

# **LABOR et EDUCATIO**

## **No. 7/2019**

---

### **RESEARCH**

Norbert G. Piłkuła

ORCID 0000-0001-7862-6300

Pedagogical University of Cracow, Poland

---

## **An Elderly Person in the Process of Patriotic Raising of Young Generations of Poles Living Abroad**

## **Osoba starsza w procesie wychowanie patriotycznego młodych pokoleń Polaków żyjących na obczyźnie**

### **Introduction**

Teaching patriotism in the 21st century is particularly important in the context of dynamic social changes that form an individual as a citizen of the world. To preserve national identity in the global world, patriotic and civic education is extremely supportive. Responsibility for this upbringing, especially in people living abroad, in exile, lies mainly with family members. In their case, the nation's history, shared cultural experiences, values and traditions are very important factors in connecting people with the group to support, overcome longing for the homeland or experience its closeness by cherishing history and tradition by young generations living/born abroad. History is a particularly important factor for people living in exile, because it shows the community of fate of this group. It is the history and socio-cultural experiences of the past

that are the basis of patterns of conduct for people living abroad; they are the basis for the duration of this group, its national and patriotic values.

This article focuses on the possibilities of using patriotic attitudes of the elderly living abroad to shape patriotic attitudes of family members and communities centered around Polish Canadians' activities.

### Theoretical assumptions

To optimally introduce the specifics of the research, it is extremely important to refer to two concepts: national identity and patriotism.

National identity is a type of social identity. Krystyna Skarżyńska believes that it is "maintained not only by underlining (and sometimes overestimating) intra-group similarity, but also by forming and maintaining in the collective memory of a certain (more or less coherent) system of group beliefs regarding matters important to the duration and good of the group" (Skarżyńska, 2008, p. 56). In addition, as the author notes, the feature of these beliefs is "a strong faith of community members that the beliefs are widely shared. Continuity, long duration and positive evaluation of these views are ways of maintaining group identity and re-education of existential anxiety" (ibidem). The attributes and values resulting from the sense of national identity mentioned by Skarżyńska are particularly necessary for sustaining and building the identity by people living in a foreign country. For them, the sense of national community bond, a patriotic attitude towards the country of origin (birth) and inherited nationality are the basis of existential security. In addition, they alleviate longing for the country, family, relatives and friends living there. Attachment to a community with which an individual identifies himself or herself is also an essential element of patriotism.

There are many different theoretical views and definitions of patriotism in the sociological and pedagogical literature. As Krystyna Skarżyńska emphasizes, some locate it "exclusively or primarily in the world of emotions and feelings (...), others place it in the circle of rational beliefs, expectations and responsibilities related to participation in a certain community" (ibidem 55). She also points out that patriotism is going beyond one's individuality; it is "placing oneself in a wider community, perceiving relationships between Me and We" (ibidem).

According to L. Malinowski, “patriotism can be understood as a state in which an individual, having his or her feelings and attachment to the homeland, nation and state, simultaneously, tries to externalize them in his or her behaviour, regardless of his or her situation” (Malinowski, 1987, p. 6). The situation of people living abroad, being outside the one’s own country and the circle of national values and traditions particularly integrate the community of people (e.g. a community centered around the Polish diaspora) from one country, who follow the principles, values and norms of the national community. This is especially important in relation to a patriotic attitude, which is conditioned by the sense of national identity.

There are different types of patriotism. K. Ziółowicz describes four of the types:

- national patriotism – the sense of strong connection with the nation
- state patriotism – a bond with the country in which the small homeland is located
- civilizational patriotism – an individual’s sense of bond with the entire civilization of origin and development
- spiritual and religious patriotism – a deep bond with religion, the Church of origin, its rite and customs (Ziółowicz, 2007, p. 42–43).

Skarżyńska considers the first of them on three levels: a) the attitude of national identification, b) the understanding of the concept of nation, c) the attitude towards people outside the one’s own group.

The research conducted by E. Nowicka (Nowicka, 1996) in the mid-1990s has shown that national identity is defined in terms of a conventional bond, although ethnic criteria for national identification are also declared to be important. According to the respondents, the fact that someone is a Pole is determined by the sense of an individual (the sense of being a Pole), as well as knowledge of Polish history and culture, good command of Polish and having at least one parent of Polish nationality. About 30% of respondents have indicated that the Catholic faith and merits for the country attest to national identity of a Pole. It can therefore be said that the respondents are characterized by national and spiritual-religious patriotism. Based on research on patriotism conducted in 23 countries, it has been found that Poles discern ethnic criteria more than other Europeans, emphasizing the importance of factors independent from an individual, such as the fact of birth in the country, when determining national identity (Bokszański, 2006, p. 39–48).

When placing the issue of patriotism in experiences of Poles living abroad, it can be seen that there are many possibilities to form patriotic attitudes. They can be developed, for example, through the spiritual culture including language, literature (here: knowledge of the mother tongue and literature), arts, national songs, national symbols, religious beliefs, theatre, paintings, and also by passing on the Polish history, national values and achievements of ancestors. In living in exile, patriotic education is carried out mainly at home and in communities of people from Polish diasporas (state and church institutions). However, the family environment is of particular importance, including people who identify themselves with Poland and cultivate national traditions and customs. Very often, they are seniors who bring up not only their own children, but also their grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

### **Methodological assumptions of the research**

In accordance with the adopted methodological procedure, the subject of research has been the sense of patriotism in the perception of Poles-seniors living in Canada and the purpose has been learning about it and determining in what it manifests itself. Research problems took the form of questions: *How do Poles-seniors living in Canada perceive their own patriotism?* and *What are the manifestations of patriotism of seniors living abroad?*

The research method used was the method of poll research (Babbie, 2006, p. 159) using survey and a tool constructed for it in accordance with methodological rigors – a survey questionnaire. The research has been carried out from July to August 2019 in Toronto. 114 seniors over 60 years of age have participated in the study. Eventually, 92 questionnaires have been analysed, according to the criterion for the respondents to answer all questions in the questionnaire. 73 women and 19 men who actively attend meetings held within Senior Clubs in Toronto, have participated in the research. When selecting the group (targeted selection), the age classification proposed by the World Health Organization (WHO) has been applied and seniors over 60 years of age have been invited to the study. The age range of the seniors for women has been 62-87 years and for men 65 - 84 years.

In the next part presents a section of research on understanding of the concept of homeland, longing for it and manifestations of patriotism. The description focuses on the showing emerging general trends characteristic for the entire group of respondents.

## Patriotism in the perception of senior Poles living in Canada

The way of expressing patriotism and attachment to the national community is situation-based and connected with current and past emotions. As K. Skarżyńska emphasizes, people who are satisfied with their own life situation, experiencing social support and having optimistic plans for the future have a greater readiness to emphasize their national identity and actions for their country (Skarżyńska, 2008, p. 72). From this perspective, scientific curiosity focuses on the issue of how elderly people living away from their homeland experience patriotism. To this end, senior Poles have been asked about the understanding of the concept of homeland, circumstances in which they talk about it, feelings associated with it and manifestations of patriotic behaviour/attitudes in everyday life.

**Table 1.** Understanding the concept of “Poland” by the Canadian senior Poles

	Amount	%
Homeland	84	91.30%
Place of birth	65	70.65%
Place of childhood memories	55	59.78%
Source of longing	26	28.26%
Place I want to go back to	10	10.97%
Other	14	15.22%

Source: Own research.

The surveyed seniors, in the vast majority (91.30%), believe that Poland is their homeland. Although these people have been abroad for several decades, this is still the place of their birth and childhood memories. Over 1/3 of the surveyed seniors, speaking of Poland as their homeland, indicate that it is a source of longing for them and increases their desire to return. For the question about determining what Poland is to them, they gave many answers that went beyond the cafeteria. They have responded, i.a., that it evokes: the sense of pride (“Poland is a source of pride for me”, “Poland is my pride”); the desire to return to the places of birth/life before they left for emigration (“I would like to get to know the house where I was born”; “where I grew up”; “I want to go back”; “I want to visit new Poland”); emotion (“I am touched when I think about Poland and when I hear a conversation in Polish”). In addition,

it is understood as a source of Christian education (“Poland is the beginning of faith in God”). Homeland, as a place of memories, experiences, culture and tradition is often recalled by the seniors (data are provided in Table 2).

**Table 2.** Frequency of recalling Poland-homeland

	Amount	%
Very often	59	64.13%
Sometimes	26	28.26%
Occasionally	7	7.61%
Never	1	1.09%

Source: Own research.

Over half of the respondents (64.13%) think of Poland as their homeland very often, and 1/3 do this sometimes. Only one person never thinks of it. The thoughts and feelings of the surveyed seniors associated with their homeland relate to different areas of memories, as well as relationships and experiences (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Reactions of the seniors when they reminisce Poland

	Amount	%
I reminisce my family and friends	70	76.10%
I reminisce old times	55	59.78%
I feel longing	30	32.61%
I get emotional and moved	15	16.30%
Sometimes I cry	8	8.70%
I appreciate that I emigrated	14	15.22%
I am happy to live in Canada	46	50%
I am proud that I left and help my family/relatives in Poland	11	11.95%
Other	6	6.52%

Source: Own research.

Most often, the thoughts of the elderly focus on family and friends (76.10% of the respondents), who lived/live in Poland, and combine with memories of the period when they lived in their homeland (59.78% of the respondents). Very often, the memories are accompanied by feelings of longing, agitation, emotion, often having a physical dimension in the form of “tears of longing”. When mentioning Poland, the surveyed seniors often indicated the following motives for leaving: “I left for my children”; “I left to help my sick sister”, “I

came because the children emigrated here”, “I married a Canadian”. Although the vast majority of the respondents often return to their homeland in their thoughts and feelings, half of them are happy to live in Canada. However, this does not mean that they do not think about Poland and do not miss their loved ones, friends and places from childhood or youth. The fact that their homeland is still close to them and that they are looking for its presence in everyday life is manifested in various activities of daily life that bring them closer to their home country (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Manifestations of the presence of homeland and longing for it in everyday life of the respondents

	Amount	%
I want to talk a lot about Poland	31	33.70%
I reminisce and reflect upon the old days (I move my thoughts to Poland)	48	52.17%
I watch Polish television/listen to Polish radio	48	52.17%
I am interested in the life of my family in Poland	50	54.35%
I sing patriotic, drinking and religious songs in Polish	41	44.56%
Regret for not being able to live in the place of birth	14	15.22%
Feeling lonely in a foreign country	9	9.78%
In communicating and cultivating beautiful Polish traditions and customs	29	31.52%
In frequent telephone conversations with the family from Poland	37	40.22%
In frequent trips to Poland	13	14.13%
In reflecting upon homeland	25	27.17%
In receiving guests from Poland	18	19.56%
In reminiscing places and people from childhood	35	38.04%
In the desire to return to homeland	7	7.61%
Other	6	6.52%

Source: Own research.

The feeling of attachment to homeland and the symptoms of longing for it are most often visible in the fact that the respondents are interested in the life of the family living in Poland on a regular basis (54.35% of the respondents), they often have telephone conversations with the family (or using modern technologies – 40.22 % of the respondents), as well as in memories and recalling old times (they move their thoughts to homeland – 52.17% of the

respondents) and places (38.04% of the respondents). In addition, it is worth emphasizing that homeland and its fate are still important to them, because they often watch Polish television and listen to Polish radio (52.17% of respondents) to be up to date with the social, economic, political situation of the country, etc. Additionally, one of the activities they undertake to draw close to Poland and minimize the distance, is to sing patriotic, drinking or religious songs in Polish. This takes place during various holidays, family celebrations, as well as community or social events. Singing enables them to introduce their close family members to Poland and also becomes a source of memories of family bonds, cordial and close family relations, as well as a sense of closeness with the religious and national community. Practices that maintain a sense of patriotism and attachment to Poland, its traditions, culture and values are also present in various circumstances (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Circumstances in which seniors talk about Poland

	Amount	%
Religious holidays	50	54.35%
Social gatherings	60	65.22%
Meetings of a community operating at the church	26	28.26%
Meetings with seniors in clubs	42	45.65%
Family celebrations	51	55.43%
Trips/tours	15	16.30%
Other	5	5.43%

Source: Own research.

Most often, they are social gatherings. The respondents maintain close relationships most often with Polish friend families, visiting their homes (65.22%). They also maintain close social contacts with Polish friends from senior clubs (45.65% of the respondents) or gathered around religious communities operating at the church (28.26% of the respondents). Poland as homeland is also present in the families of the seniors during church holidays, especially Christmas and Easter (54.35% of the respondents). Family gatherings are then an opportunity to uphold what is important for the Polish national and Christian tradition, which manifests itself in specific traditions, customs, as well as life rules and values. Conversations are most often located in family and circles of friends, which confirms that the respondents most often talk about Poland with relatives from the circle of their lives (Table 6).



**Table 6.** People with whom seniors usually talk about Poland

	Amount	%
With my family in Canada	56	60.87%
With my family in Poland	55	59.78%
With friends-Poles living in Canada	57	61.95%
With friends who are not Poles (e.g. neighbours)	21	22.83%
Other	6	6.52%

Source: Own research.

The seniors usually talk about Poland with friends, peers (closeness and community of experiences) – 61.95% of the respondents and with their family living in Canada – 60.87% of the respondents (which helps to introduce young generations born abroad with Polishness), as well as in Poland – 59.78% (which allows updating knowledge about Poland and maintaining family bonds and relationships).

**Table 7.** Ways of nurturing national identity by the seniors

	Amount	%
I celebrate Polish national and church holidays	76	82.61%
I teach patriotic, drinking and religious songs to my family members	24	26.10%
I talk about Polish traditions and culture to my loved ones	56	60.87%
I speak Polish with my family and friends from Canada	71	77.17%
I teach the Polish language to family members	30	32.61%
I talk about my nationality in public	39	42.40%
I know the history of Poland and teach it to others	30	32.61%
I read Polish literature and encourage my loved ones to read it	44	47.83%
I am proud that I am a Pole	66	71.74%
Other	4	4.35%

Source: Own research.

The elderly living in Canada take many actions to maintain their national identity. To a large extent, these actions are patriotic and educational towards younger generations. Definitely most often Polishness is expressed and maintained in cultivation of Polish national and church holidays. 82.61% of the respondents undertake such activities. Knowledge about Poland preserved in traditions, combined with maintaining national identity present in the language of the nation (77.17% of the respondents speak Polish with their family

and friends living in Canada) in stories about their customs, historical experiences and Polish culture (this answer has been indicated by 60.87 % of the respondents) enables to experience Polishness and convey it by example and direct initiation, as well as organization of important celebrations in the spirit of Polishness, on a daily basis. In addition, it favours building family and social relationships and bonds, as well as the sense of personal security in a group with common national roots. Patriotism is also manifested in reading Polish literature, popularising it among family members and encouraging reading in the national language (47.83% of the respondents). In addition, 1/3 of the respondents feel responsible for building the sense of national identity of young generations of Poles born abroad, which is evident in the fact that the seniors teach Polish and the history of Poland that they know to members of their own family (children and grandchildren). Teaching of the latter, as well as awakening patriotism, the sense of belonging to a national group is expanded by teaching patriotic, drinking and religious songs by the seniors to their family members (26.10% of the respondents). This is extremely important, because traditional songs often contain the history of a nation, its history, as well as culture, tradition or religion. In addition, the seniors' national identity is emphasized by the sense of pride in being a Pole (71.74% of the respondents) and publicly declaring their nationality (42.40% of the respondents; "if someone asks me which country I come from, I always speak well about Poland"). Among the statements of the respondents there have been also those that show emphasizing the identity in manifestation of national symbols ("I honour holidays and national/church festivities by displaying the Polish flag", "there is the Polish flag on my house").

### Final conclusions

The research shows that the elderly, born in Poland and living abroad for several decades, believe that their homeland is Poland. It is still a source of pride for them, as well as of memories and a place where the most important values, traditions and customs come from. History, culture and tradition have an impact on the way these people live and think, as well as on how they build social relationships. This is also confirmed by maintaining family bonds (meetings and conversations with relatives in Canada, frequent telephone conversations with relatives in Poland), by mutual care (support and assistance in

various life situations), as well as cultivating and celebrating Polish holidays and customs. Cherishing Polishness helps the seniors to reduce their longing for their homeland, gives them the sense of continuity of national traditions and values, as well as the sense of existential security. The everyday life of the respondents is resonant with elements of Polishness, which is evident in conversations with their family from Poland, frequent memories of the time of living in their homeland, in the use of the mother tongue (including singing patriotic, religious and drinking songs), as well as in listening to and watching the media in the national language. Social meetings in a group of compatriots with common historical, life and emigration experiences (most often, in senior clubs or religious communities at Polish Roman Catholic parishes) are of special importance for maintaining Polishness and minimising the effects of longing for homeland. In addition, to maintain national identity and cultivate patriotism, they undertake numerous educational activities towards younger generations, often already born abroad. This is expressed not only in cultivating tradition, religion, culture, but also in teaching the Polish language to family members, including patriotic, religious or drinking songs in Polish. The seniors also teach Polish history to their descendants and promote literature in their native language, motivating their family members to read it. The research results presented in the empirical part are consistent with those obtained by Nowicka (1996) or Bokszański (2006). Thus, national identity is defined in terms of a conventional bond. Being Polish is shown by the perception of oneself as a Pole, as well as the knowledge of Polish history and culture, and good command of Polish. In addition, for the seniors living abroad, the Catholic faith is extremely important for the sense of Polishness. The history, native language, traditions and values characteristic for Poles are a particularly important aspect of life and the sense of national identity of the seniors living abroad. All this testifies to their patriotism of a national and spiritual-religious nature. In addition, the sense of continuity of what is most important for the elderly, provides them with the sense of stability and existential security (Skarzynska 2008, p. 56).

The sense of national identity and patriotism of the senior Poles living abroad is naturally passed on in families to young generations of Poles living and born abroad. I believe that their potential, knowledge and skills should be involved in Polish community institutions aimed at supporting patriotic education of Poles living abroad. Thanks to this, it will be possible to educate

“conscious and responsible generations on the globe to live in an understanding and compassionate dialogue, who realise their own identity and support others in it” (Nikitorowicz, 2005, p. 16). In addition, another value of this education, as K. Skarżyńska emphasizes, is that “it is also an investment in the development of human and social capital, i.e. educating skills and beliefs that improve the quality of life of individuals and social groups” (Skarżyńska, 2008, p. 72).

**Abstract:** The presented article focuses on the issue of patriotism and national identity as perceived by the elderly of Polish nationality living abroad, in Canada. The theoretical part presents a defining understanding of the two main categories from the point of view of K. Skarżyńska and L. Malinowski, which has become the basis for constructing the research.

The study has been conducted among 92 Poles – elderly people living in Canada. For this purpose, the survey method has been used with survey technique and the author’s own research tool. An attempt has been made to answer two research questions: How do Poles-seniors living in Canada perceive their own patriotism? and What are the manifestations of patriotism of seniors living abroad? The empirical part presents results of the research, as well as their analysis and interpretation. In the end, the possibilities of including the elderly in the process of patriotic education of young generations of Poles living/born abroad have been indicated.

**Keywords:** elderly person, patriotism, national identity, patriotic education abroad

**Streszczenie:** W prezentowanym artykule skoncentrowano się na zagadnieniu patriotyzmu i tożsamości narodowej w odczuciu osób starszych narodowości polskiej, żyjących na obczyźnie, w Kanadzie. W części teoretycznej przedstawiono definicyjne rozumienie dwóch wiodących kategorii w ujęciu K. Skarżyńskiej i L. Malinowskiego, co stało się podstawą do skonstruowania badań.

Badania przeprowadzono wśród 92 Polaków, osób starszych, zamieszkujących Kanadę. Wykorzystano w tym celu metodę sondażu z wykorzystaniem techniki ankiety oraz własnym narzędziem badawczym. Podjęto próbę odpowiedzi na dwa pytania badawcze: Jak postrzegają własny patriotyzm Polacy – seniorzy żyjący w Kanadzie? oraz W czym przejawia się patriotyzm seniorów żyjących na obczyźnie?

W części empirycznej przedstawiono wyniki badań oraz dokonano ich analizy i interpretacji. W zakończeniu wskazano możliwości włączenia osób starszych w proces wychowania patriotycznego młodych pokoleń Polaków żyjących/urodzonych na obczyźnie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** osoba starsza, patriotyzm, tożsamość narodowa, wychowanie patriotyczne na obczyźnie

## References

- Babbie, E. (2006). *Badania społeczne w praktyce*. Warszawa: PWN.
- Bokszanski, Z. (2006). Polacy o sobie: autoidentyfikacje i samooceny, *Kultura Współczesna*, No. 1, p. 39–48.
- Malinowski, L. (1987). *Barwy patriotyzmu*. Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Związków Zawodowych.
- Nikitorowicz, J. (2005). Kreowanie tożsamości dziecka w społeczeństwie zróżnicowanym kulturowo. In: J. Izdebska, T. Sosnowski (eds.), *Dziecko i media elektroniczne – nowy wymiar dzieciństwa, Vol. 1. Telewizja i inne mass media w życiu dziecka – wyzwaniem dla edukacji medialnej*. Białystok: Trans Humana.
- Nowicka, E. (1996). Polskość w świadomości młodzieży szkolnej i studenckiej. In: E. Nowicka, J. Nawrocki (eds.), *Inny-obcy-wróg. Swoi i obcy w świadomości młodzieży szkolnej i studenckiej*. Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa.
- Skarżyńska, K. (2008). Rodzaje patriotyzmu. Czy i jak osobiste doświadczenia oraz wychowanie różnicują postawy narodowe? In: M. Dudzikowa, M. Czerepaniak-Walczak (eds.), *Wychowanie, pojęcia, konteksty, procesy. Interdyscyplinarne ujęcie*, Vol. 4. Gdańsk: GWP.
- Ziołowicz, K. (2007). *Edukacja regionalna jako element edukacji patriotycznej*. Kielce: Oficyna Wydawnicza Scriptum.

Date of the submission of article to the Editor: 30.09.2019

Date of acceptance of the article: 01.12.2019