

II. Pedagogy

Community Microspace in the Multicultural Macrospace: An Attempt at Systemic Perception

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The specificity of contemporary multiculturalism is difficult to capture from the perspective of a traditional concept of culture, perceived within the framework of homogeneity. This is on account of the fact that such inspection of culture does not entail what comes across as the distinction of contemporary multiculturalism, namely the processes of fusion and interspersion of cultures, both resulting in hybridization. Nonetheless, the culture can be analyzed in a more suitable manner on the grounds of the concept of transculturality, as thanks to that, it is possible to seize the dependencies, mutual borrowings of values, cultural artefacts, as well as the socially constituted microspaces of a community, which due to its structure and conceptualizing factors can be referred to as a specific system. As a result, the category of the borderland of cultures can be useful and applied, as it focuses on the contents and processes crucial for the shaping of intercultural space.

Key words: *Space; multiculturalism; system; transculturality; cultural borderland; community microspace*

A space and its multicultural context

Location of a person in the contemporary world concerns many spaces that establish various configurations. Some of them constitute an additive creation, generating a qualitatively new dimension of human experience and functioning. Others, despite their constant interspersion, preserve their specific identity. Some others, however, remain in their mutual, separate relations, adopting a relatively change-resistant form. None of these configurations exist within a sole and identical form. Therefore, as W. Welsch notes, "(...) the old, unifying and separatist

culture has been replaced by the external establishment of the networks of cultures. Today's cultures are profoundly entwined and related to each other. Various lifestyles mingle, not withdrawn within the borders of national cultures, but rather reaching beyond, adapting well in other cultures, too (...). Today's cultures are characteristic for their hybridization. For *each* culture, any *other* cultures gradually become the internal contents or their satellites (...); moreover, the culture understood as a form of life, as a daily routine, is also becoming more and more cross-cultural."¹ As a consequence, an area is established, which, in the context of these reflections "is (...) a human, anthropogenic, cultural and social creation, i.e. established by the individuals, groups and social or cultural communities."² It, therefore, generates a specific, complex system, that, according to M. Golka, "is comprised of mutually co-related, somewhat ordered, dependent and linked elements that influence each other entitling their properties, contributing to this system within given functions, the latter consisting of elements subject to subsequent structuralization. The system is a cognitive construct, i.e. it implies a way of perceiving the world, i.e. the manner that makes reference to the reality, and tries to reveal its objectively emerging features. The main features of the system include:

- Complexity, i.e. the fact that each system comprises some elements (parts, subjects, persons, objects, cells, etc.), yet these elements establish a unity that is not reducible to their sums or themselves;
- Integrity of the links, i.e. the fact that the compounds and relations within the links are manifested continuously, and are relatively organized as well as connected;
- Functionality, i.e. the fact that parts of the system influence the entire form, and the other way around – the entire structure has impact on the parts too."³

Systemic perception of space is useful for reflections over multiculturalism, which – as M. Golka claims – is reflected in "an conscious coexistence within the same area (alternatively in the direct neighborhood with no real distinction, or in a situation of aspiring to

¹ Welsch, W. (1998). Transkulturowość. Nowa koncepcja kultury. In R. Kubicki, Ed. *Filozoficzne konteksty koncepcji rozumu transwersalnego. Wokół koncepcji Wolfganga Welscha*. Część II. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Fundacji Humaniora, pp. 204–205.

² Jałowicki, B. (2010). *Spoleczne wytwarzanie przestrzeni*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR, p. 19.

³ Golka, M. (2010). *Imiona wielokulturowości*. Warszawa: Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Literackie MUZA SA, p. 35.

overtake the shared space) of two or more social groups of relatively distinctive cultural (or at times racial) features: appearances, language, religious confession, hierarchy of values, etc., that contribute to the mutual perception of diversity with various consequences. Perception of this sort of diversity takes place within the individual, small local, peer or neighboring group perspective (...) Thus, the features of multiculturalism concern not the sole coexistence of these diverse elements, but rather encompass dependencies and links that emerge between them, or broadly speaking – relations that can establish some complex, elaborate structures.”⁴ Therefore, it can be assumed that multiculturalism is “a state with a form of social and cultural minority remaining in relation to the dominant group”.⁵ It is a unique microspace with stratifying and conceptualizing functions provided by cultural differences (particularly of national, ethnic and confessional provenance), attitudes to these differences, range of their acceptance, acknowledgment of similarities, or readiness to co-exist despite such cultural differences. On the other hand, with reference to the integrality of such microspace perceived as a system, it is subject to mutual links between the establishing, constitutive elements. According to Golka the latter entails:

- personal contacts and co-related activities;
- (one-way or mutual) flow of cultural creations (the artifacts but also patterns, ideas and concepts);
- transfer of meanings and values;
- transfer of information, knowledge, myths, etc;
- inspirations;
- economic, technical and other enforcement;
- steering (decisive connotations);
- the occurrence of conflicts and tensions (that can integrate the system as long as they do not surpass a given level of such tensions),
- presence of similar goals and objectives.”⁶

The above can be considered as factors conditioning the polarization of a multicultural macrospace. Subsequently, on the basis of the latter some microspaces are generated, providing points of reference for the individuals and social groups experiencing such differences. Microspace manifestations of multiculturalism in the everyday life practices of the individuals and social groups seem to be, consequently, decisive in

⁴ Ibidem, pp. 64–65.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 97.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 38.

terms of their attitudes towards cultural differences, ranging from multicultural coexistence (as a community microspace) to tensions and conflicts at the cultural meeting points. Acknowledging W. Welsch's implications, that "(...) the traditional concept of culture is a differentiating and distinguishing framework that perceives culture homogenously (...) thus not providing an adequate description of the contemporary world, as it is incapable of comprehending the internal differentiation of the contemporary cultures (...),"⁷ it is worth looking at multiculturalism from the transcultural perspective, that "(...) is widespread not only at the level of the macroculture, but also embraces the micro level, i.e. concerning the individuals. For the majority of individuals multiple cultural co-relations are crucial for their own cultural formation. Thus, they themselves become cultural hybrids."⁸ Transcultural examination of cultural diversity provides an opportunity to capture the processes of fusion and cultural interspersion, as a result establishing a community microspace, thus "(...) the aim of the transcultural concept concerns the overlapping various contents, distant from separating and excluding understandings of the culture. The objective lies in a culture and a society in which pragmatic activities will not take place only within the established limits, but will be able to join and make transfers."⁹

The community microspace at cultural meeting points

The category of a cultural borderland is a primary concept for the conceptualization of the community microspace in a culturally diverse society. In the literature, the borderland as such has many interpretations. One of the applicable theories concerning borderland is put forward by J. Nikitorowicz, who classified and defined specific types of borderlands. According to the author, a cultural borderland is an area "(...) of difference, sense of otherness, and diversity where comparisons, discoveries, amazement and negotiations take place."¹⁰ The area "in-between", as J. Nikitorowicz implies, can encompass various types of cultural borderlands, such as the following:

⁷ Ibidem, p. 57.

⁸ Welsch, W. (1998). *Transkulturowość...*, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 213.

¹⁰ Nikitorowicz, J. (1995). *Pogranicze. Tożsamość. Edukacja międzykulturowa*. Białystok: Trans Humana, p. 11.

- territorial borderland (of contact or connecting nature) where “(...) a specific type of coexistence between two or more cultural (mostly ethnic, lingual, confessional or national) groups takes place”;¹¹
- content-cultural borderland, where “(...) for their own benefits, the individuals generate a number of customs and rules of tradition that enable their coexistence in the territorial borderland, which in turn shapes the cultural specificity of the community, in which such an individual is not subject to monoculturalism, but has the choice to shape values relying on multiculturalism. The systems of values the individuals conceptualize in such communities can take various forms, yet most often they constitute a fusion of values deriving from two cultural systems. Hence, we can speak of polyphony, i.e. of a melting pot, reflected in the overlapping of cultures, encouraging its participants to adopt two or more cultures and in this way shaping a dual system of identities”;¹²
- interactive borderland as “(...) a process and the effect of this process in interpersonal communication, shifting from a monologue to a dialogue of cultures, from the dominance of stereotypes and prejudices towards mutual understanding, negotiations and consideration for the common cultural heritage of the borderland (...). On the basis of a joint system of values and acknowledged hierarchy within social communities some specific similar aspirations, behaviours and activities emerge. On the other hand, each social group entails differences between individuals, expressed as the variety of individual dispositions, background, the performed tasks, etc. Social bond is established and sustained through that which brings people together and that which makes them different in group life. Mutual interactions, relations and dependencies are grounded in a given foundation and this is something that joins people, and makes them need each other, completing each other and experiencing the differences and the community”;¹³
- personal borderland, i.e. an internal one “(...) designed within the space of a human existence in a given place and time, when individual development takes place accompanied by the process of the shaping of personal identity. The outcomes can enhance not only dual judgment of the affective attitude towards “the own” and “the other”,

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 11.

¹² Ibidem, p. 12.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 13.

but also incapability of explicit, ethnic self-identification (i.e. a dispersed identity)."¹⁴

The defined types of a borderland of cultures can be perceived additively, thus a significant role can be assigned to them in terms of establishing a community microspace in the context of cultural diversity of a given social group.

The above-outlined process can be exemplified with reference to the specificity of the social and cultural functioning of the nationally diverse society of the Vilnius region,¹⁵ manifested within a historically shaped borderland of cultures.¹⁶ Through the prism of cultural identifications, approaches to the representatives of other cultures, common cultural references, obligations towards the country of residence, and the range of socially constructed interculturalism, it is possible to identify the structure of the community microspace and relations existing between its elements. The specificity of such microspace is depicted in Graph 1.

The microstructure of the community is a multilevel construct that stratifies the types of cultural borderlands. The first level of this microstructure is established by the territorial location of the cultural groups of different, diverse distinctive features. Residing in a direct neighborhood does not only disclose cultural diversities, but also sensitizes to it in different ranges and to various degrees, activating various types of dependencies and relations (conditioned by specific factors, mostly of political, economic and social nature), as well as social relations. The latter may, on the one hand, contribute, according to M. Golka, to coexistence relying on mutual accommodation and assimilation linked to a sort of mutual acceptance, adaptation, and amalgamations, but on the other hand, it may result in explicit and passive antagonisms, segregation, as well as overt or concealed isolation.¹⁷ If, however, the direct and positive interactions between

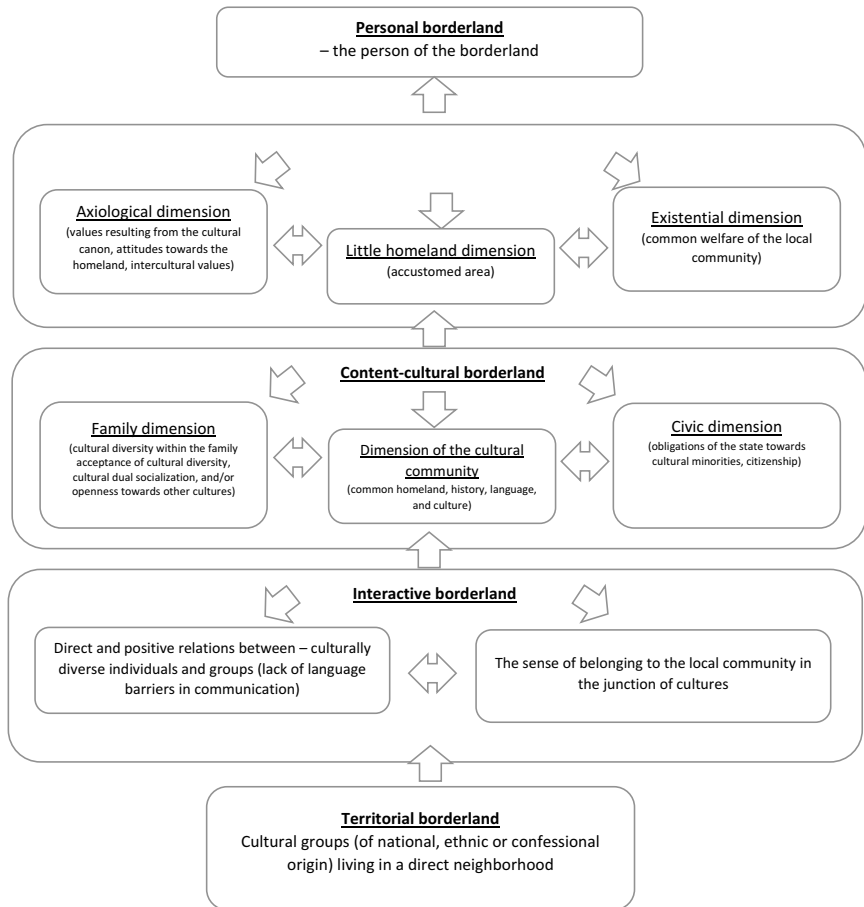
¹⁴ Nikitorowicz, J. (2009). *Edukacja regionalna i międzykulturowa*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie i Profesjonalne, p. 132.

¹⁵ Kowalski, M. (2010). Wileńszczyzna – region pogranicza litewsko-białorusko-polskiego. In Szerłaż A. (Ed.): *Wileńszczyzna małą ojczyzną*. Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT, pp. 85–86.

¹⁶ In the years 2013–2015, the author accomplished an empirical research project with the aim to explain the process of culture interspersion in the Vilnius region. The outcomes of these findings have been made a point of reference for the attempt to capture systematically the micro space of the community resulting from the polarization of a multicultural macro space.

¹⁷ Golka, M. (2010). *Imiona wielokulturowości*. Warszawa: Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Literackie MUZA SA, p. 100.

Graph 1: The multidimensional community microspace.



culturally diverse groups and individuals prevail, accompanied by barrier-free communication, the sense of belonging to culturally diverse local community is shaped, resulting in crystallization of a common sphere, where the processes of interspersion and cultural intermixing take place. This, in turn, facilitates the second level of the community, i.e. the micro level, determining the quality and range of the multicultural coexistence of the individuals and groups functioning at the cultural junctions. Concurrently, it becomes a point of reference for shaping the

subsequent level of the community microstructure, i.e. the contents-cultural borderland. Ergo, the awareness of common history, homeland, culture, language and religion shared by the culturally diverse individuals and groups becomes the borderland's constituent creator.¹⁸ The content-cultural community is deprived of duality, as it does not manifest nor expose cultural differences, but that which is common and significant at the same time. It provides favourable conditions for coping with cultural diversity at least in its two dimensions. i.e. family and civic. The first one embraces cultural differences in two forms, i.e. as the externally cultural diversity of the family (culturally diverse family members) that is perceived as culturally diverse, and as the location of a mono-cultural family in its most direct social circles with cultural diversity as the distinctive feature of the latter. In both instances the sense of community of the cultural contents allows "the otherness" of cultural differences to be overcome for the sake of their acceptance, giving rise to a culturally dual socialization in a culturally diverse family surrounding, opening up towards cultural differences in mono-cultural families.¹⁹

Within the civic framework, the common cultural references sensitize towards the obligation of the state towards cultural minorities (particularly national ones), and to those resulting from the fact of being a citizen and a member of a given society.²⁰

The community of cultural contents is therefore of an integrative character as it releases from homogenous projects of cultural dogmas, overcomes cultural borders and favours mutual interspersions of cultures, allowing to negotiate and sustain dialogue, subsequently creating an intercultural borderland, thanks to which the disappearance of the division between "us" and "them", for the sake of "we" is possible.

Contemporary cultures, with regards to the concept of W. Welsch, (...) have no island structure as they lost their uniformity and difference (...) being specified by interspersions and mutual influence. (...) Cultures transform into complex, entwined, yet co-related, cultural networks (...).²¹

¹⁸ Szerląg, A. (2013). Narodowy dualizm w codzienności polskich rodzin na Wileńszczyźnie. In J. Nikitorowicz (Ed.), *Patriotyzm i nacjonalizm. Ku jakiej tożsamości kulturowej?* Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza IMPULS, p. 209.

¹⁹ Szerląg, A. (2014). Kulturowy potencjał wychowania w rodzinie na styku kultur – orientacje rodziców i dzieci. In *Wychowanie w rodzinie*, nr. 1/2014, pp. 34–35.

²⁰ Szerląg, A. (2013). Narodowy dualizm..., *op. cit.*, p. 197.

²¹ Golka, M. (2010). *Imiona wielokulturowości*, *op. cit.*, pp. 57–58.

In a situation of progressing hybridization of culture in a microscale, different processes are activated, subsequently conceptualizing the cross-cultural borderland within, at least, the following three dimensions:

1. Axiological dimension – determined by the values resulting from the common cultural canon, values determining attitudes towards the homeland (in the case of individuals deriving from cultural minorities attitudes to two homelands), as well as intercultural values. Axiology leading towards a cultural borderland is therefore of a communal and cross-cultural nature²², specified by closeness, similarity, ease of communication, positive emotions, inclusion and integration. Constituting the attributes of the sense of “familiarity”,²³ these factors create and ensure a substantial chance for cross-cultural coexistence.
2. Cultural dimension – denoted by cultural attributes of the so called “little homeland”, establishing an “accustomed”, familiar area. The individuals functioning in the cultural borderlands, “generate their own area, shaping its given forms that entail both functions as well as meanings. This established area becomes a material frame of life, conditioning in turn human behaviour through the quantity, quality and accessibility of places where they can fulfill their needs. Such space “(...) also has a symbolic dimension, as it is subject to given emotions, feelings and values.”²⁴ Importantly, “(...) it gathers those living in a specific geographical area within the circle of the local tradition, culture, various forms of social life, and the natural environment.”²⁵
3. Existential dimension – the local dimension of the existential everyday life, particularly, concerning the common, ordinary life problems, neighborhood relations, common interest and care for the future, that altogether determine the level and degree of integration of the culturally diverse local community.

Taking the above into account, the borderland is a space creating a personal (internal) borderland, manifested within the establishment of

²² Szerląg, A. (2016). Cross-cultural orientations of the young generation of Poles and Lithuanians – axiological connotations in the context of interaction of cultures. In Szerląg A., Pilarska J., Urbaneck A. (Ed.) *European atomization or integration? Transborder aspects of (multi)pedagogy*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

²³ Golka, M. (2010). *Imiona wielokultuowości...*, op. cit., p. 174.

²⁴ Jałowicki, B. (2010). *Spoleczne wytwarzanie przestrzeni*, op. cit., pp. 23–24.

²⁵ Walancik, M. (2008). Wychowanie patriotyczne w małej ojczyźnie. In Lalak D. (ed.) *Dom i ojczyzna. Dylematy wielokultuowości*. Warszawa: Instytut Profilaktyki Społecznej i Resocjalizacji Uniwersytet Warszawski, Międzynarodowe Centrum Adaptacji Zawodowej, IW EQUAL, p. 245.

both personal as well as cultural identity. Concurrently, it gives rise to the creation of a borderland identity of a human, who "(...) uses their own cultural heritage and entails some specific developmental chances and opportunities, i.e. such an individual can shape identity through the selection of elements from different cultures and integrate them with the elements of their own culture, establishing their own system in such a way. It is often incoherent and dispersed, yet the situation of the borderland allows for the discovery and shaping of motivation to construct more elaborate forms of expressing one's own personality. (...) The person from the borderland participates in a never-ending process of communication, moving from monologue to the dialogue of cultures, from the dominance of stereotypes and prejudices to mutual understanding, negotiations and consideration for the common heritage of the culture in the borderland."²⁶

Thus, it can be assumed that the sense of similarity is the category crucially defining the process of shaping spaces (conceptualized by the types of cultural borderlands), specific for the community microspace in a multicultural macrospace.²⁷

Conclusion

Transcultural contextualization of the community microspace, with its foundation in cultural differences, implies the confirmation that despite cultural differences it is possible to move towards that which according to W. Welsch is common and shared, thanks to the potential of surpassing "(...) arbitrarily and seemingly determined monocultural points of views (...)".²⁸ As a result, a new type of cultural diversity emerges, within which that which is concurrently common and different yet simultaneously capable of inter-affiliation provides conditions for co-existence.

²⁶ Nikitorowicz, J. (2009). *Edukacja regionalna...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 134–135.

²⁷ Szerłaż, A. (2016). Cross-cultural orientations of the young generation of Poles and Lithuanians – axiological connotations in the context of interaction of cultures. In Szerłaż A., Pilarska J., Urbanek A. (Eds.) *European atomization or integration? Transborder aspects of (multi)pedagogy*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

²⁸ Welsch, W. (1998). *Transkulturowość...*, *op. cit.*, p. 213.