

CREATIVITY FOR MULTICULTURALISM: THE ARTISTIC AND EDUCATIONAL ACTION FOR DEVELOPING BORDERLAND IDENTITY

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Abstract. The purpose of this text is to showcase creativity in action, creativity that has been directed to fostering mutual understanding and cooperation in a culturally diverse environment – in a region that has seen ethnic conflict. The text is devoted to the analysis of the work of two inter-related organisations – the Borderland Foundation, Poland and the Center for Borderland Arts, Cultures and Nations, Poland – which for decades have been working innovatively on a complex history, together with the local community. This is a history that includes nationally and religiously diverse groups. Experiences with the local community have provided the inspiration for the Borderland Foundation and the Centre for Borderland Arts, Cultures and Nations for further creative work in art, education and history focussed on the phenomenon of borderland identity. The text is based on an analysis of both institutions' websites, as well as interviews with their team members and project participants.

Keywords: borderland, borderland identity, creative action, creativity, Polish-Lithuanian borderland.

Introduction

The text was developed on the basis of an analysis of data collected and interviews with individual connected to two institutions working in the area of multiculturalism, as well as participants in their projects. The organisations – the Centre for Borderland Arts, Cultures and Nations (CBACN) and the non-governmental organization, the Borderland Foundation (BF) – are financed by the local authorities and are located in the Polish-Lithuanian borderland, in Sejny, Poland and Krasnogruda, Poland. The two organisations work closely together, on the basis of a partnership agreement.

The purpose of this text is to reveal borderland topics and creative activity in a culturally diverse context, taking as case studies the work of the CBACN and the BF.

Methodologically, I apply here a triangulation of methods: I analyse existing data; I analyse the websites maintained by the BF and the CBACN. The material published on their

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websites includes recordings that document their projects and a blog for project participants. The analysis of this data was expanded with interviews with the founders of these centres and participants of two of their projects – the *Borderland School* (BS, in Polish: *Szkoła Pogranicza*) and the *Children’s Borderland University* (CBU, in Polish: *Dziecięcy Uniwersytet Pogranicza*). This additional data was collected in the autumn of 2020, via online interviews in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Websites are one of many new research areas for sociology. As technology develops, methods of research into websites evolve and improve. An example of this kind of analysis is the 2008 research of Barbara Fatyga and Albert Hupa, Polish cultural researchers, included in the *Report on the State and Diversity of Urban Culture in Poland* (2009, in Polish: *Raport o stanie i zróżnicowaniach kultury miejskiej w Polsce*). In the course of analyzing sociological studies of websites, Marek Troszyński has pointed out that cultural institutions have had to enter a new world of digital communication. He shows that new categories of data have emerged with the development of digital forms of communication – universally accessible data that is not formulated in response to a researcher’s questions (Troszyński, 2016, p. 88).

In my research into Internet sites, I have focussed on the analysis of content – mainly on the history of the BF and the CBACN and their forms of creative work. The data included on websites also includes recordings that document particular projects, interviews with key people for the projects in question.

1. Creativity – action through art

Creativity can be defined for various contexts: as an element of the productive work of artists; as a search for new solutions; as something developing new models of cooperative work – as all these things it impacts the pursuit of innovation. Tom R. Burns, Nora Machado and Ugo Corte write that creativity is a process of producing and shaping ideas and artifacts. They emphasize that from a sociological perspective it is essential to note that creativity is a process in which a variety of subjects are involved in the pursuit of innovation and creative development (see Burns et al., 2015, pp. 181–182). Burns, Machado and Corte also remark that creativity tends to be viewed from a psychological or management perspective – there are few sociological works directly addressing the topic. Their conception of the sociological systems model of creativity sees creativity as a process that takes place in a social environment, related to innovation, changes and transformations and dependent on social actors, social structure and material resource (see Burns et al., 2015, p. 188). Creativity can be defined in various ways – directly invoking art, action or innovation. I personally feel close to the definition of creativity that Melody Milbrandt and Lanny Milbrandt invoke when emphasizing process and agency. They show us that creativity is the shaping of something that already exists – into something new. But they also draw attention to the fact that creative activity has its guardians – the experts and critics who decide whether any given creative effort is socially acceptable (M. Milbrandt & L. Milbrandt, 2011, p. 9). In the case of the BF and the CBACN, I am speaking about creativity in the space of artistic work aimed at a particular audience – the “animators” of social life, teachers from culturally diverse regions and the activists of various cultural and social institutions. This is creativity built on a foundation of socially engaged art.

Conceptions of creativity that view it as action leading to change are usefully related to artistic activity, to social-engaged art where creativity is a key element. Niziołek, a sociologist focussed on social engaged art, has noted that artistic work can represent a key part of projects involving a socially diverse environment (whether “diverse” in the sense of class, ethnicity, religion, migration *etc.*). But for art to fulfil its own role in this, I should pay attention to a few points emphasized by Niziołek. She believes this kind of work enables us to draw key conclusions on the influence of art on social integration. Niziołek stresses that art can also increase division or exclusion. To avoid this, it is important to get to know the needs of the audience and their competencies. But above all, it is essential to create conditions for dialogue and communication. Niziołek also believes it is worth making sure that the reception of artistic work is a collective endeavour (see 2014, p. 60). She places conditions on socially inclusive art or any creative undertakings in sensitive areas by invoking what is important for the participants/recipients of that art. This fits well with the approach taken by the BF and the CBACN over many years. Both these institutions have their headquarters in Poland, in the Podlaskie Voivodeship (PV) – in the Polish-Lithuanian borderland. In their work they focus on the specific features of the borderland and the idea of multiculturalism.

The PV, located at the Eastern border of the European Union (EU), is inhabited mainly by Polish, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Lithuania, Russian, Tatars and Romani people (in the past by Jews as well) – and by people possessing double national or ethnic identity, as well as inhabitants with “blurred” identity. Furthermore, the PV is diverse from the perspective of religion (faith), language, local and regional location.

2. Borderland

Ethnic relations, structures of domination and subordination in the context of nationally dominant groups and ethnic minorities – these are some of the main topics of interest in the research of sociologists, political scientists *etc.* One of the growing areas here is border studies. Border studies research looks into the phenomenon of a border and borderlands, analyzing them from the perspective of various disciplines.

Borderlands have been the subject of many analyses wherein various aspects have been prominent: territory, ethnic relations, the social or cultural context and the geopolitical circumstances. Borderland typologies have been created (see Babiński, 2001, pp. 76–80). Recurring components have come to make up a kind of common denominator: references to the territory connected to the border, references to ethnic differences within communities. When writing about borderlands, Sadowski has drawn our attention to the “territorial bond”, a bond which connects diverse communities with the same borderland (2020, p. 296).

I treat borderland as a category serving the definition of a domain (field) marked out by its particular relationship with the territory of the representatives of two or more coexisting ethnic or cultural groups. These groups work to sustain (or appropriate) the territory and the results of their actions head in the same direction (defined by borderland personality, borderland identity, culture, institutions, organisations, borderland movements *etc.*).

Cudowska writes about borderland identities in the context of analysing creativity. She conceives of these identities as a sphere of human activity, of the community’s experience.

Cudowska invokes the words of Mikhail Bakhtin who stressed that the human experience of the world is based on a dialogue of “I” and “You” (Cudowska, 2004, p. 259). In relation to borderlands, I might say that this is a space defined by a continual, dialogic creation of identity with the constant presence of Others. From this perspective, a borderland is a decisive influence on the ways human beings exist; it provides perspective on your own culture, the perspective of Others with a different cultural code. The Other here is not an alien but an opportunity for developing attitudes of tolerance and mutual acceptance. Nikitorowicz emphasizes the significance of education for multiculturalism in the borderland – to be able to develop openness, tolerance and friendly coexistence. He locates educational endeavours within the context of building intercultural competencies (Nikitorowicz, 2020, pp. 417–419).

In this text I will consider borderlands in a broad sense but paying particular attention to culture. Culture has particular significance for borderlands: it can carry within itself openness to others and an affirmation of a diverse community. Culture can also emphasize ethnocentrism leading to barriers between cultures. Nikitorowicz has considered the meaning of culture in borderlands and in this context invoked the concept of “creative effort”, meaning a conscious meeting of your own culture and your neighbour’s:

“I understand creative effort as the strength of will to get to know your own culture – as an essential basis for recognising, discovering and respecting the cultures of others, as a fundamental opening up towards ‘others’ accompanied by an enrichment of oneself and one’s own, inherited culture as well as newly encountered and acquired cultures” (2020, p. 422).

The institutions I am focussing on are located in the Polish-Lithuanian borderland (in Sejny and Krasnogruda), but their work also considers other borderlands. The co-founder of both these organisations, Czyżewski, defines borderlands in the following way:

“The borderland is the agora. In this place, one who is not in dialogue with others is vegetating at the periphery. The centre of this sphere is always in a meeting – i.e. anywhere – and the surface area represents that which is untouched by the other – i.e. nowhere at all. The borderland takes away from the border the ruthlessness of a thin line or a surface which can serve to chop up and divide open space, impoverishing Everything in the immediate vicinity” (2016, p. 40).

I think that this definition, though one that has been created outside the academy, captures the essence of everyday relations of communities living in a borderland – in the neighbourhood of a previous or present border. For borderlands are not only imbued with a dimension of presence. They are frequently entangled with the past. Their history may be connected with positive events but may also bear signs of conflict and trauma. The Polish-Lithuanian borderland, where I find the BF and the CBACN, has precisely this more complex kind of history. It is a history that has provided the inspiration for creative, educational work aimed at dialogue in culturally diverse communities.

The Polish-Lithuanian borderland, in the North-Eastern part of Poland acquired its present shape after the World War II (WWII). However, when analysing the ethnic relations in this borderland, I should not forget its earlier history. The interwar period and both world wars very much influenced the fate of these lands, which were passed from ruler to ruler. The bloodiest of the events, one claiming the lives of many victims from both sides in the conflict,

was the Sejny Uprising. And the liberation of Vilnius in 1920 by the Poles is a very different event from the perspective of Lithuanian history. The countries only signed their Friendship Treaty between Lithuania and Poland in 1994 (see Bieńkowska-Ptasznik, 2007, pp. 117–118). At present, this borderland is home to Poles and Lithuanians, Russian Old Believers. Before the WWII Jews were also a significant part of the population.

Many difficult subjects connected with the past have become taboo over the years or have been marginalised. State policy following WWII, based on the idea of the ethnically monolithic nation state, did not allow prominence to be given to any ethnic or national differences, even less to continue the pre-war cultural direction of this region.

So, part of history has been passed over in silence and this impacts the way people living in the region related to one another, how they created social divisions and how they defined their identity. Ethnic identity in general is formed against the backdrop of an opposition between “self” and “other”. Though the category of “other” or “alien” always appears in the context of identity, it has particular meaning for ethnic identity. One’s membership of a given ethnic group is emphasized in this way, at the same time cutting oneself off from other groups. This identification also brings in its wake identification with a given culture. Warmińska writes: “On the one hand ethnicity can serve pragmatic or political aims; on the other hand, it can satisfy the psychological need for belongingness and ground the meaning of human existence” (1999, pp. 22–23).

Ethnic identity in a borderland context takes on particular significance. A borderland is a space – and not only a physical space but above all a social space – in which interaction with the “other” is constant.

3. The Borderland Foundation and the Centre for Borderland of Arts, Cultures and Nations

Sejny, where both the BF and the CBACN have their seats, is a small town of six thousand, lying a dozen or so kilometres from the Lithuanian border. There live around one thousand Lithuanians in the town itself and in the entire municipality the Lithuanian community represents 30% of the population. The town has a rich as well as difficult history.

The first written record of Sejny is from 1522. In 1563 Sejny was granted the status of a town. It was located at the crossroads of the Polesia, Lithuanian and Prussian routes which encouraged its multicultural dimension. This character was still evident before the WWII when Lithuanians, Poles, Russians, Belarusians, Jews and Germans all lived alongside one another. Sejny is also a centre of Lithuanian culture. Lithuania has its Consulate there and there is also the headquarters of the Lithuanian Society of Saint Casimir. Many artistic groups operate there as well as the Lithuanian Community Centre (Bieńkowska-Ptasznik, 2007, p. 45). A founder of the BF and the CBACN, Czyżewski, describes the borderland phenomenon in this way:

“This rich borderland microcosmos, full of dynamism and tension, has persisted through cataclysms of history that have changed it dramatically: emigration to America for food against a backdrop of pogroms in Czarist Russia, the war between neighbouring Poland and Lithuania to decide which of the emerging nation

states would include Sejny after the First World War, exile to Siberia and German camps, the Holocaust, and operation ‘Wisła’ in 1947 which led to the resettlement of Ukrainians from Carpathia to western and northern regions, including our region” (2008, pp. 20–21).

The BF was set up in 1990, just after the systemic changes in Poland and when, following the period of centralised power and the domination of a “uniformly Polish nation”, there was a return to democratic values. Artists connected to the BF fitted in well with the development of a new, democratic society – the rebirth of local communities after the end of the People’s republic¹.

At present the BF has “public benefit” status. It was founded by people connected to art and alternative theatre who had since the 1980s organised the *Village for Meeting – International Workshops in Alternative Culture* (in Polish: *Wioska spotkań – międzynarodowe warsztaty kultury alternatywnej*) in Czarna Dąbrówka, Poland. During their campaign lasting several months and called *Journey to the East* they reached Sejny. Sejny, with its complex history and abandoned synagogue, was the ideal place for developing artistic events aimed at cooperating with local communities.

The BF and CBACN teams are mostly the same people. At first there were only a few people in the team, and today they are known as the founders. They are still a fixture in all the projects. Over the years, others have joined, making up a total of around 15 people. Those who joined after the founders are previous participants from the BF or CBACN’s projects. The founders are: Czyżewski, Małgorzata Sporek-Czyżewska, Bożena Szroeder and Wojciech Szroeder. It has been their passion and curiosity about this area that has laid the foundations for the projects:

- Czyżewski – actor, poet, cultural animator, essayist, editor. Someone who has been and remains active in a large variety of projects. He has been associated with Sejny since 1990. Czyżewski initiated the founding of the CBACN and became its director. Together with the CBACN team he has been the creator and producer of the following programs and initiatives, among others: the Borderland Cultures Documentation Centre (BCDC, in Polish: *Centrum dokumentacji kultur pogranicza*), the BS, *Open Regions of Central and Eastern Europe* (ORCEE, in Polish: *Otwarte regiony Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*) (Siedmiogród (Romania), Bośnia, Bukowina, Spisz), the Central-European Culture Forum (CECF, in Polish: *Środkowoeuropejskie forum kultury*), *Borderland Person* (in Polish: *Osoba z pogranicza*), *The Glass Bead Game* (in Polish: *Gra szklanych koralików*), the *New Agora Travelling Academy* (in Polish: *Akademia podróżowania Nowa Agora*), *Intercultural Dialogue in the Caucuses and Central Asia* (in Polish: *Dialog międzykulturowy na Kaukazie iw Azji Środkowej*), the Eastern Partnership Dialogue Academy (in Polish: *Akademia dialogu partnerstwa Wschodniego*), *Medea/Ponte*, *The Tales of Coexistence* (in Polish: *Opowieści o współistnieniu*). Czyżewski created the International Centre for Dialogue (ICD, in Polish: *Międzynarodowe centrum dialogu*) in Krasnogruda. He is the author of numerous publications connected with the subject of borderland and is the co-creator of *A Handbook of Dialogue: Trust and Identity* (Czyżewski et al., 2011);

¹ After WWII, Poland was a state connected to the Eastern Bloc, subjected to centralised power and censorship. Local communities lost their personhood. Subjects related to ethnicity were subject to censorship, because the people’s authorities were developing the ideology of the Polish state as a nationally monolithic society.

- Sporek-Czyżewska – cultural animator, expert in theatre. Founder of the BF and co-founder of the CBACN. She has been the co-creator of projects such as: the CECF, ORCEE, the BS, *The Memory of Earlier Times* (in Polish: *Pamięć starowieku*), *Borderland Person*, *Camera Pro Minoritate*, *Cafe Europa*. She has run the educational-cultural program *A Class in Cultural Heritage* (in Polish: *Klasa dziedzictwa kulturowego*) with Wojciech Schroeder;
- Bożena Szroeder, the co-founder of the CBACN is a teacher and cultural organizer. Since 1999 she has been running her own program of intercultural education in schools in Sejny, as well as workshops on traditions from areas surrounding the Sejny area, entitled: “Our Neighbours – Yesterday and Today” (in Polish: *Nasi sąsiedzi – wczoraj i dziś*), “What Sejny Remembers” (in Polish: *Co pamięta Sejny*), “Three Old Men” (in Polish: *Trzech starców*). She is also the joint head of the program *The Glass Bead Game*, devoted to cultural work on the memory and identity of place and currently being implemented in cooperation with many centres in Poland and across Europe. For her educational activity, combining creativity and innovation, she has been awarded the prize of the Marshal of the PV in 2008 and the Irena Sendler Award for “Repairing the World”. In 2020 Bożena Szroeder has been nominated for the KARTA Center Prize;
- Wojciech Szroeder, the co-founder of the CBACN, is the creator of the Klezmer Orchestra of the Sejny Theatre (KOST) and he runs the educational and cultural program *A Class in Cultural Heritage*, devoted to understanding the multicultural heritage of the surrounding region as well as the multi-ethnic regions of Central and Eastern Europe. He also runs the youth theatre group called *Sejny Theatre* (in Polish: *Teatr Sejneński*) whose performances have included *Dybuk* and *Weather Fish* (in Polish: *Wijuny*). In 2018 he received the Prize of the PV for his overall achievement in cultural and educational work – including the creation, in 1996, and heading of the KOST.

The program *A Class in Cultural Heritage* – the CBACN realised three cycles of *A Class in Cultural Heritage* during the years: 1992–1996, 1996–2000 and 2000–2002. Youth from *A Class in Cultural Heritage* have regular meetings twice a week, they participate in theatrical and historical-cultural lessons, they prepare practically to realise the programs and projects of the CBACN. As of today, they have taken part in the preparation of projects like: *Youth Dialogues on Tolerance* (in Polish: *Młodzieżowe dialogi o tolerancji*), *The Memory of Earlier Times*, *All Souls’ Day in the White Synagogue* (in Polish: *Zaduszki w Białej Synagodze*), *The Central-European Cultural Forum Where the Greenery Meets Sky-Blue* (in Polish: *Tam, gdzie zieleń spotyka się z błękitem*) – encounters with Romani culture, *ORCEE*, *Camera Pro Minoritate* (Pogranicze.sejny.pl, 2003–2020c).

All the BF’s work, as defined in its statute, is focussed on borderlands, on advocating a borderland ethic, creating conditions for dialogue and building bridges between various cultures, religions, nationalities. The BF’s work has inspired many others, leading to the creation in 2003 of the Association of Friends of the BF, registered in the United States (US) and whose office is in Alexandria, Virginia, near Washington D.C., US. The foundation finances its activities mainly on the basis of grants. It cooperates closely with the CBACN and with which it has signed a cooperation agreement.

The BF’s founders define its mission as follows: our mission is to develop everyday practices in Central and Eastern Europe that create open communities in areas where different

nationalities, religions and cultures co-exist. We find and develop means to preserve tradition as a way of establishing a modern identity. We achieve this through inter-generational dialogue, creative long-term educational programs, stimulating active participation in cultural activities and the collection and publication of historical and cultural literature (Czyżewski, 2003).

The first activities of the BF were related to developing dialogue with the local community by means of art and cultural initiatives connected with the history of Sejny. The creators of the BF initiated projects to document the history of Sejny and together with local inhabitants they created *The Sejny Chronicles* (in Polish: *Kroniki Sejneńskie*) (Kronikisejnenskie.wordpress.com, 2020), searching for information about people connected with Sejny. Through their artistic work they have managed to demystify the complicated history of Sejny, connected to the Sejny uprising in 1919 (see Buchowski, 2020). On the BF's webpage, in the archive of texts on the Sejny Uprising, there is a remark that the archived texts include various points of view. There is no censorship here or an attempt to impose one point of view.

Artists connected to the BF have, through their daily artistic work, developed a space for dialogue about history and today, a space including everyone, regardless of religion or nationality.

4. Creative educational work in the borderland

“A borderland is a place, a community where inhabitants feel at home despite their considerable differences. It is a place that does not wipe out those differences but helps you live with them” (Interview No. 4).

The beginning was the journey to Sejny – settling here and the desire to know the history of this place by entering into a dialogue with the local community. This dialogue was not an easy one because of the complicated and difficult history of the region. In fact, the appearance of outsiders – people who had come from the central region of the country, people with completely different experience – created a space to encounter local history. The experience of having a dialogue with a community that is culturally diverse, a community with its own baggage of difficult experiences, became the inspiration, for instance, for *The Sejny Chronicles* and the *BS*.

The creators of the BF – through their artistic, creative and socially engaged work with children and other inhabitants of Sejny – have provided people with a space for dialogue. They have created a place and activities that have allowed Sejny inhabitants to tell the story of their ancestors, their nationality. Projects invoking the past have also permitted the commemoration of the Jewish population which is no longer present in this area. By means of art, new values have been creatively formed, ideas have been creatively developed about the importance of this place – the place where people live – and remembrance of former inhabitants has been creatively reinstated.

The CBACN, closely tied to the BF, was founded 1991 and in the beginning its headquarters were also in Sejny. Sejny town council granted the CBACN three buildings: the Borderland House, the Old Yeshiva and the Sejny Synagogue – the latter becoming a place

for theatre and klezmer concerts. The CBACN came to life thanks to the Suwałki Voivodeship (SV), Poland and currently is financed jointly by the PV² and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (MCNH), Poland. Since 2011, the CBACN also operates in the IDC in Krasnogruda, run by the BF³. The following ateliers operate within the framework of the CBACN: the Workroom of the BCDC, the Regional Education Workroom, *The Sejny Chronicles* Workroom, the Musical Workroom, the Music of the Place Workroom, the Storytelling Workroom, the Nature Workroom (birds, Earth), the Krasnogruda Pantry Workroom, the Deep Hymn Workroom, the Mask Workroom, the New Media Workroom, the Art Workroom, the Exhibition Workroom, the Small Sejny Museum, the Sejny Synagogue Gallery and the Sejny Jazz Collective. Each of these ateliers realises its own projects with the CBACN and these projects also overlap. One of the CBACN's first projects which could be called creative education through art was the work *The Sejny Chronicles* telling the story of the most elderly inhabitants of Sejny. The script and direction of this performance was organised by Bożena Szroeder, the co-founder of the BF. The work was prepared by the youth theatre that operates at the CBACN (see Namiotko, 2012, pp. 118–120). As well as this theatrical work, which was performed in various towns across Poland, workshops were also organised on intercultural dialogue practices for culture animators, teachers and young people. Over time, the performance came to be an integral part of the educational program. The whole project evolved and gave birth to further creative work that formed *The Sejny Chronicles*. As part of the workroom local history, local songs and stories were collected. This formed the basis for workshops as well as a collection of documentary films, *Borderland Tales*, collections of stories *etc.* As part of Workroom of the BCDC there appeared the ten-year-old Fairy Tales Film Collection which has led to the creation of over 80 animation films about a variety of ethnic or national groups – about Romani people, Lithuanians, Poles, Russians, Russian Old Believers and about Jews. The Fairy Tales Film Collection includes the following series which have already had four instalments: “Borderland Tales and Legends” (in Polish: *Opowieści i legendy z pogranicza*), “Songs of the Borderland” (in Polish: *Pieśni pogranicza*), “Tales of the Grandfathers” (in Polish: *Opowieści dziadków*) and “Krasnogruda Tales” (in Polish: *Opowieści Krasnogrudzkie*).

Most work and projects of the BF and the CBACN intertwine. This work covers a broad area – from educational initiatives, through popularising literature and art, borderland documentation gathering to original artistic work. The unique talents and education of the creators of these institutions allows them to make creative use of history and art and thereby contribute to multicultural dialogue and borderland identity.

The BF and CBACN have been working for nearly 30 years and in this time, they have completed many projects and programs. During the same period, the founders of both organisations have taught a few generations of multicultural educators, cultural animators. They have produced original and innovative workshop programs on cultural heritage and ones' neighbours in borderlands.

I would like now to describe a few examples of creative education.

² Following the 1999 administrative reform in Poland, the SV became a part of the PV.

³ IDC in Krasnogruda was set up in a renovated mansion that had belonged to the family of Czesław Miłosz. The property was loaned to the BF in 2002. Krasnogruda is a village not far from Sejny.

The program called *BS* was one of the BF's flagship programs (there have been four editions of this program). Its aim was to develop the community of animators and researchers working on the idea of borderland. Participants received not only knowledge and skills but also the opportunity to experience a borderland on field trips. Participants have included cultural animators, local non-governmental organizations activists, young researchers and those with a practical interest in the subject of borderlands and the meeting of cultures.

Every edition of the program has been made up of three key workshops and a journey. The workshops dealt with three points:

- the leadership workshop which: provided participants with the necessary competencies and skills for managerial work, to be able to create programs and set up project teams;
- the borderland workshop – focussed on developing knowledge related to borderlands. Each edition has been focussed on culture, history and the current situation of a specific borderland. The goal of this workshop was deeper thought on borderlands;
- the animator workshop – on the competencies related to specific projects within a given edition of the *BS*.

Each borderland edition also included a specific journey, each included experience of borderland places such as: Sejny, Chernivtsi (Ukraine), Grodno (Belarus), Kaunas (Lithuania), Moldavia and others.

As the *BS*' creators write on the borderland website:

“Sessions of the ‘Borderland School’ take place in areas where multiculturalism is still a living value. [...] The journey was the second, practical part of the ‘Borderland School’ program. The goal was to experience multiculturalism in areas inhabited by people of various nationalities, religions and, most of all, to meet people who encounter the challenges of borderlands on a daily basis and are able, in a creative way, to make use of the energy available” (Pogranicze.sejny.pl, 2003–2020d).

It is worth noting that the *BS* projects essentially involve work in international teams, already expressing the idea of a discussion on borderlands and cultural diversity. But mere interaction with the representatives of other cultures is not enough to develop creativity. Leung and Wang, specialists in management, point out that the widespread conviction that the cultural diversity of a team *ipso facto* leads to its creativity is a mistaken one. They argue that working in a team like that can even reduce creativity because of negative social processes that can appear (Leung & Wang, 2015, p. 1008). The assumption of the *BS* was from the beginning not only to put together people from various cultures but, above all, to give them the space and the inclination to get to know each other's cultures. And not only theoretically but also through practical experience. If I was to provide keywords characterising the *BS*' program, they would be: international team, project, travel.

The participants in the *BS* – mainly participants from the first years of the project – spoke about their inspirations and what surprised them. One used the phrase “tasting culture” when describing her impressions from the journey undertaken as part of the school. She said that the journeys that formed part of her project were unique – unique places, people, local dishes. She emphasized that the two-week journey through different countries (Romania, Hungary, Serbia) was extremely inspiring and showed her multiculturalism more deeply than the classroom workshops.

The *BS*' first participants recalled that the form of the course itself was innovative – not lectures and talks, but project-work, workshops and thematic journeys to borderland locations, culturally diverse places:

“This was my first experience on such a scale, with these kinds of projects, training, workshops and all in an international group. That was important for me. It was an eye-opener and it impacted my further contribution very much” (Interview No. 1).

Respondents also drew attention to the specific subjects of particular school projects and to the element of travel:

“I took part in the first *Borderland School*. At the time, there was a lot of talk about the war in Yugoslavia – it was the main subject at the first meeting. The next stage was the journey to Ukraine and to Romania – a journey that taught us about specific places. The journey enabled us to ‘feel’ those places” (Interview No. 2).

Our research respondents also spoke about the influence the *BS* had on their further professional life. They emphasized that they applied project and workshop methods in their subsequent work. Two respondents now work in academia. They spoke about the fact that participation in the *BS* inclined their academic interests in the same direction:

“It was then that we spoke about borderlands with such an interdisciplinary accent and it was then that I became especially interested in the subject. For me it was exactly this interdisciplinary approach to discussing borderlands and our journeys also had a great impact” (Interview No. 2).

One respondent, when accounting for her experiences and inspiration drifted into saying what a great inspiration for her the founders of the CBACN and the BF had been – “These are people who have combined their personal and professional lives – they are what they do” (Interview No. 3). The same person also noted that the BF founders

“introduced new thinking about ethnicity, about difference, ethnic history, religious history. And besides this theoretical approach, they also changed the place they live in. They now work more locally. At the beginning there was talk that they are a bit weird – outsiders, some kind of elite. In Krasnogruda especially they began working with children and they broke down those barriers” (Interview No. 3).

These words very much reflect the accounts of the creators of the *BS* – how they developed their relationships with the local community.

The first two borderland schools were run by the BF and CBACN founders together with invited experts. The following two schools also engaged a younger generation – related children and project participants. The organiser of the last two schools spoke about the basic goals:

“For our parents it was initially about the war in the former Yugoslavia; for younger term members it was about cooperation with the East. But the theme was always related to idea of borderland in a broad sense – our workshop’s subject. Depending on the stage we are at, we develop the program accordingly. [...] Borderlands for us are borderlands that exist near great cities, they are intergenerational borderlands – because for us at this moment intergenerational work is important. And the subjects we are interested in also have their own borderlands – the border areas between art, education and social activism. This interdisciplinary work is also a source of inspiration” (Interview No. 5).

In 2012–2013, the BF organised a series of meetings of the Summer School for Intercultural Dialogue – aimed at impacting the projects of leaders working towards the integration of multicultural communities, journalists, activists, artists, cultural animators and teachers.

Another key element of the BF's work is the commemoration of artists connected to borderlands or with the idea of multiculturalism in Europe. The Person of the Borderland Award (in Polish: *Osoba nagrody pogranicza*) supports this goal – with the title of “Person of the Borderland” (in Polish: *Osoba pogranicza*) being awarded to an artist from the Central-European region who has expressed a borderland ethos in their work. The initiators of the program write on the CBACN's webpage:

“Awarding this title does not mean a prize in any material form. It represents the effort to popularise the work of the recipient by publishing books, organising exhibitions, meetings and other artistic presentations. The culmination of the project is a three-day, international meeting dedicated to the award winner including the participation of guests who come to present various aspects of the life and work of the ‘Person of the Borderland’ or to present works of their own dedicated to the award winner. The title of ‘Borderland Person’ is awarded every two years” (Pogranicze.sejny.pl, 2003–2020a).

In 1999, the award went to Jerzy Ficowski; in 2001, to Tomas Venclova. In 2003, the title was awarded to Arvo Pärt; in 2005, to Bohdan Osadczuk. In 2009, the award was given to Claudio Magris and in 2019, to Irena Veisaitė.

In the spring of 2020, the BF, together with the CBACN, received funding from the Polish MCNH for the realisation of the project: *CBU*. This is an initiative for a group of 200 schoolchildren from a primary school in Sejny. The goal is to educate through art, to develop multicultural skills and exhibit the wealth of the cultural inheritance in the Polish-Lithuanian borderland. The children will not only learn, they will participate in artistic meetings and local walks around the Sejny region.

These walks will focus on the borderland and its significance as a place where various cultures, traditions, languages and religions meet. The creators of this program have divided it into several subject areas:

- Literary Class – focussed on three writers who come from three different cultural traditions connected to the Sejny borderland: Miłosz, Antanas Baranauskas, Leja Golda Rozenfeld;
- Classical Music Class – a program for class VII to expand the understanding of young people of the history of music – an area not included in the regular school curriculum;
- Theatrical Class – to equip young people with an understanding of the culture of the European humanities, in which theatre traditions reach back to origins in ancient times and Mediterranean culture;
- Music of the Place Class – to create a music group from among the participants. The Music of the Place Class from Sejny uses traditional acoustic instruments and modern electronic instruments, but also – and above all – sounds of nature like water, stones and wood;
- The Folk-Art Class – not only getting to know local folk artists but handicraft workshops.

The descriptions of the subject areas divided into classes already reveals a creative approach to the education of children and young adults.

The realisation of this project coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic – which influenced the form that planned sessions could take. These circumstances were also mentioned by one of the organisers of the CBU and a teacher-tutor of one of the project classes. The first sessions took place in a conventional way, with children from classes four through eight participating in workshops and meetings with project initiators and artists. However, the subsequent COVID-19 pandemic restrictions meant that the children's sessions went online. The leaders of individual meetings and workshops had to modify the program appropriately, record additional material. The new format did limit the aspect of a shared experience, but the co-creators, Sporek-Czyżewska and Bożena Szroeder, in their interview about the first children's university, expressed their surprise at how much the young people were looking forward to the sessions. The virtual shift was less of a problem for them than it was for the adults. They stressed that the teachers from Sejny, with whom they have been working for 30 years, form a bridge between their ideas and the children.⁴

A teacher who has been working with the BF and the CBACN for many years emphasized that thanks to the two-way interaction in the workshops, the latter have been both innovative and educational – they open up the possibility of discussions about important subjects in a culturally diverse milieu. And for the children it is a very new experience – the workshops show them how culturally rich their neighbourhood is (Interview No. 7).

Conclusions: borderland identity and creative work – inspiring creativity

“Our work – including all the educational and artistic practices happening on a daily basis in Krasnogruda and Sejny and which set the rhythm of our tasks – has been going on for many years, is addressed to a variety of age-groups and is still developing. *The Sejny Chronicles*, the Klezmer Orchestra, the workshops. These are the focal points of our work. And they also include workshops where we need support too – this is a two-way exchange” (Interview No. 5).

The work and ideas of the BF and CBACN represent a model of relational creativity – new ideas appear under the influence of programs that have already been realised. Inspiration comes while at work, in dialogues with project participants. I can see this for example in the development of the atelier *Workrooms*.

Cudowska, in her work *Shaping Creative Life Orientations in the Education Process* (in Polish: *Kształtowanie twórczych orientacji życiowych w procesie edukacji*, 2004) analyses creativity in the context of education, pointing to the multidimensional nature of this subject. She reveals that creativity may take the form of self-creation, aimed at self-realisation, as well as work for others. This kind of work can lead to change, to the appearance of something new, a new dimension in social relations (Cudowska, 2004, p. 50–69). Looking at the work of the BF and the CBACN, it is evident that their work is creative in the above sense. I believe that the creators of these institutions have brought into practice the idea of a borderland in a highly innovative way that is based on art.

⁴ Full recording of the interview available at Pogranicze.sejny.pl (2003–2020b).

The work of the BF and the CBACN shapes borderland identity and allows local communities to realise their identity needs in a culturally diversified neighbourhood.

A characteristic feature of the categories of borderland identity developed until now has been, first of all, to draw attention exclusively – or primarily – to the individual or collective identity of national, ethnic, regional, linguistic *etc.* minorities. Secondly, the identities which have been indicated have expressed the – at least implicit – assumption that minorities of borderlands are in the process of assimilation to the national majority, as reflected *inter alia* in the emphasis placed on intermediate forms, cultural hybrids representing borderland identities in practice. In the third place, in the conception of borderland identity the identities of representatives of the majority living there has been essentially omitted.

Borderland identity is a particular (activating) sense of belongingness (whether national, ethnic, religious or general-cultural) to one's own group located at the borderlands, in connection with a sense of separateness (criteria of separateness and borders) and a dynamic relationship with respect to neighbouring groups, in circumstances of a strong, shared territorial bond and the awareness of a separate provenance from one's neighbouring groups. Borderland identity is made up of: an activating sense of group belongingness; a sense of separateness from neighbouring groups whilst remaining in ongoing and dynamic relations with those neighbours; a common territorial bond, interpreted in a variety of ways; an awareness of the ethnic origin of one's own particular group.

When looking at the work of the BF and the CBACN as presented above, I can clearly see how their work for the development of local identity fits into the context of a borderland. Art – including both activities that are artistic in a broad sense and work that makes use of art – allows for the expression of the identity needs of national and ethnic groups. The means of expression in any given case might be literature, art, theatre or painting. In any case, art allows difficult subjects to be raised and offers opportunities to develop neighbourhoods and partnerships in borderlands. The work of the BF and the CBACN represent unique ideas for the creative use of art to further education aimed at a multicultural neighbourhood. They pursue the effort to develop borderland identity in a creative manner.

When analyzing the work of the BF and the CBACN, it is also worth emphasizing its timeless character. Their artistic and educational activities are independent of geopolitical context, though they do focus on borderlands. Both institutions appeared at the moment of the Polish accession to the EU in 2004. However, this important geopolitical event did not influence the substance of the institutions' work. Regardless of political circumstances, the work of the BF and the CBACN is focussed on nurturing dialogue in culturally diverse societies – whatever has gone on there in the near or distant past. This is perhaps the source of their effectiveness in working with communities that do carry traumatic experiences born of conflict, war and geopolitical change.

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