

THE ROLE OF TRADITION IN MULTIGENERATION RURAL FAMILIES IN MAŁOPOLSKA

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Abstract. Research was carried out in 2006 in three gminas (administrative boroughs) of the Małopolska Province – Dębno, Wieliczka, and Zabierzów. 40 multigeneration rural families were selected in each gmina. Interviews were conducted with them on the basis of a questionnaire made up of three parts focused on the representatives of three generations: grandparents, parents, and grandchildren. 360 people were surveyed in total. The results of the research, which are presented here, will try to provide an answer to the question of how critical a role tradition plays in the life of multigeneration rural families, and also to what extent they cherish the customs and habits which they have inherited from previous generations.

Key words: tradition, multigeneration families, rural families, customs and traditions

INTRODUCTION

“Tradition is like a mirror that reflects the centuries passed. Tradition is like a tree the roots of which reach deep into the family grounds”, this is how Seweryn [1961] starts his book on the traditions and customs of Kraków. While other authors [Dąbrowska 2003], understand the notion of tradition as: “a bond that connects us with our ancestors, giving us the sense of national, regional, and family belonging”. Accepting the heritage of previous generations, young people re-read it anew, attach values to it, enrich it and hand it down to their descendants.

In his definition Dobrowolski [1966] emphasizes the issue of heritage handed down from generation to generation and understands tradition as a “great legacy, that retiring generations hand over to those entering onto the stage of life”.

The term “tradition” is commonly used, both in everyday language, and in a scientific one. As argued by Ziemiński [1999] it is a dynamic category, and the relationship with it undergoes constant changes. Ziemiński presents quite an interesting formula of the term under review referring to it as “instinctive experience and social experience stored in the databank of generations”.

When reviewing the term of tradition a distinction should be made between its categories, since one may talk about a holiday tradition, a patriotic tradition, etc. All of them, however, are connected with a family tradition that makes up a part of the overall tradition – out of which it has grown, derives its contents, patterns, and in which it functions and transforms, having its own autonomy, individuality and privacy [Dąbrowska 2003].

THE ROLE OF TRADITION AND ITS TRANSMISSION IN THE FAMILY

Nowadays in the era of a post-industrial civilization it may seem that there is no place for tradition which, as it is known from the history of Poland, played a significant state and cultural role. The fast pace of life, migration of population and cultural changes contribute to the disappearance of tradition. Modern civilization forces out good old customs and habits, therefore it is so important for contemporary man to combine modernity with tradition, and the family becomes especially responsible for cherishing and handing down a tradition. So its role as a cultural transmitter is not to be underestimated.

Each family shapes its own, internal atmosphere of family life. It is made up of a number of factors, which should include: relations among family members; mutual love; daily behaviour; fulfilled roles and, first and foremost, upholding family traditions. It is on the backdrop of family life that, as Dąbrowska [2003] argues, “the continuum of the cultural heritage is maintained through handing down the language, customs and habits, norms, values, and patterns of behaviour”.

The family tradition constitutes a major value in upbringing, develops an atmosphere so specific for each family community and the style of house, and decides about its individual image. Awareness of the family’s cultural heritage and its own roots of tradition is of paramount importance for the life of an individual, helping to develop through growing into the culture, including the tradition, customs and habits cherished by nations, social groups, and families as Dąbrowska [2003] writes.

A family participates in social transmission through which the heritage and traditions are remembered and sustained. According to Ziemiński [1999] the transmission assumes “communication between what was and what is”. That the sustaining referred to above occurs when there is a communication link between the sender (older generations) and the recipient, and takes place through such social institutions like the family. Gradually through upbringing and education children receive the cultural heritage from the parents who hand down to them their own life experience, including those that they were once given by their parents.

Augustyn [1999] notes a mission that the family is to perform in that sphere, but he stresses a specific role of the father as the family head. He argues that “sustaining and cherishing authentic traditional values is one of the most important tasks of the family,

especially so for the father". By cherishing annual holiday traditions and anniversaries the family "introduces into the child's life the experience of promise and hope without which life become monotonous and flat".

As already mentioned, the importance of culture transmission is related to the attitudes of the parents who, as senders of the message, develop the contents and hand them down to their children. "In the heritage parents hand down moral standards, religious beliefs, social symbolism that has been created over centuries that facilitates communication within their group and teaches children cautiousness in relationships with others" [Dymara et al. 2002].

As argued by Dąbrowska [2003] cherishing tradition shapes the family history of life. Very often it is the old photographs, souvenirs, documents or diaries that are the symbols of family identity, witnesses of the family's past. Practicing the customs, habits, stories, family anecdotes, or visits to places of particular reverence are also important. All that creates a family cultural bond that cements and strengthens the life style.

When reviewing the role of tradition in a family, it may be assumed that similar functions are performed by individual holidays. Holidays are, as Dyczewski [2003] writes, an expression of the variability and cyclic nature of human life, since in them one sees a variable life-style, its changeability. They perform the role of assigning sense to individual and social life – by celebrating a holiday, the family focuses on underlying values, people, and events. A holiday is a reminder, renews and upgrades values, truths of faith, ethical norms, creates the basis for common valuing and assessing. Following the author it should be stressed that the role of holidays is to make people come together, provide time for active creativity in terms of an artistic setting. It is also a connection between times, since, although rooted in the past they are always lived through now, and holidays are a time of joy since, as argued by Dyczewski, they are accompanied by pastimes, games, dances, etc. He also stresses the importance of holidays as the grounds for strong impressions that affect emotions and evoke existential, religious, national, family, and aesthetic feelings. They also help to alleviate tensions, resolve conflicts and get through difficult times, since through their rituals they bring closer values, people, and events, relieving tensions and allow, for a short time, one to become detached from difficult daily matters. The profound rank of holidays is seen by the fact that religious holidays were observed in concentration camps even though people risked putting their life at the stake for it [Dyczewski 2003].

The role of tradition in the life of man and the family is of a broad importance. First and foremost, the educational importance of tradition for the young generations is emphasised [Ziemski 1999], while Augustyn [1999] also stresses the high position of tradition in upbringing, defining it as a fundamental value in the life of man, who without it would be a lost person and continually begin things from scratch. He emphasises the demand for the sensitivity of tradition to "preserve for the children the best things that we have acquired from the past from our ancestors". A child, as the author argues, is not capable of building the continuous rhythm of life within a day or year that they need so much, and such a rhythm is provided by tradition. It sets up a constant rhythm in man's life measured by a cycle of the year, day, and also hour. The author stresses that a lack of such a rhythm results in the family life becoming chaotic and accidental.

A parish priest of the gmina Dębno, in his interview, also stresses the important role of tradition in the family life. He specifically emphasizes the importance of holiday traditions that as he claims "keep people faithful". He also stresses the impact of tradi-

tion on the life of a rural family as one of the fundamental features distinguishing the village family from the city family. According to the priest, tradition sets the rhythm of life in the countryside which is seen in the way all family festivities and holidays are lived through. Specific importance is attached to traditions related to the farming way of life, i.e. blessing the fields, however they are disappearing in families where the land is not tilled any longer.

When considering the role of tradition in the family's life, celebrations should be mentioned and the proper use of the holiday time by the family. Dyczewski [2003] writes about the increasingly frequent "desacralization" of religious holidays and inapt use of free time, which brings about a blurring of the differences between celebrating and spending the free time. It should, however, be stressed that proper celebrating means not only fun and leisure, but also appreciating the specific values of the holiday that may help in making peace by man with himself and his neighbours and to drive him into the world of metaphysical reflections.

As Dyczewski [2003] stresses celebrating should be learnt like any other skills, and which may be achieved through: active participating in celebrations together with communities, people who can do that, learning customs and habits, observing celebrations in various cultures, caring about the quality of one's own life and allocating enough time for celebrations.

Though being a part of a general tradition, a family tradition – out of which it has grown, derives its contents and patterns, and in it functions and transforms, having its own autonomy, individuality, and privacy. Cherishing tradition shapes the history of family life. The family tradition remains alive where there are strong bonds among the members of the family community [Izdebska 2003].

There are a number of important events in the family life that gather together its members. To emphasise the significance of such events, special words, behaviour, objects, and customs are used. All these elements together make up a holiday.

The family and any community celebrating a holiday focus on its underlying values, people and events. They leave any daily chores and things to get to know better and experience what is precious and important for them. Everything that accompanies celebrating, namely proper attire, a decorated house, joint meals of holiday dishes, conversations, and signing, all create a specific sense of mutual closeness and family union.

There are numerous traditional holidays celebrated by a Polish family, mostly inseparably linked with religious holidays. Christmas and Easter are the holidays that are the richest in traditions and most solemnly celebrated. They are followed by All Saints' Day and Corpus Christi. These are religious holidays, and simultaneously family events, too.

The most important of typical family holidays that have strong ties with religion include a wedding ceremony, the birth of a child, its christening and the First Holy Communion, and also death and funeral. Among national holidays, particularly important are Independence Day and the 3rd May Constitution Day.

As referred to family, religious, and state holidays are closely connected with the entire Polish and European culture and Christianity, owing to which they are rich in symbolism, have extensive customs and permanence [Dyczewski 2003].

Individual families have their own history, keep souvenirs after ancestors, cherish the genealogical relationship, use norms and patterns of behaviour known to themselves only, have their specific beliefs, political and social views, their own holidays and celebrations. All that creates the culture of a specific family.

In the past, the transmission of culture within a family goes in one direction only: from the oldest to the youngest. Older generations were introducing younger ones into the culture of their family, environment, and nation, into their experience and homespun wisdom. Such an arrangement still functions today, however, next to it there is a new phenomenon. The younger generations more often acquaint the older ones with technological and organisational developments, impose on them new values, norms, and patterns of behaviour. This is manifested best in the older generations acquiring from the younger ones new forms of spending their free time, clothes, and verbal expression. Thus, the transmission of culture covers all generations in the family [Dyczewski 1994].

There are a number of objects and forms of behaviour in the family life that have a symbolic nature. It is through them that the family expresses its religious, social, and political beliefs, in them it contains the system of values, strengthens the contents and quality of mutual intrafamily relationships. Symbolic objects in the Polish house includes for example a cross, a picture of the Blessed Virgin Mary, portraits of ancestors, a Christmas tree during Christmas tide, while symbolic behaviour includes sharing the wafer on Christmas Eve or an egg at Easter, lighting a large blessed candle at the bedside of a dying person. Through its symbolic behaviour and objects the family expresses its own system of values and norms, and the quality of mutual intrafamily relationships [Dyczewski 2003].

Lack of radicalism in the transformation of family customs is a specific feature. One does not reject all too easily symbolic objects or forms of behaviour, even when they have lost their old meaning, to those who cherish them. Customs cherished by the family, experienced very individually within a small circle of people, root the individual into the heritage of the culture of the family and the nation.

Family customs fulfil a very important educational and socialising role for all members of the family, and primarily so for the youngest generation [Dyczewski 1994].

The family tradition shapes the atmosphere and style of the house so specific for each family community, and decides its individual image. Cherishing traditions, celebrations in the circle of our closest relatives often alleviates tensions, facilitates reconciliation and understanding, relieves tension and brings joy to both the younger and older members of the family community [Izdebska... 2003].

By solemnly celebrating holidays, members of the family expressly realise their position in it, learn their rights and obligations, become rooted in the family, and through it in the entire local community, in the culture of society at large and the entire nation [Dyczewski 2003].

THE ROLE OF TRADITION IN THE SURVEYED FAMILIES

As presented below the research results try to provide an answer to the question of what role tradition plays in the life of multigeneration rural families, and also to what extent they cherish the customs and habits which they have inherited from previous generations.

Research was carried out in 2006 in three gminas of the Małopolska Province – Dębno, Wieliczka, and Zabierzów. 40 multigeneration rural families were selected in each gmina. Interviews were conducted with them on the basis of a questionnaire made

up of three parts focused on the representatives of three generations: grandparents, parents, and grandchildren. 360 people were surveyed in total.

The results of the research into the role of tradition in multigeneration families mainly include the generation of parents and grandchildren and their subjective opinions on the reviewed issue.

THE CHERISHING OF TRADITION IN THE SURVEYED FAMILIES

The passage of time entails a number of various changes in numerous aspects of life. These changes also relate to traditions – some continue to be cherished and enriched, others pass into oblivion, although they are sometimes revived again.

In order to determine the extent to which holiday traditions are observed and to obtain information on how they were cherished in the times when the respondent was still a child, and these days in the family, the middle-generation respondents (parents) were asked to indicate which of them were not cherished any longer, and which were still observed in their family.

Tradition, both the one peculiar for a given family, together with customs and habits characteristic for it, souvenirs kept by it, and family histories handed down from generation to generation, and also the general tradition, if it is commonly preserved by family members, constitutes an element which strengthens relationships among its members. Therefore, in the course of research into multigeneration families it is worth pointing out that aspect of the family life.

The questions that the respondents were asked enabled the importance of the two major holidays in the Christian tradition (Christmas and Easter), in the life of the members of the surveyed families to be ascertained, and to what extent they observe religious customs and habits related to such holidays. Additionally, based on the obtained results, information may be derived as to whether the history of the family and its ancestors occupy a major place in the life of the surveyed families, particularly in the awareness of the youngest generation.

Addressed to parents, the question on the observance of holiday customs and religious practices during the most important Christian holidays was made up of two parts. The respondents were to answer whether a given custom or religious practice had been observed in the past, when they were still children, or they were observed nowadays, or when they had children themselves. This would allow the discovery of how deeply these customs are rooted in the tradition of the surveyed families and what their handing down from generation to generation looks like. A family is a place in which children learn those customs and habits and its lasting character depends on how much parents, and also grandparents, initiate the young generation into the tradition. Furthermore, preserving such customs and habits, joint participation in religious practices, sharing feelings related to holidays brings family members together, strengthens bonds and alleviates any misunderstanding. Thus, based on that it may be concluded whether the surveyed families properly use the opportunity that joint celebrations bring to strengthen relations and create a better atmosphere in the family.

A clear majority of holiday customs relating to Easter and Christmas has been and still is observed by the members of the surveyed families. Among them there are a few customs that are observed by all families very meticulously. For example sharing the

wafer with other family members, observing a fast on Christmas Eve, decorating a Christmas tree, visiting relatives during Christmas tide or having foods blessed on Easter Saturday and to go to confession before Easter. Numerous traditions that are peculiar for that holiday have not lost their meaning with time in the surveyed families. For example all families observed, and still observe, the Easter tradition of observing a fast on Good Friday, having foods blessed on Easter Saturday, observing a fast on Ash Wednesday and going to confession before Easter.

However, Easter eggs are not so often painted at home as they were in the past or Easter postcards are not sent as often, in favour of SMS'es or e-cards. The custom of sharing an Easter egg has lost its significance. It should, however, be stressed that the tradition has never been very much popular among the surveyed families – only 57% of the total surveyed population observed this in childhood. It may be concluded that it has not been nor it is a very popular custom in the region.

The fact that certain customs are now observed in the surveyed families with the same commitment as in the respondents' childhood shows that they play an important role in the life of those surveyed and therefore they wish to hand them down to their children.

One may have the impression that, despite a departure from certain traditions, the essence of holiday has not been lost. The most significant and symbolic customs have been observed and are handed down from generation to generation.

It is worth having a closer look at the observance of religious practices by members of the surveyed families. As the answers provided by the respondents show that today attendance in the services of the Way of the Cross, and Vespers or the midnight Mass Service at Christmas is less frequent than it used to be in the past. The changes occurring here may raise the suspicion that the religious dimension of these holidays has slightly lost its importance, although they clearly play a critical role, and for some of those surveyed even the most critical.

The results of the research, in which the surveyed compared modern Christmas Eve with that from their childhood, basically show a permanence of the primary Christmas Eve traditions in multigeneration families. Certain changes however were seen in the respondents' attachment to some of those customs.

A picture of the Polish modern Christmas Eve, as recreated on the basis of research carried out in the respondents' families shows a strong commitment of the respondents to traditions handed down by families from generation to generation.

And the picture is as follows: in the evening on Christmas Eve, all families share the wafer, extend wishes and together have traditional Christmas Eve dishes, in general observing the traditional number of them. In each home a decorated lit Christmas tree creates a traditional atmosphere. There is the commonly observed custom of placing an additional set of cutlery on the Christmas table for an unexpected guest. This is a token of old Polish hospitality, and also a custom that goes back to the times of national uprisings and deportations and an obligation to remember those prosecuted because of the Homeland, even today it requires us to wait for those not present. All families maintain the custom of mutual visits and the exchanging of wishes and greetings with next of kin, and to go to visiting the graves of the family members.

A religious dimension of Christmas Eve celebrations is added by commonly observing a fast (100% indication), joint singing of Christmas carols (72%), saying a prayer before the Christmas supper or reading a relevant fragment the Bible (97%), and attend-

ing the midnight Mass Service at Christmas (90%). Other Christmas Eve customs also refer to events from 2,000 years ago. For example, to commemorate the Bethlehem star the Christmas Eve supper starts in most families with the appearance of the first star (82%), while the atmosphere of the Bethlehem manger is evoked by the custom of placing some hay under the tablecloth (90%) and, though less common, the custom of sharing the wafer with animals (47%).

Traditions that have almost vanished when compared to the time of the respondents' childhood include Christmas carol signing and inviting a lonely person to a Christmas Eve supper. Giving presents to next of kin is becoming an increasingly more popular tradition nowadays.

A high level of traditionalism in the surveyed gminas is also shown by the fact that the respondents quoted a large number of additional traditions when answering the question: "What other old traditions (apart from those mentioned) have survived in your family till now?".

A number of very interesting customs were mentioned, often characteristic for the Małopolska region, like: the tradition of decorating the house for Whitsuntide, burning a Judas on Maundy Thursday, the consecration of wreaths in the octave of Corpus Christi, the consecration of the large candle at Candlemas, the making of home bread, sprinkling fields with holy water, consecrating herbs and grain on the holiday of the Our Lady of the Herbs, painting doors with lime, putting up mistletoe over the door, cutting twigs from the cherry tree on 13 December (St. Lucy) that brought home would blossom on Christmas Eve, playing pranks during the Easter period, washing the face with water from the river on Good Friday, sticking crosses made from the Easter Palm into the soil on Good Friday "to have bugs and worms driven out, and the soil bring good harvest", making "stacks" of straw then stuck under the door on Christmas Eve, making little hedgehogs, going out in front of the house with cutlery after the Christmas Eve supper, wreaths on the holiday of Our Lady of the Herbs, putting scales from the Christmas Eve carp into the wallet or purse.

Apart from these mentioned above those surveyed quoted many other customs that though rare, however, were worth mentioning, which among others include, a tradition of knitting, hand-made Easter palms, fortune-telling with hay taken out from under the tablecloth on the Christmas Eve table, sprinkling animals with holy water before "leaving for" work in the field after winter, or appearing in a traditional Kraków region costume on local holidays and festivities.

The large number of traditions that have been mentioned shows that families attach importance to cherishing them in those surveyed gminas. It may also be explained by the fact that the research was carried out in multigeneration families in which the older generation plays an important role in maintaining traditions. Senior family members care about cherishing traditions, have more time for them and certainly are a storehouse of knowledge on traditions of yore that they wish to hand down to younger generations.

The above positive phenomena of tradition maintenance are confirmed by the parish priest from one of villages in the gmina Dębno who indicated the strong ties of the local population to tradition, caring for them and the faith. In an interview he says that no specific disappearance of traditions is observed. This is evident in the high attendance at mass services and during holiday customs. A clear majority of parishioners keep a vigil over Christ's grave during the Holy Week, adore the Cross, have their heads sprinkled with ash, etc. According to him until very recently the tradition of "Wet Easter Mon-

days” was disappearing, but nowadays one can see its revival. The priest also states that, despite the fact the “Christian faith is a very difficult one, traditions will be observed, since their cult allows the preservice of a certain rhythm of life in the countryside”.

THE ROLE OF HOLIDAYS IN THE LIFE OF THE SURVEYED FAMILIES

The respondents were asked about what role the family tradition played in their lives. The clear majority of those surveyed (88%) responded that the role of tradition in their lives was big or very big. Others admitted that tradition held not much importance in their lives. It is worth examining how these statements translate into maintaining holiday customs by the surveyed families.

After presenting the results that would allow showing to what extent members of multigeneration families observe most known customs related to Easter and Christmas, it should be pointed out that holidays are perceived by those surveyed in various aspects and different elements of celebrating them make up the “essence of celebrating” for individual people. For some these are primarily a family holiday, for others the religious aspect is most important.

Among all those who answered the question (with answers provided by parents and grandparents), the largest percentage (69%) included people for whom Easter and Christmas were primarily family holidays, whereas nearly 24% of those surveyed also quoted the religious aspect of these holidays as the most important for them.

It is worth noting that the parents somewhat differently perceive the role of the holiday than the grandchildren (Fig. 1). Among the representatives of the two generations the largest group included those respondents who had admitted that the family aspect of the mentioned holidays still played the biggest role for them. However, the parents said that their attention focused more on the religious experience during the celebrations, more often than the children.

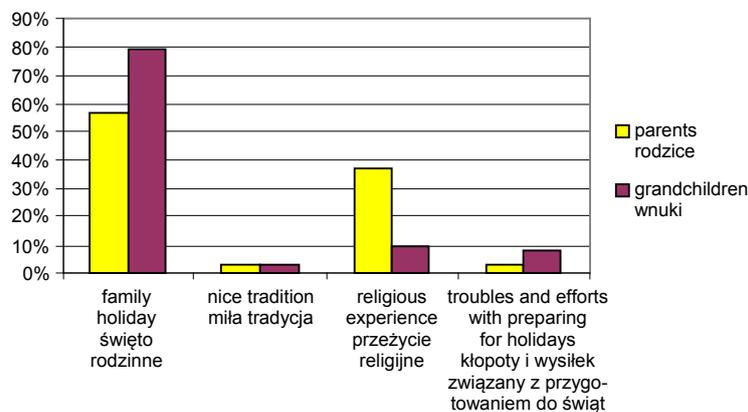


Fig. 1. What Easter and Christmas primarily mean for the parents and grandchildren

Rys. 1. Wnuki i rodzice według deklaracji, czym przede wszystkim są dla nich Święta Wielkanocne oraz Święta Bożego Narodzenia

For the purpose of comparison, the results are now worth mentioning of the research during which the question about the importance of Easter and Christmas was addressed to 126 multigeneration families, who were living in the city. For all three generations from the surveyed families the listed holidays were first and foremost connected with cherishing tradition (87% for youth, 95% for parents, 94% for grandparents) and participating in services (some 47%, 62%, and 87%, respectively) [Nikitorowicz et al. 2003].

Research results on the perception of holidays in multigeneration families are reflected in the above-mentioned interview with the parish priest. He said that “for a rural family the religious experience undoubtedly comes first. Its evidence can be delivered by the high attendance at church services and a large number of those going to holy sacraments. Though Christmas is more family orientated than Easter”.

SUMMARY

This paper has been an attempt at answering the question of how critical a role tradition plays in the life of multigeneration rural families in the surveyed gminas, and also to what extent they cherish the customs and habits they have inherited from previous generations.

The clear majority of those surveyed responded that the role of tradition in their lives was big or very big (all in all nearly 90% of the people).

A slight disappearance of traditions that are typically secular could be observed, while ceremonies closely related to religious practices are cherished with as equally big commitment as in the past. It may be observed, as the parish priest claims, in “solemn experience of religious and holiday events”.

Summing up, it may be concluded that holidays and related traditions still play a very important role in the life of multigeneration families residing in the surveyed gminas of the Małopolskie Province.

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ROLA TRADYCJI W WIELOPOKOLENIOWYCH RODZINACH WIEJSKICH W MAŁOPOLSCE

Streszczenie. Badania zostały przeprowadzone w 2006 roku w trzech małopolskich gminach – Dębnie, Wieliczce i Zabierzowie. Do badań dobrano po 40 wielopokoleniowych rodzin wiejskich w każdej gminie. Przeprowadzono z nimi wywiady według kwestionariusza, który został podzielony na trzy części, skierowane do przedstawicieli trzech pokoleń: dziadków, rodziców i wnuków. Łącznie przebadano 360 osób. Prezentowane wyniki badań będą stanowiły próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie, jak istotną rolę odgrywa tradycja w życiu wielopokoleniowych rodzin wiejskich, a także, w jakim zakresie są w nich kulturowane zwyczaje odziedziczone po poprzednich pokoleniach.

Słowa kluczowe: tradycja, rodziny wielopokoleniowe, rodziny wiejskie, zwyczaje

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