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Doctoral dissertation: Regional Identity in the Experience of Socialization and Educational Spaces Across Four Generations of Upper Silesians – An Ethnographic Analysis

Abstract:

This dissertation addresses the processes of shaping and experiencing regional identity within the environments of socialization and upbringing across four generations of Upper Silesians. Socialization spaces are understood in a broad and dynamic way, encompassing family life, peer groups, educational institutions, local traditions, and everyday practices, as well as popular culture and modern media. These diverse contexts play a central role in the construction and preservation of collective belonging. A key analytical category is identification, conceptualized through an interdisciplinary lens that draws upon psychology, pedagogy, sociology, and anthropology. The pedagogical perspective, which frames the dissertation, enables the synthesis of these disciplinary approaches while emphasizing the formative role of education and socialization in identity building.

The study is situated within the complex historical and socio-cultural context of Upper Silesia, a region deeply marked by political upheavals, border shifts, and processes of repolonization after World War II. Migration, forced assimilation, and shifting administrative boundaries profoundly influenced the redefinition of identity and often generated tensions within the community. Particular emphasis is given to the Silesian dialect, which many participants regard as a native language and a crucial medium of cultural memory. Family traditions, religious practices, and local customs act as cohesive forces in maintaining intergenerational bonds, while at the same time, popular culture and global media transform traditional patterns and introduce new forms of expressing Silesian identity.

The theoretical part of the dissertation discusses the historical and cultural foundations of Silesia, the characteristics of local socialization environments, and the role of language and intergenerational transmission. Special attention is devoted to the dual dimension of education—formal curricula and hidden agendas—highlighting the role of schools and teachers in shaping attitudes toward Silesian identity. The methodological section outlines the qualitative approach, based on narrative interviews with representatives of four generations (post-war, martial law, transformation, and global) as well as expert judges. The analysis encompasses both individual experiences and broader mechanisms of reproducing regional identity.

The findings reveal the complex interplay of continuity and change in constructing Silesian identity. While deeply rooted in family ties, shared language, and cultural heritage, this identity is simultaneously shaped by contemporary processes of globalization and mobility. The research also underscores the sensitivity of the topic, which at times resulted in participants' reluctance to openly discuss their identity, raising important methodological and ethical issues. The dissertation concludes with recommendations for pedagogical practice, emphasizing the role of education in fostering regional identity, and suggests further directions for interdisciplinary research on identity in regional and intercultural contexts.