to the fact that they are Polish. Children speak a lot about the positive experiences of befriending Norwegian boys and girls, in addition to a special role of "multicultural integration facilitators" that computer games and new, globally spreading communication technologies play. The virtual connections translate into the real lives and are exemplified in the invitations to friends' birthday parties, playing sports together, or organizing slumber parties.

B. Ambivalence

Broadly speaking, a child with an uncertain ambivalent identification often has contradictory feelings about using Polish or Norwegian language in a particular space or place, may feel strange about celebrating Polish or Norwegian holidays, and feels less comfortable discussing their consumption choices as rooted in the Polish or Norwegian context. These children are often unsure about where they would like to live, and may experience fear, depression, as well as suffer from diminished well-being in connection with language difficulties that in turn impact on the school achievement, ability to do homework, communication breakdowns between school/teachers and themselves/parents. It is quite characteristic for children in this group to have a rather limited social network of friends and acquaintances, as their limited language skills exclude them from peer group membership.

Let's hear from **Adam**, aged 10, who migrated at the age of 2:

I am very stressed when I have to go to school.... Yhm, something spoils the atmosphere at school. [it is] very nice [in Norway] but I also like [being] in Poland. I would rather live in Poland because it is okay for me to live there, but in Norway it is also very nice, but well I would rather prefer [to be] in Poland [...] I simply like Poland more than Norway, I don't know why [...] Yes, I miss it because I have been in Norway for so long. When I grow up I do not know if I move to Poland, but [...] I don't know if that would happen. I will think some more about it because I am not sure.

Consequently, filling in the SCM test, Adam writes:

When I grow up I would like to live in **I am not sure**.

Next, two brothers **Sylwester** (8) and **Jacek** (9), who migrated in 2012 discuss their preferences:

S: Do you go to Polish school?

Sylwester, Jacek: Yeah.

Sylwester: In kindergarten it was fun. I played a lot.

S: Yes.

Jacek: It is better there... Polish school is better than Norwegian, because there they are fighting all the time.

S: In the Polish school?

Jacek: No, in the Norwegian one.

S: They fight in Norwegian school? Oh look at that, during the breaks?

Jacek: All the time.

Sylwester: Mhm.

S: Where would you boys like to live?

Sylwester: I don't know, I don't know, nowhere.

S: Jacek?

Jacek: I do not think about that.

Nina, who is now 10-years old and migrated at the age of 7, is reflexive and open about her troubles at school:

I have rather big problems with her [a teacher] and I have trouble communicating with her and sometimes it got to the point of, oh man! The problems were so big! At least Grandma is always taking my side. She always goes to school and takes my side, defends me. She always comes to school and talks to the teacher. Mum cannot protect me from that after all, because, firstly, she does not speak Norwegian very well, and, secondly and more importantly, she does not feel like she could protect me that much. But Grandma does, she is more like that, that she always protects me and defends me from everything. I have a feeling that the teacher always gives me more homework, and I also have this thing when one has trouble reading and one reads in a different manner, letters get all mixed up. The teacher knows about it because they gave me a test. She knows about it and still gives me more homework. The more difficult ones, and I tried to talk to her about it but she says that this is so I can learn more [...] I know that I do many things wrong [...] I would really [like to] change my grade, even repeat a year, do it calmly. The teacher does not understand that I need help and more time. Actually, when I was younger I always wanted to have a horse and this is still my destiny, to have a horse. And yes, right, go with him to Spain alone. This is my dream. And what is more ride and play a guitar. And this is somehow well... I was young, I had big imagination. Now I also have big, but maybe a different one because I know that one cannot really do that.

Children articulate problems which are typical for their age and are therefore connected to school, may be linked to peer violence or (what is most common) directly result from poor language competency. The responses, which highlight the avoidance of a national affinity expression topic or lack of place one choses, may suggest certain difficulty with organizing one's life as a child of migrant parents. Children are rarely consulted –they cannot choose but are rather forced to migrate and

cannot overturn or contest the decision that is crucial for the entire family. Children's agency should depend on the capacity to deal with requirements posed by social life in the new and complex context of the destination country. A specific child-like solution to accumulation of problems is evident in Nina's story: she is raised by a single mother who works long hours as a cleaner and travels a lot due to her involvement with the Jehovah's Witnesses church. A grandmother, who is Polish but married a Norwegian man, is Nina's carer, friend and defender when she gets in trouble. In the face of feeling lonely and helpless, Nina's preference is for an imaginary and unrealistic "escape" to warm Spain on her dream horse and with her dream guitar. Nina's problems escalated and a teacher worried about her well-being (e.g. reported sleep disorder). At the same time, Nina identifies with a country that she only knows from stories and she wants to belong to an unrealistic social setting. She neither identifies with Poland nor with Norway, which may be attributed to a problematic family history, alienation and uprooting through migration.

Language deficits translate to a perceived lack of talent for school, which in turn affect self-worth and identity. In some cases, they reinforce a negative attitude towards the receiving society. Children do not have the same skills for managing identities as adults, and they are lacking effective defence mechanisms that would protect them against the psychological costs of adaptation framework.

C. Uni-valence towards Poland

Children who manifest univalent identification with Poland mostly use Polish language at home/in private realm, often visit their family in Poland and Polish relatives in Norway, often use Skype or telephone for communicating with kin members in Polish, express preference for Polish food, largely take part in Polish supplementary schooling, are religious (take holy Sacraments, attend Polish masses, pray at home and before meals), their cultural consumption is in Polish (newspapers, magazines, books, as well as TV is read/watched in Polish), and they support Polish sportsmen and sportswomen. For many children, it is their private life at home that constitutes a "small Poland" – a contained space of patrimony abroad. This private sphere protects them from the consequences of failures, compensates for troubles or conflicts with peers or at school, and it is here where assurances are made that what is Polish is properly protected and maintained. In that context **Marek**, who is now 7 years old and migrated at the age of 4 has early on in the interview stated his identity:

M: I am not Norwegian.

S: You aren't, are you?

M: No, I am Polish.

Similarly **Paulina**, who has been in Norway since she was 3-years-old and is now 11, strongly declares her love for Poland as her patrimony. On the one hand, she does not seem to have much in common with her destination society and, on the other, she misses her grandparents and the warm atmosphere of closeness. Once again problems connected to an insufficient knowledge of the local language appear:

[...] I would like to live in Poland because that would mean I would live close to my grandma and I would understand more at school. Whenever I visit Poland, I don't have the heart to leave for Norway.

The second method – a Sentence Completion Test – supports this finding as Paulina's written declaration reads as a clear statement of a plan:

When I grow up I would like to live in **Poland at my grandma's** and I would like to study at the university there.

D. Uni-valence towards Norway

Children in the group marked by univalent Norwegian identification generally have features somewhat opposite to the ones described above for those focused on Poland, which here orient identities towards Norway. Here children primarily speak Norwegian – both at home and elsewhere and adore Norwegian holidays and celebrations. Children's consumption preferences (meals, food) are Norwegian products and dishes. Similarly, books, newspapers and TV are also in Norwegian. Continuously, peer contacts and friendships are stronger with Norwegian rather than Polish children and support is issued primarily for Norwegian sportsmen and sportswomen. Children univocally voice a wish to live in Norway, and their life there grants them many pleasures and an overall large degree of satisfaction. For many, migration to Norway is linked to a fulfilment of dreams that were impossible to realize in Poland, which indicates a success story of parental migration and an upward mobility/higher social/material status attained in the destination country. In their stories migration is an opposite of being problematic – it opened doors and brought on new perspectives, as well as greatly positive changes that impacted on a unilateral identification with Norway.

For instance Marta, who is now 9-years-old and migrated as a one-year-old toddler sees Norway as her home and uses a telling metaphor of a "dog-bed" in a positive sense: just as a dog needs its home/house, she also needs her warm and stable place – a home. Arguably, this means that her living conditions in Poland were not particularly appealing and there was nothing to return to there:

M: I really like my life.

S: So you wouldn't like to live in Poland in the future?

M: No.

S: And where would you like to live?

M: I would like to live in America or in Norway. But normally here in Norway. I have my place here, just like dogs have their places and do not want to sleep in a different place. Norway is a place like this for me.

A similarly unambiguous narrative was shared by **Honorata** who is 10-years-old and came to Norway just 10 months prior to an interview. She appears to enjoy Norwegian rules, values guiding life and lifestyle. She not only speaks Norwegian fluently, but seems to suggest forgetting Polish. A shift in her identification is quite radical, given a short duration of her stay abroad:

S: So how do you like it here?

H: Everything is great, people are kind.

S: Yhym.

H: I cannot complain.

S: I know that you have not been here for long, but where would you like to live?

H: HERE!

S: And why is that?

H: Because the rules here are better [...] There is not one thing here that I do not like [...] For a long time me [and my younger brother – 6-year-old Leon] did not speak Polish anymore, so this is why the words escape us, one has to do it in Norwegian.

Honorata chooses to fill in SCM test in Norwegian and does not hesitate about declaring her attachment to Norway:

Når jeg blir voksen, vil jeg bo i Norge When I grow up I would like to live in Norway.

4. Conclusions

As the data shows, Polish children try to actively (re)construct their post-migratory identities and therefore respond to the aforementioned challenge. The bivalent dual identity is a feature for the largest group of children and, next in terms of significance, the ambivalence is quite common. Conversely, the unilateral, one-directional national identifications are rare equally for the Polish and for the Norwegian focus. The first type of declarations (bivalence) should be seen as a positive sign – it facilitates creation of networks, bonds and cultural, social, and economic relations between Poland and Norway. One can hope that a shift towards Norway does not indicate a permanent loss of knowledge about one's roots, but it may also be understandable in terms of a fast and conflict-free

method for feeling at home through acculturation. It is possible that children manifesting bivalence will soon become the ambassadors and interpreters of what is Polish in Norway and what is Norwegian in Poland. Such connected identities additionally allow for an emergence of something new, useful and described by the feeling of “ownership” over one’s identity without forsaking one’s heritage. A bivalent identification strengthens the feeling of belonging and identity that facilitates adaptation and attaining what Mostwin (1985) called a “third value” – a higher degree of humanization. Person’s self-worth, dignity, and a feeling of community membership are positively linked to considering two cultures as one’s own. A high competence in Norwegian language opens doors for social citizenship and participation in various forms and activities within the Norwegian social life.

Simultaneously to the above successes, it is important to explore the stories of children who declare ambivalence, have no clarity about their belonging and seem to be “on a swing” moving between Poland and Norway. While there is evidence for noting a particular migration-induced dilemma, it would be flawed to expect stability, certainty and durability of identity during childhood as a life-course stage. Some researchers (e.g. Bokszański 2007) claim that a forced relocation/displacement of a child can contribute to an emergence of an unauthentic identity in the future. This is exemplified by deficits in school achievement, insufficient knowledge of a local language, feeling excluded from the peer environment, as well as no objective success within parental migration stories. Like adults, children may also suffer greatly as migrants. They may display and narrate experiences of loss, physical separation from one’s kin members, isolation in the destination society, lack of transferable capital and ability to deal with a change that took place in one’s life.

The findings presented here first and foremost demonstrate that children have a lot to say about themselves, their relatives, school, peers, Poland, Norway and the world that surrounds them in general. Further exploration of data will be continued in the subsequent publications stemming from the TRANSFAM project.

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