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## CONSTRUCTING A BICULTURAL UPBRINGING ENVIRONMENT IN POLISH-ITALIAN FAMILIES\*

**Introduction:** The article relates to research in the field of education focusing on family and identity that have gained particular importance in recent years in relation to the increasing number of children brought up in culturally diverse environments and attending Polish kindergartens and schools not only in the territorial border areas. The aim of the article is to show the ways in which Polish-Italian families living in Kraków construct bicultural upbringing environments for their children.

**Research Aim:** The research aim was to analyse and interpret the subjective experiences of Polish mothers raising preschool children with partners of Italian nationality.

**Method:** The research project was embedded in a qualitative research orientation, adopting its methodological assumptions. The data was collected during individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with 10 women.

**Results:** Following the analysis and interpretation of the women's narratives, four models of upbringing strategies created by Polish-Italian families were distinguished. These are: a culturally engaged family, a cosmopolitan (European) family, a culturally passive family, a family of unfulfilled expectations and aspirations.

**Conclusions:** The proposal to distinguish four models of family upbringing strategies created by Polish-Italian families living in Kraków enables a novel perspective in analyzing the processes of socialization and enculturation within mixed families. The proposed approach broadens the spectrum of possibilities of understanding the processes taking place in families formed by people of two different nationalities, which can be found in publications of other researchers (e.g. J. Nikitorowicz, S. Gaspar).

**Keywords:** Polish-Italian family, upbringing, biculturalism, cultural identity, preschool age

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\* Suggested citation: Wojnarowska, A. (2023). Constructing a Bicultural Upbringing Environment in Polish-Italian Families. *Lubelski Rocznik Pedagogiczny*, 42(3), 187–200. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17951/lrp.2023.42.3.187-200>

## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary world poses numerous challenges resulting from continuously changing socio-cultural experiences stemming from processes of globalization and migration. Witkowski (2007) emphasizes that the main difficulty in people's struggle with the postmodern world is finding their own, adequate and suitable place within it. Witkowski calls these struggles – with the world and with oneself – “identity challenges”. The essence of contemporary thought on identity is regarding it as a challenge that is processual in nature and perceiving it through the lens of socio-cultural transformations. Bauman's (1994, 2001, 2006) concept of “liquid modernity” and Giddens' (2012) writing on “reflectivity of modernity” are useful in understanding these challenges. Academic accounts of the present time often discuss the peculiar and multifaceted structure of modern civilization. Descriptions of contemporary reality often focus on precarity, unpredictability, ambiguity, temporariness, and bipolarity. Researchers point out that the fluidity and precarity of postmodernity imply a “liquid” identity in the process of continuous becoming, constructed through reflective participation.

The family is the most important upbringing environment that lays foundations for the creation of individual's own cultural identity (see Nikitorowicz, 1995, 2007, 2017; Paleczny, 2008; Ogrodzka-Mazur, 2011, 2014; Pawlus and Grzymała-Moszczyńska, 2011; Slany et al., 2014; Slany et al., 2017).

The article presents different ways/models of constructing a family upbringing environment by adult members of Polish-Italian families living in Kraków for the children raised within those families. Binational relationships and families, representing the “postmodern image of the social world” (Slany, 2002, p. 23), constitute an increasingly large group within Polish society. However, binational families and children, who live in Poland outside the immediate territorial border areas, are rarely the subject of social sciences and education scholars. This research was carried out in order to obtain information about day-to-day reality of children brought up in culturally diverse families, using Polish-Italian families living in Kraków as an example. Such knowledge should be used for the proper and meaningful design of educational and didactic processes that would take into account these children's family and home experiences, as well as their cognitive and personal potential.

Polish-Italian families constitute a unique group in Poland and as such are considered valuable research material. Based on official figures, the authors of *Imigranci w Krakowie w świetle danych rejestrowych* report (Pędziwiatr et al., 2019) indicate that Italians are currently one of the top ten nationalities among foreigners living in Kraków. It is worth emphasizing that the Italian community living in Poland has grown dynamically over the past decade, creating numerous centres and organizations (Vanzi, 2018). The main reasons

for Italian emigration to Poland include work and family matters (Com.It.Es. *Polonia*, 2016).

The occurrence of partners of different nationalities (cultures) forming relationships and establishing families has accompanied humanity since the dawn of time. The 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of development and flourishing of such relationships and families, and decade after decade, the growing numbers of such relationships in the US, Europe or Poland, has led to more and more frequent academic studies of this issue (see Nowicka and Łodziński, 2006; Crippen and Brew, 2007; Favell, 2008a, 2008b; Recchi and Favell, 2009; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2013; Slany et al., 2014; Ślusarczyk, 2014; Nowicka, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2017).

This kind of relationships are a symbol of changes in human interactions caused by migration processes and globalization, as well as dynamically changing social and political conditions. The increase in the number of binational and bi-racial marriages and relationships is also the result of technological progress and digitization. It should be emphasized that culturally diverse relationships and families are the result of political decisions: they are related to the opening of borders, migration and immigration, granting foreigners the right to work and settle.

In the social dimension, the formation of culturally diverse families is caused by human affections, professional aspirations, curiosity, and individuals' willingness to take on challenges – seeking different and better (both personally and economically), more interesting life. This is indicated by the dynamics and causes for migrations – from economic and political migrations undertaken at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to contemporary migration for reasons of love, education, work ensuring personal development, better qualifications and faster professional accomplishments, well-being – a peaceful and comfortable life, willingness to satisfy one's need to travel – to discover new places, people and cultures. It should be noted that love and family are one of the main reasons for contemporary migration, and that they are the key factor contributing to the increase in the number of culturally diverse families in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (see Gaspar, 2008, 2009; Recchi and Favell, 2009; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2013, Slany et al., 2014; Ślusarczyk, 2014).

Palczny (2008) notes that cultural identity of contemporary individuals takes more and more complex forms, e.g. bicultural or multicultural identities, which result from the large-scale processes of globalization, migration, and multiculturalism. This concerns the growing number of complex upbringing environments and the transformation of traditional relationships and social relations, which implies the formation of various “types of complex, bi- or multicultural, bi-centric and polycentric identities” (Palczny, 2008, p. 41).

## RESEARCH PROBLEM AND GOAL

The qualitative paradigm adopted in the conceptualization of this research is related to the emphasis on the description, interpretation, and understanding the meanings assigned by people to the experiences of their everyday life (Denzin and Lincoln, 2009; Flick, 2010; Kubinowski, 2011; Rubacha, 2008; Urbaniak-Zajac and Piekarski, 2003). Polish pedagogy scholars (a humanities-oriented science) point to the principle of understanding educational processes through qualitative research as a consequence of ongoing social changes (e.g. Kubinowski, 2011; Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2016). Sharing this view, I based this research project on qualitative research and methodology (Wojnarowska, 2019).

This research focuses on the experience of mothers of pre-school children from Polish-Italian families living in Kraków. Thanks to adopting qualitative research methods I was able to analyse, interpret, and understand the subjective experiences of interviewed mothers. The main research problem, posed as a question, was as follows: what are the child-rearing experiences of Polish mothers of preschool-age children born from relationships with Italian nationality partners? The construction of the research questions was based on Schütz's (2006) concept of common sense and scientific interpretation of human action in social sciences. Questions were then divided into two categories, based on Sajdera's (2017) notion that "Schütz's model of creating scientific concepts may serve as a tool for determining research questions' hierarchy of meaning" (p. 119). The first category of questions was those relating to the description of mothers' everyday experiences, presenting constructs of their common thinking. Through their use, it was possible to reconstruct a linguistic worldview of the families of the mothers taking part in the interviews. I therefore adopted the following specific first-level research questions:

1. What is the linguistic worldview of the nuclear family in the narratives of Polish mothers of preschool-age children born from relationships with partners of Italian nationality?

- 1.1. What everyday practices of Polish-Italian families are described by the interviewed mothers?

- 1.2. What relationships between family members are described by the interviewed mothers?

- 1.3. What do the interviewed mothers say about their children?

The questions constructed within the second stage refer to the possibility of creating theoretical constructs based on the researcher's scientific knowledge in order to indicate the directions of interpretation of the data collected during the interviews. Applying these principles, I undertook, among other things, to construct four models of family upbringing strategies of Polish-Italian families of the interviewed mothers, which is the subject of the presented article. I therefore adopted the following specific second-level research questions:

2. What conditions for the creation of bicultural identity are constructed by Polish-Italian families for preschool-age children raised within them?

2.1. What definitions of the bicultural family arise from the narratives of Polish mothers of preschool-age children born from relationships with Italian nationality partners?

2.2. What models of family upbringing strategies of Polish-Italian families arise from the narratives of Polish mothers of preschool-age children born from relationships with partners of Italian nationality?

## METHOD AND SAMPLE

To collect data, I used individual interviews described by Kvale (2011) as semi-structured interviews focusing on the life of respondents. The general question opening the interviews was: tell me about your family? During the interviews, supplementary questions were asked when respondents asked for further questions or when the interviewer wanted to expand upon threads raised by the respondents. The content of the supplementary questions was driven by the researcher assumptions made.

The process of selecting respondents was based on non-random, non-probability sampling (Rubacha, 2008), which began with outlining the scale of presence of Polish-Italian couples' children attending Kraków kindergartens. I obtained the list of kindergartens from the website of the Kraków City Hall and sent survey questions by email to the directors of the 319 institutions. I received answers from 50 institutions, but only six directors informed me about the presence of children of Polish-Italian couples in their establishments. Subsequently, it was necessary to obtain the mothers' approval to participate in the research. Four women were willing to get involved in the research, and additional participants were recruited using the "snowball" method. At the end of each interview, I asked the respondent if they knew other women raising a preschool-age child/children with a partner of Italian nationality, living in Krakow. Ultimately, the sample consisted of 10 mothers.

## DATA ANALYSIS

After conducting the research and preparing the data (interview transcription), I conducted the analysis, which used coding based on the theory (Gibbs, 2011). The codes were created using the theoretical framework of the research project and research questions. Field notes taken after the interviews or during the transcription of interviews were also used. Therefore, coding based on data was also used. The data-analytic process made use of the constant comparison method (Miles and Huberman, 2000; Flick, 2010; Gibbs, 2011). To determine the theoretic-

cal framework for the conducted research and during the analysis and interpretation of research findings, the concept of *cultural identity* as interpreted by Nikitorowicz (1995, 2007, 2009, 2017) and Paleczny (2008), the concept of *world families* by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2013) and the concept of *European intra-marriage* by Gaspar (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011) were used.

For data analysis (coding and categorizing), the WeftQDA (Pressure.to, 2007) free software facilitating the organization and management of data was used. The programme allows to build a code tree, search within the codes created and export data to other text programs (Niedbalski, 2013).

## RESULTS

The result of the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data obtained *via* the interviews is the proposal to distinguish four models of family upbringing strategies created by Polish-Italian families living in Kraków. It should be noted that the linguistic worldview of the upbringing environment of Polish-Italian families outlined at the first stage of data analysis serves as the foundation of these proposed models. This linguistic worldview was constructed based on various aspects within the mothers' narratives, including families' communication language, cooking habits, holiday celebrations, leisure activities, and family and friendship relations.

The four proposed models of family upbringing strategies created by Polish-Italian families living in Kraków revealed by interviewed mothers' narratives are as follows:

- a culturally engaged family,
- a cosmopolitan (European) family,
- a culturally passive family,
- a family of unfulfilled expectations and aspirations.

A **culturally engaged family** is characterized by the fact that its adult members undertake a number of activities to pass on to children the cultural heritage (culture) of each parent. Practices of everyday life are saturated with cultural content (traditions), which children are made aware of in daily conversations. In culturally engaged families, particular significance is attached to the child's ability to speak languages used by both parents. Adults are aware or have an intuitive understanding that language is the basis of culture. Thanks to learning the language spoken by the non-Polish parent, the child can experience and understand their culture. The language of everyday family communication is Italian, while in conversations with each parent children they use their native language. An example of a culturally engaged family is this fragment of one of the mothers' narrative (W3):

Our [son] is bilingual. He speaks fluent Polish, because we live here and he goes to kindergarten here. At the same time, my husband and I try to speak Italian on a daily basis, [...] and [my son] also speaks Italian quite fluently. [...] we bring him up both in the Polish tradition and also in the Italian tradition. [...] We would like [our son] to be brought up in such a bilingual manner from an early age and that he would also learn Italian to a similar degree as Polish.

In culturally engaged families, some family members are particularly involved in the (cultural and linguistic) upbringing of children, for example: mothers read about bilingualism in order to undertake educational activities in an appropriate manner; mothers organize meetings with families with similar experiences or are active on social media in this area; grandmothers (Italian women) often visit their grandchildren who live in another country – the phenomenon of “flying grandmothers” (Slany and Strzemecka, 2016). This thread is presented a fragment of the narrative of another mother (W7):

We have quite a lot of contact with the Italian side of the family, because the grandmother comes to visit every two months. This is a lot of support when it comes to the language side of things [...] grandmother plays a large part [...] she spends all her free time here, and when she comes, she comes to see the grandchildren, right? She spends all her free time with them, they talk a lot, read, play and [...] you can see, after each such visit, and especially the older one, you can see that she has a greater inclination to use Italian and has better vocabulary each time.

In **cosmopolitan (European) families**, the priority is to undertake activities aimed at building the attitude of cultural openness and tolerance towards diversity in the youngest family members, for which the family experiences of children are used. Passing on to children each parent’s cultural heritage (culture) takes place during the course of everyday activities, but it is not the most important goal of the parents’/relatives’ actions. One of the mothers describes this as follows (W5):

Bilingualism and biculturalism opens them up [children] to the world. In a way, they can gain better experiences, yes. We have more opportunities because we spend a lot of time traveling. We go to [...] there to see the family, so [...] children stay in touch with cousins, with their peers, so they also benefit from this culture. And that opens them up. They are also not so narrow-minded, they know that there are other people, that there are other languages than just Polish.

In **cosmopolitan families**, parents do not always know, for example, the native Christmas traditions, they do not consider them important, nor are they attached to national symbols. In cosmopolitan families, a great importance is attached to the child’s ability to use the languages of both parents. According to the parents, this skill is of great importance for creating the child’s personal and cultural iden-



tity and for building family relationships. Parents also point out that children's bilingualism can play an important role in their future professional life. In these families too, Italian is the language of daily family communication, while in their individual conversations with parents, children usually use the native language of each parent.

The **culturally passive family** is characterized by the lack of undertaking committed and deliberate activities in the field of transferring the cultural heritage (culture) of parents to the children. Parents show a lack of interest in such actions and lack reflectivity in this regard. Children have little contact with the family/relatives of the foreign/non-Polish parent and their home country. The knowledge of languages of both parents is the result of the situation, in which the foreign parent speaks only their native language and communicates only in this language in contact with children and their partner/wife. An example description of this family model is a fragment of another mother's narrative (W9):

My husband runs [the business], and I look after the children. [...] the husband does not really want to [speak] Polish. [...] "Let's speak Italian, it will be easier and faster". And that's why. [...] I have never been to Italy for celebrations ... Sorry, onetime – for Easter. [...] We go there rarely now [to Italy], well, twice a year at most. [...] [The older son] goes to school, so we don't want him to miss class. It's too hot in summer. We went on holiday once – and we said, never again! [...] the husband works the way he does [...] so I drop them off [the children], then I sort out the house, shop, do pick up, do homework, after-school activities, so that's that ... the whole day flies by. [...] The last time they [in-laws] came here was when we got married [a few] years ago.

A constitutive feature of a **family of unfulfilled expectations and aspirations** is the fact that partners/spouses do not attach shared meanings to everyday practices and that just one of them is involved in passing on to children the cultural heritage (culture) of both parents. A committed parent (mother) experiences numerous negative emotions related to such situation. She is the person whose needs are not satisfied and whose expectations and aspirations in relation to family life are not met. Transferring cultural heritage and language of the foreign parent to children takes place without their participation, which weakens the child's motivation and willingness to use it. In families of unfulfilled expectations and aspirations, adult family members' lives run parallel to each other. They have a different point of view in many issues, including those relating to parenting. The following narrative exemplifies this model (W4):

I would like [partner] to take her [daughter] there at least once for such holidays, so that she could see what it looks like. What's it like there, no? [...] I would like her to see it, to experience it, to go there ... However, it does not happen like this. [...] I tried, but you know, when you face criticism at every turn ... and such an indifferent approach, eventually you stop trying, you don't care anymore. [...] But I would also like to learn



something more about this culture, learn, right? Who should I get it from? Since he is from there and he knows it inside out, right? Well, he could tell us about it. He could bring some Italian (culture) into this Polish (culture). Yes? To arrange something for us, anything.

## DISCUSSION

Everyday life of culturally diverse families and their unique upbringing environment escape straightforward descriptions and reconstructions. Researchers emphasize that in biracial and binational relationships there are unique forms of socio-cultural exchange, implied by the practices of negotiating and constructing shared meanings and values by partners/family members within – and in relation to – practices of everyday life (Paleczny, 2008; Gaspar, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2013).

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2013) draw attention to the fact that living/family space shared by partners is characterized by many contradictions, as well as elements that due to their different and diverse cultural experiences are contradictory or mutually exclusive. Therefore, such families are characterized by a lack of consistency and certainty as well as ambiguity, which requires the family members' cognitive and emotional efforts, as well as the effort of constant cultural decoding. Simultaneously, these families create their own unique family order, resulting from partners and family members assigning meanings to jointly developed everyday practices.

Gaspar (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011) focuses on the unique character of families established between citizens of European Union member states, the so-called *European intra-marriages*, which, in her opinion, constitute an interesting social phenomenon within the space of the EU Community. According to Gaspar, such marriages can play a significant role in the processes of European integration due to specific transcultural family structures and specific patterns of parental and educational strategies applied to children brought up in them. The author points out that children brought up in such families constitute a unique, and yet “invisible social group” (Gaspar, 2010, p. 3), and the values, lifestyles, or patterns of behaviour passed on to them within their families are close to the cosmopolitan and transnational way of understanding and existing in the world. According to the author, such children have access to specific resources thanks to which they are not discriminated against or marginalized by the society. This is related to the privileged status of their foreign parents in the country of residence of the other parent. Gaspar constructs a typology of models of family upbringing strategies created by citizens of the EU Member States, including: family assimilation strategy, binational family strategy, and peripatetic family strategy.

Nikitorowicz (1992, 1995, 2009, 2017), when exploring the eastern borderlands of Poland – the religiously and ethnically diverse region of Białystok, explored the self-identification of people living there and the upbringing strategies they practiced. As a result of his research, he identified four “types of family socialization and upbringing” (Nikitorowicz, 1992, p. 375), that is, the four types of cultural identity of families. They are: the ethnocentric, dualistic, undirected and assimilative type of educating and socializing.

## CONCLUSIONS

The specific character of bicultural family environments in binational families means that they do not reflect the reality of the partners’ cultures of origin, nor is it a simple sum of experiences from the time of growing up in their home country. It is a field for jointly developed cultural family practices, taking into account the perspective of each of the partners. These are new qualities and a new cultural order resulting from responsible and measured merging, mixing, permeation and sometimes collision of cultures of partners/spouses (Paleczny, 2008; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2013).

Children brought up in Polish-Italian families live in a reality that is, on a daily basis, constructed and negotiated by their parents – representatives of two different cultures and languages. They grow up within a particular family order, created by adult members of binational families, that takes into account their jointly developed family practices, which can be described as a “new family cultural order” (Paleczny, 2008) or “family cultural space” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2013).

The models of upbringing strategies created by Polish-Italian families presented in this article are the result of the analysis and interpretation of research material revealed by interviewed mothers’ narratives. The aim of the author is to support teachers and educators in order to better understand the situations experienced by children brought up in Polish-Italian families, in order to broaden their cultural awareness and to design more thoughtful educational and didactic process, and to create optimal conditions for the personal and cognitive development of children from binational families.

The proposal to distinguish four models of family upbringing strategies created by Polish-Italian families living in Kraków enables a novel perspective in analyzing the processes of socialization and enculturation within mixed families. The proposed approach broadens the spectrum of possibilities of understanding the processes taking place in families formed by people of two different nationalities, which were presented, as I mentioned above, in the publications of Nikitorowicz (1992, 1995, 2009) and Gaspar (2009, 2010, 2011).

## LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Due to the small sample group, the size of which is the result of the adopted research orientation, the research findings presented are not subject to any generalisation. They serve as preliminary diagnosis of the diversity of family upbringing environment constructed by mixed families living in Poland outside the territorial border area and different ways of their functioning. The research results shown in this article offer insight into the reality pertaining to a small and unique social group: Polish-Italian families living in Kraków whose children attended kindergarten. It should be emphasised that Polish-Italian families are not representative to the currently dominant directions of migration and Polish multiculturalism issues. However, the research approach I have adopted enables an in-depth exploration of unique cases, making this study a valuable contribution.

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## KONSTRUOWANIE DWUKULTUROWEGO ŚRODOWISKA WYCHOWAWCZEGO W RODZINACH POLSKO-WŁOSKICH

**Wprowadzenie:** Problematyka artykułu nawiązuje do edukacyjnych badań nad rodziną i tożsamością, które w ostatnich latach nabierają szczególnego znaczenia w związku ze wzrastającą liczbą dzieci wychowywanych w środowisku zróżnicowanym kulturowo, które uczęszczają do polskich przedszkoli i szkół nie tylko na terenie pogranicza. Celem artykułu jest ukazanie sposobów konstruowania przez rodziny polsko-włoskie mieszkające w Krakowie dwukulturowego środowiska wychowawczego dla wychowywanych w nich dzieci.

**Cel badań:** Prezentowane wyniki badań zostały uzyskane w ramach projektu badawczego, którego celem była analiza i interpretacja subiektywnych doświadczeń polskich matek wychowujących dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym z partnerami narodowości włoskiej.

**Metoda badań:** Projekt badawczy osadzono w jakościowej orientacji badawczej, przyjmując jej założenia metodologiczne. Materiał badawczy zbierano w czasie indywidualnych, pogłębionych, częściowo ustrukturyzowanych wywiadów prowadzonych z 10 kobietami.

**Wyniki:** W wyniku analizy i interpretacji tekstu narracji kobiet zaproponowano wyodrębnienie czterech modeli strategii wychowawczych rodzin polsko-włoskich. Są nimi model strategii wychowawczej rodziny: zaangażowanej kulturowo, kosmopolitycznej (europejskiej), pasywnej/biernej kulturowo, niespełnionych oczekiwań i aspiracji.

**Wnioski:** Propozycja wyodrębnienia czterech modeli strategii wychowawczych rodzin polsko-włoskich mieszkających w Krakowie wskazuje odmienną (nowatorską) perspektywę w postrzeganiu procesów socjalizacji i enkulturacji w rodzinach mieszanych. Zaproponowane podejście poszerza spektrum możliwości rozumienia procesów zachodzących w rodzinach tworzonych przez osoby dwóch różnych narodowości, których opis można znaleźć w publikacjach innych badaczy (np. J. Nikitorowicz, S. Gaspar).

**Słowa kluczowe:** rodzina polsko-włoska, wychowanie, dwukulturowość, tożsamość kulturowa, wiek przedszkolny