

HISTORIA LUDZI. HISTORIA DLA LUDZI

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“Culture of ours neighbors” – basic course on the history of Central Europe

I have been conducting my self-created classes titled “Culture of ours neighbors” in the Department of Sociology of APS for last three years. It aimed at familiarizing Polish students with selected cultural aspects of countries in our region. In fact, the classes have become the basic course on the history of Central Europe in relation to Polish history. The questions, that arise to me after conducting several courses on “Culture...” are as follows:

1. How might sociologists use historical knowledge?
2. What is the reason for such significant lack of historical knowledge among students of social sciences?
3. How to fill up the student’s gap of knowledge?
4. Does my self-created program of classes meet its objective?
5. What are the dominating narrations in my programme and how do they relate to the narrations dominating in teaching history at lower levels?

In my article I would like to present my program and my reflections on the historical education of students of sociology.

For the needs of this article, the broad subject area of Central Europe (and for my program of classes needs as well) includes: knowledge of the countries in the region (or at least Polish neighbors), the story of Polish relations with these immediate and more distant neighbors, geopolitical changes, that is, shift of the borders, the emergence and disappearance of states, knowledge about their symbolic culture and its products.

An unusual concentration of many ethnic groups, nations, languages, religions and cultures on a small territory is a characteristic feature of Central

Europe¹, so it is obvious that the history of ethnic, national and religious minorities is involved here as well (particularly in two typical Central European communities, Jews and Romans) and the issue of multiculturalism.

In short, the cultural frameworks of the idea of Central Europe² in the classical sense can actually limit the choice of subjects, instead geographical and historical factors will be more appropriate here.

Why do I think that there are sociology students who should possess knowledge of history (not only about a more broadly defined region, but also about their own country!)? The precise answer to this question would require an extensive disquisition on the relationship between sociology and history. Two fields of science, which can be classified to liberal studies and social science, are equally imminent and distant. The issue of their relationship in various fields was analysed by many researchers, either by scientists considering themselves more as sociologists³ or those more historically oriented⁴. There is even a branch of sociology called historical sociology⁵. We can consider methodological issues, the choice of research topics, an approach to sources and materials and how one discipline can serve the other, etc.

The Krystyna Kersten's opinion is particularly significant here. She

[...] proves that despite the history deals with the *res gestae*, that is the actions of people taken in the past, the determination of a definitive boundary between past and present societies is impossible. This is especially in the case when this past constitutes relatively recent times, and essentially is still present in the public awareness⁶.

Every day, the past is reflected in the image of the present, regardless of a field, which you choose to study. Attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, value systems, or in general, the culture of each community, which is understood in a broad sense⁷, is not born overnight. They are subject to change, while being under the influence of stabilizing factors such as for instance tradition or collective memory – anchored

1 N. Davies, R. Moorhouse, *Mikrokosmos. Portret miasta środkowoeuropejskiego. Vratislavia, Breslau, Wrocław*, Kraków 2002.

2 M. Buchowski, I. Kołbon, *Od „Mitteleuropy” do Europy Środkowej: zarys dziejów idei*, „Sprawy Narodowościowe”, nr 19, 2001, s. 11–32.

3 P. Sztompka, *Socjologia jako nauka historyczna*, „Studia Socjologiczne”, 1988, nr 1–2, s. 5–32.

4 K. Kersten, *Relacje jako typ źródła historycznego*, „Kultura i Społeczeństwo”, nr 3, 1970.

5 A. Kolasa, *Socjologia historyczna. Problemy ujęcia interdyscyplinarnego*, „Historyka”, t. 26, 1996, s. 3–20. „The Journal of Historical Sociology was founded in 1988 on the conviction that historical and social studies ultimately have a common subject matter and can only benefit from the interchange of ideas and perspectives. Edited by a distinguished international panel of historians, anthropologists, geographers and sociologists, it is both interdisciplinary in approach and innovative in content”, <http://eu.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-JOHS.html>.

6 M. Cobel-Tokarska, *Bezludna wyspa, nora, grób*, Warszawa 2012, s. 10.

7 Golka M., *Socjologia kultury*, Warszawa 2008, s. 37–38.

firmly in the past. It seems to be simple – when you do not know the past of a society, you cannot understand its present. How does it translate into the problem of interest in issues that I have specified above as “Cultures of our neighbors”? As any community does not live in a vacuum time, there is no vacuum space, in a geographical sense. States, nations, ethnic groups, or simply social groups exist side by side and establish relationships, alliances, conflicts, mutual influence and dependence. Thus, we may be tempted to create another maxim – when we do not know our neighbors, we do not know ourselves.

To sum up, as far as I am concerned, knowledge of the history of Central Europe is essential for a modern humanist, in order to understand the culture in which he lives and be able to discover the richness and value of our part of the continent. I mean that even the most trivial matters such as the skills needed to understand press articles, which often include Central European threads⁸, or competencies necessary for the conscious experiencing tourist travels to the countries in this region. For these reasons, it's worth focusing on recent history, which probably is the strongest factor influencing the present, and to which many references can be found in today's culture, press, films, etc. It does not exclude the relevance of basic facts from earlier history, without knowing which even the understanding of today's neighborhood conflicts (e.g. the Slovak-Hungarian) is impossible. Considering this knowledge as an essential component of humanistic canon, I postulate, then, that sociology students should have an opportunity to gain it.

Educational experience provides assumptions unverified by systematic research results: Polish students of sociology (and, anyway, those who study at the Warsaw Academy of Special Education, although it may be presumed that they are not the exceptions in our country), they have no knowledge of the history and culture of the countries of Central Europe. This is probably the part of a wider phenomenon, that is low level of general student's knowledge observed by the university staff⁹.

First of all, we should try to find the reasons for this state of affairs. As the first "offender" of insufficient knowledge of students who apply for the university, school must be indicated and all stages of education prior to college should be

8 For example the appendix „Dobrze mieć sąsiada” to the „Tygodnik Powszechny”: „Już od 10 października co dwa tygodnie na łamach »Tygodnika Powszechnego« cykl o naszych relacjach z krajami ościennymi! Napiżemy: o ciekawych i nietypowych inicjatywach Polaków i ich najbliższych sąsiadów; jak wpływa na nie polska polityka zagraniczna; jak współpracują ze sobą samorządy lokalne; co dla dobrego sąsiedztwa robią organizacje pozarządowe; jak wiele w relacjach z sąsiednimi krajami zależy od nas samych”, http://tygodnik.onet.pl/78124,artykul_info.html; or the „Gazeta Środkowoeuropejska” published with „Gazeta Wyborcza”.

9 A. Krajewski, A. Wojciechowski, *Studenci są coraz głupszy? Czy to szkoła nie daje rady?*, „Newsweek”, 10.10.2011.

taken into consideration here. It should be noted that while it is impossible to examine the accomplishment of teaching tasks by specific teachers, the research concerning curriculum and its instantiation in the content of textbooks have a good tradition in Poland. Focusing on the courses on history, I will present research concerning the following issue: presentation of the Polish neighboring countries and national, ethnic and religious minorities in the history handbooks.

Being aware of the fact that a book is merely a tool (and the teacher should not restrict himself to using only this book), which can be used in various ways, however, we have to remember that many teachers do not approach these tools critically, and do not make effort to find and prepare other teaching aids. Similarly, for a student, a handbook can only be a starting point for further reading and research, but it can also be like “alpha and omega”, a kind of encyclopedia and an oracle at the same time. Thus, the role of a textbook is difficult to be overestimated and it is not surprising that there is a large amount of research and studies on how are essential but also difficult, obvious and complex issues presented in the textbooks.

The most complete statement, which should be depicted in the first place, is the study carried out by the association *Otwarta Rzeczpospolita* (Open Republic) in 2002–2004. The project was called *Szkoła otwartości* (The School of openness). As the authors write:

The team of reviewers have been analysing school textbooks of Polish, history and social studies in terms of respect for ethnic, religious and philosophical differences. There have been reviewed about 80 secondary school books (with about 150 available on the market)¹⁰.

The purpose of the study was practice – enabling secondary school teachers to choose the best textbook, in which the above mentioned issues of differences are presented in a way that meet proposed by the association (and recommended by the Ministry of Education) standards. Therefore, the authors distinguished four groups: recommended textbooks, good textbooks, neutral textbooks and those, which are not recommended.

Criteria, on the basis of which a given textbook is categorised, is presence or lack of certain content shaping narration and summarising interpretations of history that were acclaimed or not. (The following enumeration of specific topics can also be treated as a directory of the content involved in my general definition of “the history of Central Europe”, that I would like to teach sociologists.)

A good history textbook should contain the following messages.

¹⁰ *Kryteria oceny podręczników do języka polskiego i historii*, <http://otwarta.org/old/kryteria-oceny-podrecznikow-do-jezyka-polskiego-i-historii,157.html>.

The Middle Ages:

- 1) multiculturalism of medieval cities: Germans, Jews, Armenians.

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth:

- 1) multinational population: Lithuanians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Jews, Tatars, Germans, Poles;
- 2) plurality of religions: Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism, Judaism, Islam;
- 3) structure of noble democracy over religious and ethnic divisions;
- 4) tradition of tolerance.

The XVIII century (the Enlightenment):

- 1) republican ideas of the Enlightenment: social contract, human rights, equality of citizens.

The XIX century:

- 1) development of a modern national consciousness among the nations living in the territories of the former Republic;
- 2) modernization and industry – multiculturalism and the ethnic structure of cities.

The interwar period:

- 1) the national structure of the population of the Second Republic, legal mounting of minorities;
- 2) Small Constitution and the Treaty of Versailles;
- 3) shaping of national consciousness among ethnic minorities (continuation);
- 4) ethnic issues: state policy towards minorities and public mood;
- 5) contribution to the development of minorities in the Republic;
- 6) birth of totalitarianism (Fascism, Nazism, Stalinism).

Information about the Holocaust:

- 1) basic information about German machinery of extermination, the ghetto, the names of death;
- 2) camps, their purpose – especially for the extermination of Jews and Romans;
- 3) victims of World War II in Poland, the scale of destruction of ethnic communities;
- 4) diversified attitudes of Polish community towards the Holocaust (support, indifference, "szmalcownictwo");

The period of the Polish People's Republic:

- 1) forced migration of population ("Vistula" action, a camp for Germans in Łambinowice); information about pogroms (the Kielce pogrom);
- 2) anti-Semitism in the events of 1968¹¹.

A so-called neutral textbook will not include the above-mentioned information, but will not also convey content classified as xenophobic, nationalistic, or distortions in the presentation of historical facts. If such content appears, the book is classified as not recommended. The nationalist perspective is characterized as follows:

It is only determined by ethnic understanding of Polish culture beyond the civil attachments connecting representatives of different cultures and believers of different religions. This is accompanied by the identification and exclusion of "strangers". In the historical narration this perspective creates a one-dimensional, strictly national view of history, especially in those places, where there is a conflict between ethnically understood nation and other citizens¹².

Maciej Górny presents a detailed report on the study of textbooks history¹³. Except for comments concerning the quality of teaching textbooks and finding a "general occurrence of factual, linguistic and logical errors"¹⁴, the most significant part of the report is the extent of material. The authors reasonably point out that the core curriculum allows to feel free while choosing the content. Despite significant differences in this extent, the authors state that

[...] perhaps the most common phenomenon in the majority of these books is complete exclusion of the history of our neighbors. Hungary and the Czech Republic are particularly disadvantaged in this respect. Russia is mentioned more often, then they write about Germany more often than not. These deficiencies are particularly painful, when authors completely ignore the events of 1956 in Hungary and 1968 in Czechoslovakia and in this way they deprive students of an opportunity to supplement the textbook knowledge with the memories of their parents or grandparents. Perhaps such a selection of events from the world's history is based on the assumption that only powers are important instead of smaller countries around us¹⁵.

The same applies to minorities issues:

The authors of secondary school textbooks have to deal with the problem concerning not only the history of the Polish nation, but also other nations living in

¹¹ *Kryteria oceny podręczników...*, *op. cit.*

¹² *Ibidem.*

¹³ M. Górny (ed.), *Sprawozdanie z badania gimnazjalnych podręczników do historii*, <http://otwarta.org/old/sprawozdanie-z-badania-gimnazjalnych-podrecznikow-do-historii,252.html>.

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*

¹⁵ *Ibidem.*

our country. The shortcomings in this respect are particularly visible. The mentions about Jews, Germans, Ruthenians and Armenians living in the Republic are often limited to state that those nations indeed lived here, because we were a very tolerant nation. Authors usually do not provide more detailed information and ignore the fact that Polish tolerance was not eternal¹⁶.

To make matters even worse, the existing topics are presented almost exclusively from the Polish perspective, with the exclusion of other points of view:

In textbooks, former Poland sometimes was treated as almost one-nation state, which in reality had become after 1945, and as a country, the present borders of which correspond to the territories, which have been always regarded as the Polish lands¹⁷.

The information about the citizens of the Second Republic, who identified themselves with various national and ethnic communities

[...] almost always [...] are subsumed in a separate chapter, so that a student receives the image of impermeable boundaries between the Polish nation and the others living in the Second Republic. Meanwhile, the phenomenon of assimilation to Polish culture is usually ignored, and the mention of Tuwim, Handelsman, Słonimski in a chapter devoted to Polish culture does not work if there will be no reference to the impact of not only their identification with Polish culture but also their own cultural and ethnic origins on their writing. Sometimes, you can get the impression that the authors are not sufficiently competent, when it comes to the history of minorities, which they write about. In such cases, it happens that the Polish-Ukrainian and Polish-German relations are reduced to the conflicts¹⁸.

As far as the World War II is concerned, the authors make considerable progress in terms of the presentation of information about the Holocaust of Jews, it

[...] much less than the Jews, other victims of the Holocaust are mentioned in textbooks – Romans. The topic of Polish-Ukrainian conflict is rarely present there. A reader of the majority of the reviewed books will not know either about the massacres in Volhynia, or the "Vistula" action. Additionally, authors are not interested in the fate of the Jews after 1945 and the postwar fate of Germans¹⁹.

In these shortcomings and omissions reviewers generally do not see any deception, but rather "lack of ideas on the presentation of history", however, those general tendencies seem to be disturbing – a Polish student attending school in 2002–2004 (and later) could not have learnt too much on the "central European" and minorities topics. The analyzed textbooks had been prepared according to

16 *Ibidem.*

17 *Ibidem.*

18 *Ibidem.*

19 *Ibidem.*

the so-called “the old core curriculum”. In 2008, there was introduced a new core curriculum, which emphasized the importance of including in teaching of history and social studies issues interesting for us.

The books written according to this core curriculum were analyzed in the framework of the project implemented by an association called Towarzystwo Edukacji Antydyskryminacyjnej (The Anti-discrimination Education Association) in 2011. It resulted with a report edited by Marta Abramowicz, which focused on the presentation of many groups experiencing discrimination during school education²⁰. The problems of minorities (national, ethnic and religious) interesting for us are mentioned in the chapter titled *Analysis of textbooks and the core curriculum – history* by Marcin Dziurok and Małgorzata Jonczy-Adamska. There are 18 titles included here. The changes that have taken place over several years are worth noting if compared to the findings discussed above by the Otwarta Rzeczpospolita team. First of all, the authors note that there is more information about minorities (“History textbooks devote much attention to national and ethnic minorities”²¹), however, they are not always presented in a satisfactory manner. If they are compared to older books, in newer books we can find information about

[...] minorities inhabiting the territory of Poland, especially in the chapters on the sixteenth-century Poland and the Second Republic. The description of the size and composition of nation is mainly used to list Belarusian, Russian, Lemko, German, Czech, Slovak, Jewish, Tatar, Ukrainian minorities. There is usually attached information that they now have the same rights as Poles, their children have right to learn their language and the history of their society²².

By far, the most often mentioned nation is Jewish one (however, in the analyzed books there is no mention of anti-Semitism). When it comes to the presentation of relationship,

[...] books do not contain the descriptions of Polish relations with other nations, for instance Polish-Jewish or Polish-Ukrainian. The interaction is limited to the participation in wars or battles to gain power (for example, on a particular area). Cultural influences, building a diversified society and animosities associated with origins are rather not mentioned in the books²³.

The contemporary conditionings, which influence the consolidation or abolishment of stereotypes existing between nations have not been considered.

20 M. Abramowicz (ed.), *Wielka nieobecna. O edukacji antydyskryminacyjnej w systemie edukacji formalnej w Polsce. Raport z badań*, Warszawa 2011, www.tea.org.pl/userfiles/file/Wielka_nieobecna_raport.pdf.

21 *Ibidem*.

22 *Ibidem*.

23 *Ibidem*.

When it comes to religion and beliefs, this theme is also taken up, for example the information about the mosque in Bohoniki or Orthodox followers living in Poland call attention. As the authors suggest, there are

[...] individual information creating knowledge about the heritage of other religions than the Catholic in our country. However, they are scattered and usually do not create unity. It is also difficult to teach students to distinguish specific factions even Christianity²⁴.

The authors point out that the core curriculum demands the transfer of much content to upper secondary education.

It is worth noting that although the new core curriculum highly emphasises the above mentioned issues, there are still many unclear and insufficiently emphasised points. The term "Central Europe" appears in the core curriculum only in the fourth stage of teaching of history, that is general level on the first year of high school. It was not until high school level and the subject of extended complementary "History and Society" provide satisfactory elements showing even the history of Poland and other Central European countries in a comparative and synchronous perspective. Here, we can also find unclear utterances, which may be adversely extended by the authors of textbooks and by teachers. For example, the point about "[...] the cultural role of Polish people in transferring patterns of Western civilisation into Russian and Lithuanian areas" suggests only the positive role of colonization of the eastern territories and does not indicate a bilateral nature of cultural influences. Therefore, one can expect that even if students get information about individual events from the history of neighboring countries, as well as learn about the existence of national minorities in Poland, they will not see a broader picture of Central Europe, showing their interactions, similarities, parallels and dependences.

Returning to the analysis of school textbooks, there should also be noted that a large amount of research was conducted on individual, specific topics. The first analyses of this type were carried out in the 90^s of 20th century, further studies have being conducted all the time. Thus, there are works presenting the issue of existence of our neighbors history such as Lithuania²⁵, Germany²⁶, Ukraine²⁷

24 *Ibidem*.

25 A. Suchoński, *Dzieje Litwy w Polskich podręcznikach do nauczania historii* [w:] M. Kosman (ed.), *Kultura polityczna w Polsce*, Poznań 2006, s. 272–284.

26 M. Pawelec, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie we współczesnych polskich podręcznikach historii (analiza treści i sposobu prezentacji)*, 1999, www.haus.pl/pl/pdf/pub1/o7.pdf.

27 B. Urbanowicz, *Ukraina na kartach polskich podręczników historii XX wieku*, 2010, <http://lib.chdu.edu.ua/pdf/historyarchive/35/48.pdf>.

i Belarus²⁸, Czech Republic²⁹ in Polish school books. Some research deals with the problem of international relationships: for instance, Polish-Ukrainian relations. The Jewish issue is relatively well-represented in current research. We also have a more general studies on minorities.

It can be assumed that at least partially the results of these studies are consistently indicating under-representation of minorities and neighborhood in Polish books, which contributed to the creation of the new core curriculum. We, as academic lecturers, will be able to check the results soon.

Another reason for the ignorance of students could be prejudices and stereotypes present in the Polish culture, including both discourse on minorities and in general on the entire region of Central and Eastern Europe. Focusing solely on the second issue I would like to note that we are dealing with two cognitive models: a negative stereotype and the lack of any stereotypes. The main problem while working with students is rather the second way of perceiving Central European countries – a kind of semantic emptiness, which means that they do not make any associations with such slogans as “Slovakia” and “Romania”. It appears that the existence of the second model is based on the existence of the first.

Thus, this situation has its origins in the presence of a negative stereotype in Polish culture, including the territories that are interesting for us, which, as “meta-stereotype” determines the perception of these areas. Christopher Buchowski directly calls it as “the eastern bias”, writing: “The Polish attitude towards other nations is characterised by an inferiority complex towards the West and a sense of superiority over the East”³⁰.

The postcolonial theories, that have been already popular for several decades in the humanities, explain this phenomenon by being under an influence of other power for many years, which develops in the conquered culture specific characteristics. Tomasz Zarycki sums it up:

One of the ways in which Poles still compensate its post-colonial inferiority complex to a large extent, is referring to the diagrams, which orientalize its eastern neighbors – particularly Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians³¹.

28 H. Głogowska, *Białoruś i Białorusini w podręcznikach historii do szkół podstawowych w Polsce*, kamunikat.org/download.php?item=1067-8.pdf; K. Buchowski, W. Śleszyński (ed.), *Historicy polscy, litewscy i białoruscy wobec problemów XX wieku. Historiografia polska, litewska i białoruska po 1989 roku*, Białystok 2003.

29 J. Brynkus, *Obraz dziejów Czech w polskich podręcznikach historii* [w:] M. Myśka, W. Świątkiewicz (ed.), *Česka a polska mladež o sobie. Młodzież polska i czeska o sobie*, Ostrava 1998, s. 163–184.

30 K. Buchowski. *Wschodnie uprzedzenia*, „Przegląd”, nr 48, 2010.

31 T. Zarycki, *O jednostronnej wizji „Wschodu” w polskiej kulturze narodowej* [w:] J. Szomburg (ed.), *Modernizacja Polski. Kody kulturowe i mity*, Gdańsk 2008, s. 75.

Zarycki refers to the classic work *Orientalism* by Edward Said, who deconstructs the East phantasm present in the Western way of thinking and discourse.

This is a schema, under which the Orient is always presented as the backward, outdated, unpredictable, dangerous, and generally worse. [...] In a similar manner the whole Eastern Europe and often Central Europe too are perceived by the West. This picture is, what is important [...], internalized by a large part of the population of the Orient, in this case also the Central and Eastern Europe, and in particular its elite. They reproduce especially intensively the ideas of underdevelopment, immaturity, exoticism or cultural inferiority of countries and communities located on east of the Elbe³².

If we combine it with the anxious memory of the communism's legacy, especially the economic backwardness of the countries of Eastern Bloc, which Poland was a part of as well, and we realize that in Polish culture there can be found the elements of superiority not only towards the East, but also towards the southern neighbors, we will complete the whole picture. The mechanism that governs the student's choices to acquire the knowledge can be briefly summarized: only content acclaimed to be attractive is worth the effort required to acquire it.

In the face of "the West", attractive in principle, this poorer and uninteresting "East" or even the "Center" of Europe, is unfortunately lost. Interestingly, the students deal with the real disbelief to any information that makes a dent in this way of thinking, for example, the news that Miloš Forman, Oscar-winning director of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Amadeus*, filmed his first movies in socialist Czechoslovakia, or that Mircea Eliade, read during classes on anthropology, was Romanian. What is more, it can be assumed that this meta-stereotype lies at the basis of the above-described deficiencies in school education – people deciding on the core curriculum, the authors of textbooks and, finally teachers are also shaped by the dominant culture, which conveys this message.

I have already presented plausible causes of a situation that could be called "intellectual emptiness" – almost total lack of knowledge on the topics of Central Europe among students of sociology. As far as I am concerned, the most important are two reasons: a specific one – shortages in school education, and a general one – the existence of stereotypes. We should consider whether there is a healing remedy for both "diseases". The solution suggests itself – education is the best cure for the prejudice and ignorance. That is the way I have chosen. I have prepared a special, original program, which I implement during classes with the third-year of sociology studies.

The classes are titled "Cultural neighbors" and are held in the dimension of 30 hours of lectures and 30 hours of practice. Being aware of the time constraints,

³² *Ibidem*.

I have had to choose the essential issues for me. The program is modified once a year, for example, it is possible to invite guests³³ or make movie projections³⁴. However, its essential elements remain unchanged.

During lectures, I introduce the following topics.

The idea of Central Europe and the historical development of this specific region³⁵:

- 1) Central European Jews (at least 2 classes);
- 2) Romans;
- 3) an ethnic group experienced by the history – a case study of Lemko – Kresy (Eastern Borderlands of the Republic) – the history and cultural significance, from the time of the First Republic to the contemporary times;
- 4) Austria-Hungary – a multicultural monarchy;
- 5) a case study – Bukowina;
- 6) milestones in the recent history of the region: uprising in Hungary in 1956, the Prague Spring in 1968, 1989 in the Central Europe;
- 7) contemporary cultural institutions in Central Europe – Ośrodek Pogranicze Sejny (Centre Borderland Sejny) and publishing house Czarne based in Wołowiec.

During the practical classes, there was adopted a system of presentations prepared by students. I have chosen six countries that border or formerly bordered on Poland: Czech Republic, Slovakia, Belarus, Ukraine, Romania and Hungary. Two classes are devoted to each of them. The first is the presentation of general information about the country and its history, and the second is devoted to issues of culture.

Such a program allows us to synchronize information and builds in students' minds the image of Central Europe as a whole, where certain historical processes occurred in many places at the same time. It also shows the complexity and richness of both the history and culture of this area. The obligation to read four books by each student: respectively two to pass the lecture (describing the broader issues) and two for the practice classes (for each country), constitutes an additional advantage to the course. The choice of these books depended on their accessibility and affordability at the same time. Accessibility – because, on the Polish publishing market despite significant progress in recent years, there are still not too many items within the presented range. Straightforwardness – because

33 This year I invited for the classes dr Victoria Dunaeva, who talked about Russian minority in Poland.

34 In 2011/2012 we have seen for example a Czech movie *Divoké včely, 4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile* from Romania and Hungarian *Fehér tenyér*.

35 A. Podraza, *Europa Środkowa jako region historyczny*, <http://jazon.hist.uj.edu.pl/zjazd/materialy/podraza.pdf>.

my goal is to intrigue, so instead of academic items such as historical or Slavic, which could prove to be difficult after such a basic course, I have chosen rather essays³⁶ or reportages³⁷, in which the history we had talked about in the classroom is transformed into "living culture" or presented from the perspective of individual biographies of specific people.

Finally, a few optimistic remarks. Firstly, it seems that a noticeable renaissance of Central European issues in Poland has a positive impact on the overall state of knowledge. I note that current students easier than a few years ago reach the interesting content, books, films, which they may present later during a class. I am looking forward to the arrival of the first students educated at school on the basis of the new core curriculum with great curiosity. I would like to see the new content in school education, actually changing their students' state of knowledge and attitude towards the proposed topics.

Secondly, it seems to me that the work within the framework of the subject "Cultural neighbors" can convey deeper meaning. On the first classes I propose a discussion usually based on the slogan "My Europe". I ask students to give me a list of free associations with this slogan. The discussion usually shows that the associations simply apply to the word "Europe" – there appear such words as Paris, Rome, great fashion. The students state that they do not consider the Europe defined in such a way as their own. The possessive pronoun "my" remains suspended. It turns out that the post-colonial complexes presented above are still alive, even in this generation, whose representatives were born after 1989 and did not know the world before globalization and the Internet. Students do not feel as a part of Europe, because they understand this word only as the Western Europe. The second part of the task is an attempt to literally interpret the literary vision of *My Europe* by Andrzej Stasiuk. In the famous passage *Dziennik okrętowy* the writer provides his own definition of Central Europe – a geographical one. He puts the one part of the compass on a map in the central Lemko point – village Wołowiec near Slovak-Polish border, and the other leg of the compass points in Warsaw. The author describes a circle with a radius of over 300 km, and lists the names of places and countries that are included in this circle as follows: Brześć, Równe, Czerniowce, Cluj-Napoca, Arad, Szeged, Budapest, Żylna, Katowice, Częstochowa; a part of Belarus, not a few of Ukraine, respectable and comparable areas of Romania and Hungary, almost all Slovakia and a strip of the Czech Republic.

After reading this section, I ask students to draw from memory, without using any hints, a map containing these geographical names. This task turns out to be extremely difficult, not only because of the lack of cartographic competence, but

36 C. Magris, *Dunaj*, Warszawa 2004; A. Stasiuk, J. Andruchowycz, *Moja Europa. Dwa eseje o Europie zwanej Środkową*, Wołowiec 2007.

37 For example texts by M. Szczygieł or K.M. Gauss.

the above mentioned “emptiness”. They do not know exactly where so incredibly exotic countries are located and how they border with each other! What are the conclusions? There is something precious: the reflection on their own identity, not only as a Pole, but European identity as well. Since we established in the first part of the course that Polish students may not feel a full-fledged citizens of the Western Europe, the forgotten and invisible area “so-called Central Europe” appears to be some kind of alternative. We are still from here, so perhaps we should make effort to learn something about this globe.

Thirdly, the belief in the reasonableness of these activities is confirmed every time during the oral exams at the end of the year. In the case of free face to face conversation, students sometimes say very important things, perhaps too difficult to express them in the classroom. I can notice very frequently their emotional attitude and interest in the fate of the Romans in Slovakia. The most popular book from the list is still *Psożercy ze Svini* by Karl M. Gauss³⁸. Students choose it, because it is the shortest one and is accessible in the university’s library. In this way, simply heuristics of availability works, but then, this unconsciously chosen book impresses almost every student. Another example (an individual one this time), is a student who thanked me for the classes, because for the first time in her life she heard someone speaking in a neutral tone of the Jews – as people, and not all possible “vectors” of anti-Semitic stereotypes.

My general approaches to the teaching are fully in line with the assumptions of the authors cited in the first part of the text reports: TEA and *Otwarta Rzeczpospolita*. The discourse that I propose to students, emphasizes the importance of diversity of cultures, both in Central Europe and in Poland. It draws minorities out emphasizing that they should be treated equally with the numerical majority. I try to react against the above mentioned meta-stereotype and postcolonial resentments, showing the image of Poland compared to other countries – it makes visible not the uniqueness of Polish history emphasised in “Messiah’s thought calque” but its similarity with other countries’ fate. I never allow to express contempt towards the others. In this way, the education can bring therapeutic effects. I believe that by giving voice to the forgotten communities I contribute to the creation of the world, where we do not have complexes and we can simply respect each other.

38 K.M. Gauss, *Psożercy ze Svini*, Wołowiec 2005.

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Summary

“Culture of ours neighbors” – basic course on the history of Central Europe

I have been conducting my self-created classes titled “Culture of ours neighbors” in the Department of Sociology of APS for last 3 years. It aimed at familiarizing Polish students with selected cultural aspects of countries in our region. In fact, the classes have become the basic course on the history of Central Europe in relation to Polish history. The questions, that arise to me after conducting several courses on “Cultures...” are as follows:

What is the reason for such significant lack of historical knowledge among students of social sciences? How might sociologists use historical knowledge? How to fill up the student’s gap of knowledge? Does my self-created program of classes meet its objective? What are the dominating narrations in my programme and how do they relate to the narrations dominating in teaching history at lower levels? In my article I would like to present my program and my reflections on the historical education of students of sociology.

KEY WORDS: history, sociology, Central Europe, education, minorities