From Conflict to Reconciliation. Creating the National Identity on the Polish-Lithuanian Borderland

ABSTRACT
The authors are discussing the shaping of the national identity of Polish-Lithuanian frontier denizens, regarding the historical events of the 20th century. In the first part of the article, they present a brief historical sketch of Polish-Lithuanian relations, putting significant emphasis on the moment of the Sejny uprising beginning, that is August 22nd, 1919. Reclamation of independence after World War I put both countries in a challenging position of building own national image. Defining own territorial affiliation of the Sejny region spawned an exceptionally harsh conflict between Poles and Lithuanians, leading to the uprising. The results of these events echo in Polish-Lithuanian relations in the Sejny region to this day. The second part of the article is devoted to the presentation of the multidimensional and constantly created identity concept by Jerzy Nikitowski, as an introduction to considering the shaping process of identity among youth of the cultural borderland. The authors point to the fact how important it is to find a platform of dialogue for both parties. They explain selected activities regarding intercultural education, accomplished in local environments by the “Borderland of arts, cultures and nations” center animators in Sejny.

Keywords: national identity, borderland, Sejny uprising, intercultural education, site of memory, local society
INTRODUCTION

A borderland is the area placed at the crossroads of different centres, the zone of diversities, where the continuous contact with the Other takes place. The inhabitants of the borderland are in constant interaction with otherness. It is connected with the process of constant defining itself towards the Other. The subject of this article is concerned with the issue of determining national identity on the Polish-Lithuanian borderland in the context of the historical memory of the region and social-cultural relations connected with it.

Historical legacy of the Polish-Lithuanian borderland is a record of ceaseless balance between conflict and cooperation. Natural persons are formally bound to the state by the institution of citizenship. For the inhabitants of the borderland, personal sense of belonging to the state is often more important. Constant political and historical changes on the Polish-Lithuanian borderland and repeated moving of the state borders made the inhabitants of the area change their national status without changing the place of living. Consequently, the area was always treated as “the region between” and as “one’s own” both by the Poles and the Lithuanians. Each country wanted to mark its right to the land, which was and still is the reason for numerous arguments over the “host of the place” issue.

POLISH–LITHUANIAN RELATIONS. SHORT HISTORIC OUTLINE

The beginning of joint history between Poland and Lithuania is dated back to the 13th century when Lithuanian tribes united by Mindaugas acquired some of the Russian territory and got involved in the first neighbourly feuds with Polish princes. The years of mutual raids and conflicts ended in 1385 with the Union of Krewo. Grand Duchy of Lithuania – Jogaila – by marrying Queen Jadwiga became the King of Poland. Subsequent unions: the Pact of Vilnius and Radom (1401), the Pact of Horodło (1413) and the most important, the Union of Lublin (1569), resulted in the unification of the political process. The last union resulted in the creation of the federal Republic of the Two Nations consisting of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Constitution of May 3, signed in 1791, was an attempt at unifying this common state into a new form of the Republic of Poland (it was a reaction to the deteriorating domestic and international situation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth). The adoption of the constitution raised an objection of the gentry of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and led to the signing of the Reciprocal Guarantee of Two Nations on October 20,
1791, which ensured equal representation for the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland in all state-governing bodies of the newly reformed common state. Further integration ended with partitions, the Commonwealth’s land was apportioned among its neighbours – Austria, Prussia, and Russia. The areas on the left side of the River Niemen were annexed by Prussia whilst Russia took the right side. Only after World War I Lithuania and Poland regained independence. In September 1917, the State Council of Lithuania was convened in Vilnius – the so called “Taryba”. On 16 February 1918, Taryba proclaimed independence and signed the Act of Independence of Lithuania. 11 November 1918 was perceived as a symbolic beginning of the Second Polish Republic when Piłsudski was appointed Commander in Chief of the Polish Armed Forces. After the war, Józef Piłsudski wanted to renew Polish-Lithuanian federation. In 1919, Polish-Soviet War began (lasted until 1920) and resulted in the Red Army taking over Vilnius and giving it to the Lithuanians. At Easter 1919, Polish army commanded by Józef Piłsudski liberated Vilnius from the Bolsheviks, who had occupied it since January 1919. In Vilnius, the Bolshevik authorities proclaimed a Lithuanian-Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. On July 12, 1920, Lithuania and Russia signed a peace agreement. Pursuant to the secret protocol of the agreement, the Lithuanian side expressed consent to the march of the Soviet army through its territory as part of the Polish-Soviet war. It also affected the Polish-Lithuanian fights in Sejny and Suwałki during the Polish-Soviet war (Wolkonowski, 2015). On the one hand, the Lithuanian side consented to the Soviet army crossing the Lithuanian border and undertaking military action on Lithuania’s territory, but on the other hand, it carried out its own military actions against the Polish troops in areas that were granted to Lithuania in the Lithuanian-Russian agreement without consulting the population inhabiting the region (Łossowski, 1996). Inspired by Józef Piłsudski, the Polish army, commanded by Lucjan Żeligowski, captured Vilnius and pushed out the Lithuanian army, at the same time starting the period of Polish administration in the region of Vilnius. By the decree of October 1921, Żeligowski granted himself and the Temporary Commission power to govern in Central Lithuania. At the beginning of the following year, elections to the Sejm were conducted. In February 1922, during the sitting of the Sejm of Central Lithuania, the Resolution on the Statehood of the Vilnius Land was adopted. It was an area larger than that granted to Poland. The conflict over the land caused tensions between the two countries and freezing of the diplomatic relations until 1938. After the break of World War II in 1939, as a result of the agreement between the Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, Vilnius and its surroundings were given over to Lithuania. In 1940, Lithuania as a Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic together with other Bal-
tic countries was annexed to the USSR. After the war, Poland was in the Eastern Bloc. Therefore, the Polish-Lithuanian relations after the war practically did not exist. The change came with the collapse of the Soviet Union including partly free elections in Poland in 1989 and regained Lithuanian independence in 1990. It was the time for creating friendly relations between the neighbours.

The above historical outline shows complex mutual Polish-Lithuanian relations. Contemporary conflicts have their roots in the years passed. The knowledge of history allows us to understand present times particularly in terms of countries’ relations and accompanying emotions. What happened in the centre found echoes in the borderland, moving the conflicts between the two countries to the immediate proximity of the borderland.

Map 1. The History of Polish Borders

**POLISH–LITHUANIAN BORDERLAND. THE SEJNY UPRISING**

North-Eastern border of Poland runs through the area whose national affiliation is not as clear as the present political-administrative division of the land. The permeating cultural heritage of the place marks its own invisible borders between the inhabitants of the borderland.

The issues of national identity and a sense of homeland among the residents of the borderland become significant here. The category of social space (Simmel, 1975; Halbwachs, 1969) is of significant importance in the processes of homelands formation. Georg Simmel points out that space, in addition to being a symbolic reflection of interpersonal relations, is also a condition necessary for the existence of the living world, the world of everyday life. Maurice Halbwachs explains that the spatial environment is of particular importance on the one hand because the groups that live in it leave a particular mark on it, and on the other, because the views of these groups are determined by the space which they live in, so they can find a collective memory in the space that they have shaped themselves. Space becomes one’s homeland when they identify with the objects that fill it. Building national identity on the borderland is connected with the constant confrontation with “the Other” and searching for what is one’s own and what is common.

Wojciech Łukowski indicates that the concept of homeland is associated with everyday activities. The result of these activities is the appropriation of space in both a functional and symbolic meaning. In his study on the identity of the residents of Mazuria, he refers to the issue of spatial identity. Peter Weichhart (cf. Łukowski, 2002) defines spatial identity as a mental representation and an emotional and affective evaluation of a specific fragment of the environment which an individual includes in the concept of himself/herself and perceives it as part of himself/herself. In relation to social groups, this is the identity of a specific group that perceives a specific fragment of space as a component of a sense of common affiliation that is functional to group cohesion and at the same time constitutes an element of the ideological representation of the “We” concept.

The article refers to historical events related to the fight of the Polish and Lithuanian people for the territorial affiliation of Sejny. The Sejny Uprising referred to at this point is still an important reference point in shaping the Polish-Lithuanian relations in the borderland. Sejny is a town and commune located in the north-eastern part of the Podlaskie Voivodship, in the immediate vicinity of the Republic of Lithuania. The population of the town is 5,709, whereas of the surrounding rural commune – 41,561. Sejny is the second, apart from Puńsk, commune in Poland inhabited, in a very homogeneous way, by the Lithuanian community. According to
the results of the 2011 National Population and Housing Census, Lithuanians live mainly in the Puńsk commune – 75.7%. Unlike Puńsk, the share of the Lithuanian people in the social structure of Sejny is much more insignificant. In the rural commune of Sejny, Lithuanians constitute – 18.52% of the total population, in the urban commune of Sejny – 7.80% (according to the 2002 National Census of Population and Housing). However, it is difficult to clearly estimate population structure as there are significant discrepancies between the data of the Lithuanian organizations (about 25% in Sejny). The Lithuanians are the indigenous people of the discussed area, who have lived here since the 16th century.

Determining territorial affiliation of the Sejny Region was the cause of a very serious conflict between the Poles and the Lithuanians. The results of those events had found echoes in Polish-Lithuanian relations in the Sejny Region until today. The land was previously inhabited by Poles and Lithuanians, which resulted in claims for the right to the territory from the two risen countries. The final division of the land was made by Ferdinand Foch – Marshal of France and commander-in-chief of the victorious forces of Entente, who on July 26th, 1919 incorporated to Poland the Regions of Suwałki and Augustów, and the city of Sejny together with the southern part of the Sejny Region. The city of Sejny was particularly important for the Lithuanians who badly felt its loss. The contemporary national movement of Lithuania began in the second half of the 19th century and continued in the 20th century. An important centre for establishing national identity of the Lithuanians was the Sejny Priest Seminary, which educated a group of the Lithuanian intellectuals with revived national awareness. Most of the clerical students of the seminar came from Lithuanian families. The Seminary organized scientific activity (Lithuanian grammar and orthography were drawn up here among other things). One of the best known graduates was Vincas Kudirka, the author of the poem *O Lithuania, My Country*, which became the anthem of the independent Lithuanian state. A key figure in the history of Sejny was Antanas Baranauskas, a Lithuanian bishop, poet and scientist who ran the Sejnenska diocese at the turn of the centuries. He was the first person who ordered the sermons to be delivered not only in Polish but also in Lithuanian. Since 1906, there existed a storehouse with Lithuanian books and a printing house which had published 275 books over the ten year period. Also, there were seven Lithuanian magazines being published, and schools with Lithuanian language appeared. There also functioned Lithuanian organizations of social and cultural character. Activities conducted by Lithuanian priests who were also national activists together with the development of education and printing movement had a great significance for the development of Lithuanian national identity (Buchowski, 2009).
Taking Sejny from the Lithuanians after World War I aroused a lot of feuds among neighbours, which became exacerbated after Vilnius had been ascribed to Poland. German policy played an important role in this conflict. The military failure of Germany after World War I did not weaken the country’s interests in the north-eastern borderlands. Germany, due to its policy in the area of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, managed to: use aspirations of the Lithuanian elite who wanted to create a new Lithuanian state, group influential pro-German Lithuanians around Taryba and the Lithuanian government, as well as intensify anti-Polish moods among the Lithuanian (Kirwiel, 2011). In May 1919, retreating German troops handed over the administration of the Suwałki-Sejny Region to the Lithuanians and stayed in the area until August. After the border issue had been finally explained, the German army began to withdraw. The troops successively left the Regions of Augustów, Sejny, and Suwałki. The Lithuanians evacuated their troops together with the Germans only to strengthen their presence in the Region of Sejny since they did not want to give back the land. The Germans supported Lithuanian aspirations hoping to gain an ally in Lithuania which still stayed in conflict with Poland (Grzeszak, 2009, online source 1).

According to the historian Piotr Łossowski (1966, 1996, 1997), the Poles could have counted on solving the case concerning the Region of Sejny through the diplomatic channels. The outlined Foch Line confirmed the affiliation of Sejny to Poland and the Lithuanians would not have been able to oppose to its authority. However, the Poles decided on the different solution. Both the Poles and the Lithuanians wanted the Foch Line to enclose among its borders as much borderland as possible. The Prime Minister of Lithuania – Sleževičius – during his visit to Sejny in 1919 called his countrymen to fight for the land of their ancestors. Józef Piłsudski warned against the military action and recommended his compatriots to be patient. At the same time, in Warsaw, the concept of Polish-Lithuanian federation was still taken into account. Nobody followed the advice, though. At night following August 22nd, after the Germans had left Suwałki, the day before the 41st Polish Infantry Regiment from Suwałki entered – partisan units from the Polish Military Organisation attacked Sejny. The plan adopted by the command from the PMO foresaw that the insurgents should have seized the area affiliated to Poland by the Entente and that they should have gone 30–40 km beyond the Foch Line. The Polish army was supposed to help supply the insurrectionists with guns, ammunition and food. At the beginning the uprising went successfully for the insurgents. Surprised Lithuanians did not put up resistance. Lithuanian posts along Czarna Hańcza were liquidated almost without a fight and after a short battle the city was occupied. The insurgents counted on support of the Polish reinforcements coming from Suwałki. However,
they were wrong. The Lithuanians quickly regained strength and took up arms. The city of Sejny changed hands. The situation was getting worse and the soldiers of the 41\textsuperscript{st} regiment, who had left Suwałki the day before, still did not come. The situation changed on August 28\textsuperscript{th}. After the 41\textsuperscript{st} regiment had come, reinforced insurgent units repelled another Lithuanian attack on Sejny, making the Lithuanian troops withdraw beyond the Foch Line. The uprising was over.

County authorities were evacuated to the nearby Łoździeje (Lazdijai), the clergymen from the seminar were deported beyond the Foch Line, Lithuanian schools were closed down. The Sejny Uprising found an echo in Lithuania and stayed in conflict with the concept of federation proposed by Kowno. Polish-Lithuanian battles continued.

The war also was not over for the city of Sejny. A year after the uprising, the Lithuanians exploiting the Polish-Soviet War decided to regain the area of...
Suwałki left by the Polish Army retreating before the Red Army. In July 1920, they made an agreement with the soviet authorities which affiliated them Vilnius and its surroundings as well as the Suwałki Region. After the ending of the Polish-Soviet War, Poland did not want to comply with the border agreements advised by the Soviet army. The Polish army did not wish to fight the Lithuanians but wanted to make them withdraw. It was ordered by Piłsudski, who did not give up hopes for the federation. The Lithuanian army retreated from the occupied land, even from Sejny. However, it turned out that the withdrawal was only a tactical manoeuvre. The Lithuanians concentrated large forces near Mariampol and attacked in order to regain the lost land. The most cruel battles were over Sejny (in 1919 and 1920 the city changed hands 13 times). The Lithuanians soon retreated. Bilateral talks started and tried to determine the line dividing the armies. Vilnius, which stayed in Lithuania, was not included in the talks. The seizure of Vilnius by general Żeligowski in 1920 marked the beginning of the cold war period between Poland and Lithuania which lasted till World War II (Grzeszak, 2009, online source 1).

DEVELOPING NATIONAL IDENTITY ON THE BORDERLAND

Regaining independence by Poland and Lithuania after World War I made the two countries face a difficult task of building up their own nationalities. Among national factors pointed in the literature on the subject, the following objective elements are mentioned: a tribal community, a territory, a language, common history and culture, as well as subjective factors connected with consciousness of belonging to the national community (Samsel, 2009).

After World War I, which followed the years of annexations and the period of the wartime occupation, the Poles and the Lithuanians started defining their national identity by establishing borders and fighting for the right to the land. The Sejny Uprising was the fight for Polish and Lithuanian identity in the region which culturally belonged to both countries. When the border issue was settled, the conflict was transferred to the Church. When, after World War II, Lithuania was annexed to the USSR and Poland became the Soviet satellite state, Polish and Lithuanian struggles to regain the region of Sejny were moved from political to religious spheres. At the time, adopted policy of the Polish state was characterized by discrimination of national minorities. The Lithuanians who lived in Poland were forced to migrate. Also, they could neither educate Lithuanian children in their mother tongue nor conduct organized social-cultural or political activities. Lithuanian language was also eradicated from the Church (Tarka, 1998). Polish
national policy became less harsh in 1956 when minorities were allowed to conduct social-cultural and organizational activities under state’s control, but in the 1970s assimilative policy returned and stayed in various forms until 1989 (Tarka, 1998).

After World War II, the aspect of the national language in liturgy was also a very important issue for the Lithuanians living on the borderland. In the light of the common denomination of both nations (the Poles and the Lithuanians), religious affiliation did not reflect ethnic diversity. In this case the language of liturgy was a significant factor determining nationality. For the Lithuanians it became a means of manifesting their nationality and an element of national identity (Tarka, 1998). The Polish-Lithuanian conflict in the borderland parishes lasted for years. Many times the Poles were responsible for expelling the Lithuanian language from Sunday services, which caused protests on the part of the Lithuanians. Especially the Second Vatican Council, which introduced mother tongues to liturgy, strengthened Lithuanian’s insistence on celebrating masses in their mother tongue. According to the historian Krzysztof Tarka (1998), the language of liturgy became the matter of honour for both nations. The Lithuanians treated depriving them of their language as a means of depriving them of their national identity. Establishing the language of liturgy went on for years. Disputes concerning the matter lasted in Sejny for almost 40 years. Celebrating the mass in Lithuanian was finally introduced to the parish church in Sejny in 1982.

The language of liturgy was not the only reason for conflict concerning the language. Similar disputes also arose in connection with street names and teaching language. The language constitutes a major element of national identity and is a means for establishing the right for the land. Accompanying conflicts separated the Poles and the Lithuanians and bore pre-war mutual animosities.

The demise of the Soviet Union and free elections in Poland in 1989 which initiated the beginning of the democratic Polish state were like entering the new reality which put an end to minority discriminations and made them the subject of state policy. Changes were also present in Lithuania where a new era of national rebirth at the end of the 1980s began. In 1992, the first free elections to the Lithuanian Sejm took place. Across the Polish-Lithuanian borderland echoes of the historical conflict could have been found. Democracy brought about new contentious issues in the neighbourly relations: new organizations and cultural associations of national character were established, the problem of street naming, writing names and surnames, teaching language at schools as well as the issue concerning the history commemoration.
Place memory is the feature of place and man. The place remembers through means of architecture, historical buildings or conscious activities of inhabitants and city’s authorities (street names, monuments). An inhabitant remembers through more or less appropriate knowledge of the place where he lives (Lewicka, 2012). Memory researcher – Paul Connerton – by using the term “place memory” distinguishes its two types: monument memory (memorial) – a certain way of commemorating the past, and place memory (locus) – culture memory. The monument is the art seen from outside, locus is the life felt from inside. We can ignore the memorial, locus is the means of experiencing the place. However, there is also a possibility of recognizing the content included in memorial as one’s own and accepting its meaning in accordance with the individual way of experiencing the place (Lewicka, 2012).

The fight for memory in the area of Sejny after 1989 particularly concerns the graves and monuments. The conflict started at the cemetery of Beržniki, the district bordering on Sejny. In the 1980s, there were discovered unknown graves of the Lithuanians who were killed in action. By courtesy of the local parish priest, the Lithuanians built symbolic graves for their soldiers in the central part of the cemetery and after that, they put up a monument with the inscription: Late Lithuanian Soldiers who fell fighting for country’s freedom in 1920. The Poles treated it as a provocation and built their own two monuments nearby: one to the honour of Polish soldiers who fell in the Niemen battle and the other granite monument with the inscription – Your sacrifice opened the doors to the Niemen Victory, which was unveiled in 2001 (Podgórski, 2001). In the proximity of the Lithuanian graves the Poles built a cross and a large commemorative plaque to the honour of the Poles murdered during the last war by Germans and Lithuanians in Ponary near Vilnius. The Lithuanians treated it as a provocation since no victim of Ponary is buried at the cemetery in Beržniki (Tarasiewicz, 2011).

In Sejny, the conflict flared up around the monument of the Sejny Uprising unveiled in 1999, on the 80th anniversary of annexation of the Region of Sejny to Poland. The monument was built in honour of the insurgents of the 41st Regiment of the Polish Military Organization who died during the Sejny Uprising. The Lithuanians treated the monument as an accusation and yet another provocation on the Polish side.

The case of Antanas Baranauskas – bishop of Sejny between 1897–1902, linguist and mathematician, aroused similar emotions. He was the first bishop who addressed the parishioners in Lithuanian and who started translating the Bible into Lithuanian. He propagated the agreement with the Poles and joint Catholic resistance against the influences of Russification in the period of growing reluctance
towards the Poles. Antanas Baranauskas was a man of considerable stature who deserved a monument and finally got it. However, open fights followed by years of Polish-Lithuanian claims led to building the monument in Sejny after almost 90 years of trials. Even after 1989 local authorities together with the Polish community were against putting up the monument of the Lithuanian bishop. State delegations together with the Polish and Lithuanian Members of Parliament were involved in erecting the monument. The ceremonial unveiling of the memorial took place in 1999 (online source 2). Stories about monuments in the Region of Sejny prove how strong emotions are present in the mutual existence of the Poles and the Lithuanians living on the borderland.

**CONCLUSION**

Lithuanian independence and democracy introduced in Poland after 1989 brought not only new conflicts but also new hopes for reconciliation. It was essential to find a suitable platform where the dialogue between the two countries through factual and safe means could have been possible.

In his multidimensional and constantly created identity theory, Jerzy Nikitorowicz (2009) points at the difficulties that go along with the question “who am I?”. The theory presents identity as an open process, as a continuous and lifelong becoming, during the process of interaction and experiencing of a social reality, which often is difficult and painful, prone to failure regarding the flux of values and role models. It puts emphasis on focusing on “becoming”, uniqueness, self-reflection and a system of self-knowledge. The existence of a contemporary man regarding goals and values (teleology and axiology) is multidimensional. It is a theory that investigates the directions and the variety of identity self-assessments regarding the variety of problems faced in contemporary life. These problems touch, inter alia, identification dilemmas, insecurity in the world of axiology flux, taking responsibility for own development in many fields of present times, thinking about own future, goals, plans and life aspirations. Continual identity changes present individuals with new challenges, bringing about continual questions on: “who am I?”, “who am I becoming and why?”, “who should I be and who should one be?”, often putting youth in states of fear, frustration and insecurity (Nikitorowicz, 1995, 1997, 2005, 2009, 2010).

The shaping of an individual’s identity may lead to open identity, in which an individual expresses activity and liberalism, or a closed identity characterized by passiveness and separatism. In order to gain an open identity, an individual
expands own identity, from an individual, through family, then local-parochial, regional, national and finally, to continental (European), or even global categories. The opposite process will lead to a creation of a closed, hermetic identity (Nikitorowicz, 1995, 2005, 2009).

Regarding such an assumption, shaping of an identity is a continual process of becoming, in which a clash of past, present and anticipated future takes place. The process refers to three aspects: inherited identity (social-cultural), individual (personal) and constantly created identity (cultural, intercultural, and multicultural) and takes place in three dimensions: in experiences of an individual in its individual life cycle, in generation fortunes, generation condition, and in the clash of the youth generation with history. Identity is something to be constructed and may be constructed in different ways. Thus, identity is a task to be completed, one from which there is no escape (Nikitorowicz, 1995, 1997, 2009).

Knowledge regarding local, regional, national and European societies, which an individual could identify and get involved with, is essential for the process of creating an identity. The author of the theory makes a notion that an analysis of a multicultural society with regard of the structural criterion and its interpretation as a social fact (regarding not only differences, but changes that happen fast now regarding: territorial incumbency, migration processes, cultural revitalization, emergence of new national groups, changes in structures and tendencies in national and state populations), as well as dimensions of human activity (racial, biological, geophysical, mental, cultural, economic and political), is necessary (Nikitorowicz, 1995, 1997, 2005, 2009, 2010; Nikitorowicz & Sobecki, 1999).

Identity, as shown in this theory, is a creative effort of an entity that lowers tension and inconsistencies between permanent elements (inherited, resulting from family and local social rooting with an identification with significant people and groups, essential values, according to primary socialization) and changing, unstable elements (acquired through secondary socialization, resulting from interaction and experiences in culture and social structures, acquired and acknowledged norms, values and behavior). The dilemmas of identity shaping are visible in three dimensions: in the past (inherited identity), present (presented identity), and future (acquired identity). The enumerated elements build a core of identity, in which various continual processes take place, which affect the functioning of individuals and groups (Nikitorowicz, 1995, 1997, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2014; Nikitorowicz, Sobecki, & Misiejuk, 2001).

Antonina Kłoskowska (1992, 1996) was another researcher who analyzed the range of significant assumptions and approaches related to shaping of a national identity. According to her, an individual is a member of multiple communities,
e.g., a family, a nation, target groups, and many others, and identifies as a part of them to varying degrees (Kłoskowska, 1992). A. Kłoskowska also considers enculturation as an important process. It occurs during socialization, through a direct impact of other individual, groups or cultural institutions, such as school and family, but may also be free from any direct social continguities and occur via written, audiovisual or electronic transmission. In this case, a person is free to choose how they shape their own identity (Kłoskowska, 1996). In addition, A. Kłoskowska discusses social valence and distinguishes four behaviors described by her as: (1) univalence, (2) bivalence, (3) ambivalence, and (4) polyvalence. Univalent individuals are rooted only in one culture, while bivalent ones are adapted to two cultures. Polyvalent individuals, on the other hand, have adopted three or more cultures. Ambivalent individuals are those who, by experiencing more than one culture, feel uncertain and lost (Kłoskowska, 1992, 1996). A. Kłoskowska juxtaposes these four types of valence with types of national identification: (1) inherent/integral, (2) dual/binational, (3) uncertain, and (4) cosmopolitism. Research shows that only the following pairs do not correlate: ambivalence and inherent identification, univalence and dual identification, and univalence and cosmopolitism. It clearly shows that the two components of an identity, identification and valence, complement each other. Identification could be viewed as a subjective declaration, while valence is the individual’s adoption of cultural elements related to the group to which the identification refers (Kłoskowska, 1996; Sobecki, 2007).

There are not many initiatives in Sejny seeking to build a vision of history that takes into account the heritage of both communities and various interpretations of the past. This is particularly evident in local cultural and memory institutions. The Museum of the Sejny Region presenting the cultural heritage of the Sejny Region bypasses Lithuanian achievements and contribution to the development of the lands; in the case of the narrative about the Sejny Uprising, presents them as a fight between Poles and a hostile invader, without paying attention to the indigenous nature of the Lithuanian population and an attempt to take into account the perspective of the other side of the conflict. Dom Społeczność Litewska [The Lithuanian Community Home] organizes its own institutions of remembrance – in the Lithuanian House there is an exhibition dedicated to the Lithuanian national revival and the activity of the Šaltinis printing house. It is extremely important to look for a common meeting platform. Such attempts are undertaken by the “Borderland – Arts, Cultures and Nations” Center operating in Sejny since the early 1990s. Animators from the Borderland began looking for the way to meeting through activities in the field of intercultural and regional education. The workshop of the animators from the borderland – “practitioners of ideas”, says Krzysztof Czyżewski, founder
and director of the “Borderland – Arts, Cultures and Nations” Center – is built on a solid foundation of the past memory of the region. He teaches how to read it in the modern world. It is building bridges between what has passed and what lasts, between tradition and modernity, the old and the young generation. The seat of the Center was half way between Polish and Lithuanian community centers – what in accordance with the founder’s wish could constitute a symbolic agora – the meeting place. Center’s leaders started working with young people brought up in the new political reality, without historical burden. Those actions were meant to bring to life what was negated, concealed and forgotten.

In connection with this, exhibitions and performances were organized that drew the attention of the inhabitants to these periods in the history of both countries which referred to the legacy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Numerous projects, programs and conferences organized by the Borderland Center lead to the meeting of the inhabitants of Sejny and the rebuilding of a tolerant and open attitude, with respect for the otherness, breaking stereotypes, building bridges between people of different nationalities and religions. Krzysztof Czyżewski, founder and director of the “Borderland – Arts, Cultures, Nations” Center in Sejny, often repeats that: “Unsuccessful encounters do not break the dialogue off. Sometimes such events actually initiate dialogue by laying bare how difficult – and sometimes even impossible – it can be. The borderland constantly puts a man to the test with these failed attempts, and guarantees their occurrence. Thus, they draw us, too, into the drama of the path they are on. The path becomes overgrown and the space for such encounters disappears only when non-encounters take place, and when there are no situations that can put us to the test, when our isolation proves complete – often the result of an ideology characterised by hatred and threats. It is then that the temblors and tensions inherent to the borderland can explode into a destructive cataclysm” (Czyżewski, 2002).

From the very beginning of its existence, the center’s animators have been running a program of the Cultural Heritage Class, where through working with young people, a dialogue is being reconstructed between the past and the present of this place. The process of building the Sejny project of the Cultural Heritage Class began in 1991. At that time, the animators from the Borderland Center sent to the youth from the Sejny high school an offer to participate in the “Heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania” program. It was an initiative to start, lasting to this day, work with young people from Sejny, whose aim was to restore the memory of the place, to study the traditions of their own region, creative exploration of the multicultural heritage of Central European borderlands, and to shape the attitude of dialogue.
The above mentioned cultural initiatives are a slow process towards reaching cultural symbiosis across the borderland. In the context of the European policy which highlights the meaning of regions, the need for regional education and its considerable meaning in creating the citizen of the “little homeland” is stressed more and more often. According to Jerzy Nikitorowicz – the propagator of research connected with intercultural and regional education – the aim of the latter is to equip one with knowledge and sensitivity, as well as strengthening and protecting the worlds of core values and encouraging to cultivate and take up intentional actions for the sake of fostering attitudes of attachment and conscious creating of bonds with the “private homeland”, with the world of primeval roots (Nikitorowicz, 2009).

Jerzy Nikitorowicz defines intercultural education as the collection of mutual influences between individuals, groups, institutions and organizations, favouring such human development which could help one become a fully aware and creative member of the family, local, regional, religious, national and cultural community. One should also be capable of active self-accomplishment, creating a permanent identity (Nikitorowicz, 2009). Getting to know the other side through the means of dialogue constitutes the first step to grasp the idea of joint past and heritage of the borderland.

The century has passed since the Sejny Uprising, which divided the inhabitants of the borderland. The issue of the borderland and finding a model of reconciliation between the conflicted nationality groups inhabiting the borderland and similar areas is a difficult but very important issue. Searching for a way to reconciliation is an extremely necessary issue. The young generation of Sejnen, Poles and Lithuanians is growing up, ready to cooperate and build a shared social spatial identity, by appealing to a multicultural heritage – to what united both nations. The young generation of the Poles and the Lithuanians from Sejny is growing up. They are ready for both cooperation and creation of the joint heritage of the borderland. The above mentioned actions help us notice the process of integration of the local community through cultural means. The art has received a social rank and is becoming a place for the dialogue. The reconciliation model built in this way, the experience gained, can be used on other borderlands.

References


Online Sources


Maps

