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Creative inside the home

Privately creative, publicly passive? - this seems to be an accurate description of the participation in culture of migrants from Poland in Germany. A large percentage of Poles (35%) declare that they devote time to their own artistic activities - be it handiwork and crafts (20%) or visual arts (15%). Publicly their cultural interests are much less visible – only one in ten declares taking part in the activities of a cultural organization: German, Polish or other. Read more below about the findings of a project led by Dr Michał Nowosielski.



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How migrants from Poland in Germany participate in culture

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Types of cultural practices of migrants from Poland in Germany

In this paper we will apply the definition by Barbara Fatyga who described cultural participation as a „complex, dynamic (variable) set of cultural practices” (Fatyga 2014: 19). The adoption of the definition by Fatyga allows us to treat as cultural participation all the activities that can be characterized in three different categories:

- **Home-based practices** (*culture d'appartement*), which may be also called domestic consumption; it covers among others: watching TV, listening to the radio, watching and listening to recorded sound and images, reading and using computer and the Internet.
- **Going out practices** (*culture de sortie*), which may also be labeled as public consumption; it consists of e.g.: visits to cultural venues such as cinema, theatre, concerts, museums, monuments and heritage sites.
- **Identity-building practices** (*culture identitaire*), which are activities involving the community; it means among others: amateur cultural practices, membership of cultural associations, ethnic culture, and community practices (Morrone 2006: 30).

The researched group – migrants from Poland in Germany – are understood in the project broadly and inclusively as Polish citizens living in Germany, German citizens of Polish origin and people of German origin who identify with Polish culture and language.

Home-based practices

Our research – both quantitative and qualitative – seems to suggest that reading is very popular. This concerns both books and the press. It is worth pointing out that in addition to people who declare to be avid readers (of both books and the press), there are also people who declare that they frequently replace traditional reading with surfing various sources on the internet.

The research in the project „Migrants from Poland in Germany – cultural aspects” was conducted by triangulating methods and sources. Four types of research were conducted, which allowed for the comparison of results and enriched the interpretation. These were:

- Quantitative CAWI - Computer-Assisted Web Interviews - computer-assisted interviews with the use of a web page, N= 1249;
- Qualitative interviews as case studies of families of migrants from Poland, N=22;
- Qualitative in-depth interviews with cultural activists living on the territory of Germany, N=28;
- Study of the contents of the press – an analysis of discourse regarding Polish culture, based on 1112 articles from German newspapers: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *DieWelt*, *General Anzeiger*, *Berliner Zeitung*, *Sächsische Zeitung*.

A non-traditional use of television was also observed. Although half of the respondents do watch television, for up to two hours a day, one fifth declared that they do not watch television at all. Declarations of use of alternative internet channels to access television content such as films, series and programs is also noticeable.

When looking at the languages in which the respondents participated in home-based practices, three clear patterns were observed:

- **Participation mainly in Polish** – about half of the respondents judged that up to 70% of the books they owned were in Polish; in the case of written media used, the part in Polish constituted 54%. Polish was relatively least popular for watching television – watching in Polish took up 44% of the total time watched. This leads us to believe that the more demanding the form of language use and medium, the more often the respondents turned to Polish. This was confirmed in qualitative interviews, which demonstrated that a poor knowledge of German was one of the important reasons why Polish dominated in the reception of culture. Other reasons included: a belief that content in Polish is better or more interesting; declared attachment to Poland; or – a reason characteristic for second-generation migrants who knew Polish less well – wanting to deepen links with Polish culture.
- **Participation mainly in German** – contrarily to Polish, we observed that the easier and more accessible the content was, the more often participants used German. Only 4% of participants declared that they read books exclusively in German. At the same time, 40% of the press and 50% of TV programs were consumed in German. The qualitative study revealed that respondents use German for the following reasons: they prefer it, for example because they judge German television as more interesting; they have technical problems with access to Polish content, or they have difficulty understanding the content.

- **Using both languages** – this was by far the most frequent among respondents. The respondents differentiated what kind of contents and what kind of media they preferred to access in which language. Bilingualism in the access to culture was justified by the respondents mainly in terms of possibilities – having the cultural competence and having access to both.

Going out practices

Our analysis of qualitative data demonstrates two main approaches to practices of going outside the home to participate in culture. The first – active – approach involves frequently and willingly profiting from opportunities to spend one's free time outside the home, responding to the offers of various types of cultural institutions. The second approach is much more limited – respondents infrequently spent their free time outside their home, and when they did it was not in typical cultural institutions, but rather in cafés or restaurants.

The quantitative study demonstrated that the largest number of respondents only infrequently responded to the offer of cultural institutions – 'once a year' or 'sometimes'. Film screenings were the most popular (with only 21% declaring that they had not participated in one during the last year), followed by festivals (24% of non-participants), music concerts (36%). Opera and theater plays were the least popular (respectively 80% and 61% of non-participants). While living in Germany, the respondents most often participated in events organized by German institutions. The study, however, focused especially on the non-German context, related with cultural participation in Poland, or contacts with Polish culture and other migrant cultures in Germany.

- ***Profiting from the cultural offer in Poland.***

The patterns of such participation in Polish culture depended very much on where in Germany the respondents lived. Those who lived near the Polish border had easy access to culture on the Polish side, which sometimes pushed them to forgo participation in events offered by German institutions. People who lived far from Poland treated visits as an occasion to participate in culture, sometimes quite intensely.

- ***Contacts with Polish culture in Germany.*** In the qualitative interviews, respondents spoke



Polish Cultural Institute in Berlin.

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of Polish cultural events delivered by two kinds of institutions: commercial ones, who

organize events such as discos, restaurants, film screenings etc. for the Polish community; Polish institutions run by the state of the Polish community – both public and NGOs – such as the Polish Cultural Institutes or migrant organizations. The quantitative study demonstrated that all of these are known and used by a small percentage of the Polish community in Germany. 37% of the respondents declared that they do not know any Polish Cultural Institute and 41% that they do not know any migrant organization. Knowing an organization of course does not necessarily mean responding to their offers.

Only 30% of respondents declared that they participate in events organized by Polish organizations (2% – frequently, 11% – sometimes, a 16% – rarely). The percentage is even lower for Polish public institutions (including Polish Institutes): less than 20% (1% – frequently, 5% – sometimes and 11% – rarely);

- ***Contacts with the culture of other migrants living in Germany.***

Both quantitative and qualitative research demonstrated that the knowledge of such institutions and the uptake of their offers is low. Less than 20% of the respondents declared ever taking part in an event organized by such an institution, and data from qualitative interviews suggest these ‘institutions’ tend to be mostly restaurants. Participation in Turkish events was most frequently mentioned in the interviews. At the same time, many respondents were distant or even distrustful of events related to the Turkish culture.

An analysis of the national German press (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Die Welt*) demonstrated that it only rarely writes about events linked with

Polish culture, and when it does it is mostly about events related to particular occasions (for example, linked with Polish-German relations), or high-brow culture. The regional and local press (*General Anzeiger*, *Berliner Zeitung*, *Sächsische Zeitung*) publish much more information regarding Polish cultural events in Germany, both announcements of upcoming events and reviews. There is also more information about various undertakings, both in the field of high and popular culture.

Identity-building practices

A relatively big group of respondents (35%) declared that they devote time to their own artistic or creative activities. Usually this is handicraft or crafts (20%), visual arts (15%), music, dance, or writing.

Individual interviews also demonstrated that creative pursuits were very important for some respondents. This took on various forms. Respondents created artwork, wrote and engaged in handicrafts individually. In groups, they engaged in music, dance and theatrical activities.

Participation in associations is an important element of creating identity. Our results suggest that such participation is limited. Only 10% of the respondents declared that they take part in the activities of a cultural organization. These included involvement in German cultural organizations (4%), Polish ones (4%), or informal groups (4%). Only 1% declared their involvement with an immigrant organization other than a Polish one.

The project „Migrants from Poland in Germany – cultural aspects”

The project „Migrants from Poland in Germany – cultural aspects” was conducted in the years 2016-18, first at the Western Institute in Poznań

and from 2017 in the Centre of Migration Research (University of Warsaw). Deutsches Polen-Institut (DPI) from Darmstadt was the German partner. The project was financed by the Polish-German Foundation for Science.

The international and interdisciplinary team included: dr Agnieszka Jeran (Adam Mickiewicz University), dr Łukasz Kumięga (DPI), dr Peter Oliver Loew (DPI) – coordinator on the German side, dr Witold Nowak (CMR UW), dr hab. Michał Nowosielski (CMR UW) – project director, dr Marcin Poprawski (Adam Mickiewicz University).



The logo of the project. ©CMR

You can read more about the project in full reports in [Polish](#) and in [German](#). More info and detailed reports are available at <http://mpn.uw.edu.pl/>.

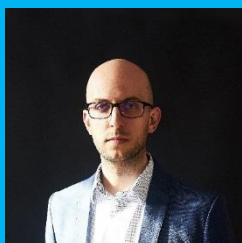
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