



MAŁOPOLSKA
Wielu Kultur

WIELE KULTUR WSPÓLNE MIASTO

wydawnictwo mik

Rozmowy o roli kultury
w integracji nowych mieszkank
i mieszkańców Krakowa

Opracowanie: **Elżbieta Kaproń**

WE NEED TO COME DOWN TO THE LEVEL OF EVERYDAY LIFE

**Interview
with Halina Czuba**

ELŻBIETA KAPROŃ: You organized workshops at MIK (Translator's note: Culture Institution of the Małopolska Region) for people with different intercultural experiences, entitled *Many Cultures, One City*. What does it mean in practice that there are "many cultures" in the city?

HALINA CZUBA: It's a reality that we observe and hear more and more on Kraków's streets. The Polish language is predominant, of course, yet sometimes, as a philologist by degree, walking past some groups lost in conversation, I wonder, "What language are they speaking?" Of course, it's easy to distinguish English, German, and French, but I can also hear languages that I cannot recognize right away.

Kraków now looks different than twenty-five years ago when I first arrived here. Back then, it was "Polish" Poland, and now there is an evident ethnic diversity on the streets and in pubs. The increased frequency and ease of travel also play a significant role in opening up to other cultures: on the one hand, foreigners come to us, and on the other hand, we can also travel to their countries.

In Stare Podgórze, where I live, in my local shop, I see people, often with children, who are plainly not from around here, not even from this part of the world. That helps me realize that Kraków has changed. We can experience it on a personal level. It's a change that is not happening as much but has already happened.

For years, Kraków has been pursuing a policy focused on tourism: its offerings and expanded services are aimed at tourists. Living in Kraków, we've been experiencing the presence of foreigners who come here for festivals or holidays. We've gotten used to them. What is the difference if we're to compare it with the current situation?

The difference is that they're not tourists! When someone goes shopping in the local Groszek convenience store, that means they're not a tourist but a resident. When someone brings their child to kindergarten, it must mean they intend to stay here, not for a month or two but for much longer. Therefore, the difference stems not only from the fact that there are more tourists but also that a large number of people from other countries have settled here permanently. And it's not just about students, diplomats, and employees of international corporations. It's also about children who go to kindergarten, school, and sports clubs. Of course, Ukrainians predominate, but the number of Belarusians and Georgians is also growing, and many people are coming from India as well. They haven't just dropped by for a short while. They have become

part of our shared reality. Essentially, the main change is that we begin to meet in everyday life.

This poses certain challenges for both new and current residents of the city. During the workshop, many people claimed that regardless of their nationality or origin, they feel strongly connected to Kraków. How does the process of becoming a “local” work?

At some point, I realized that for a long time I had been saying that I was going “home” for Christmas, meaning Lviv and my parents. And recently, while staying in Lviv, I said to my mum, “You know what, I want to go home,” meaning Kraków. I said it spontaneously, but I think it was because here in Kraków I no longer feel like a visitor but a local. The way you think about yourself shows who you are in this city.

Common Kraków is a space where we must coexist alongside one another. Those who have arrived must enter the schooling, education, and healthcare systems. Something may upset them, something may not suit them, but they must find their place in this system nonetheless.

Of course, everyone would like to live well and comfortably in Kraków, but this is largely an individual, internal process of adaptation. You can’t just tell someone, “Now feel at home.” I think children and youth of school age are adapting to these processes the fastest. As follows, it applies to the parents of these children, who, out of necessity, have to start functioning within the school and childcare system.

A researcher studying the Polish migrant community in Norway pointed out the difference in the volume of behavior: Norwegians are much quieter and behave more discreetly. For the locals, the migrants’ loud behavior was very uncomfortable; something changed rapidly for them, and they even stopped feeling at home. Many such situations that we have to deal with somehow are our neighborhood, going to the shop, the clinic, work, and taking children to school. However, integration is not just a matter of those who have come here having to adapt, but in a sense it is a task for all of us.

And that is the hardest thing to accept and embrace.

I see two perspectives. From the host’s point of view, it may appear that many people who behave differently have arrived, and at some point, this may be jarring and cause concern. And if certain behaviors are commonplace, it may even cause frustration, resentment, and outrage. But there is also the other side—and I think it is worth mentioning—the person who is arriving. We need to realize that we are coming to a different culture. And usually we come with their habits, our way of speaking, which we are not even aware of. When Italians gesticulate while speaking, they don’t think,

“Oh, now I’m going to use these gestures,” but they were raised that way; it’s natural behavior for them. I think it is also significant for those who come here to be sensitive, to be willing to enter a new reality and find their place in it.

What might such an entrance involve?

First and foremost, a positive attitude and openness to reality. Many people, especially those working in international corporations, assume that knowing English is enough to function in the modern world, regardless of which country they live in. Meanwhile, language is one of the early paths to opening up to the local culture. After all, language is not so much about the language itself as a tool for communication but also about opening up to the people with whom we are trying to communicate, showing that we want to be with them.

And just as the hosting country is willing to search for ways of understanding and integration, so too should new residents, even if they are only coming for a short while, find the will and eagerness to discover and learn about Polish reality. This may include not only language, customs, or ways of looking at the world but also art, literature, and films that tell us about who Poles are and what their history is.

However, among very young, English-speaking, modern, cosmopolitan people who do not yet know where they would eventually like to live, a certain trend in thinking can be observed: “Since I’m not sure whether I’ve come here for the long term or not, it’s not worth integrating or investing in learning the local language,” because it indeed is an investment of time and effort.

For many women with children who have arrived now because of the war, this lack of involvement is more related to uncertainty, a lack of mental strength, and time. They probably also feel the disapproval of the whole situation.

Yes, but even people who came here before the war, of their own free will, to work did not necessarily learn the language. I once had a student, an adult man, an employee of one of the international corporations, who had been living in Poland with his family for five years, and we started our first Polish lesson with: “I am, you are.” I asked him, “How did you manage to survive for five years without even learning the basics of the language?” Our cooperation was rather tough, until I finally said, “How about meeting people, watching some films, going to a museum? Just out of curiosity, not because you have to, because you have an exam.” And indeed, at one point, he asked, “What film would you recommend?” He actually started watching films and reading more, and after a while, he said that it was actually quite an interesting experience. This way, the language becomes much more graspable than when you learn it solely from a textbook.

If you already live here, even if only for a few years, it's really worth it to open your heart to get to know the people and the country.

Getting to know a culture is not just a matter of familiarizing oneself with its symbolic layer or with its cultural artifacts.

Well, on the one hand, we're biological beings, but on the other hand, we're social beings. Our social nature incorporates rules of behavior and ways of thinking. This is what culture is—everything that concerns human society's functioning. I always tell my students that culture is not only what we see in museums or on stage. Not only paintings, architecture, and music but also the way we address each other, what we think about the world, and how we perceive it. As social beings, we are shaped by culture. We adopt certain behaviors from our parents and our environment, even unconsciously. We are largely shaped by our culture. Culture is ingrained in us.

A real-life example: I was recently in Italy with a friend. It was late in the evening, long after dinner time, but we saw that some pubs were still open. We were hungry because we had just returned from a trip. So my friend went into a small restaurant and asked the waiter, "Till when are you open?" The man was clearly surprised by this question. I said to my friend, "Don't ask like that. Ask if we can still get something to eat." In our country, restaurants are open at specific times, but in a small town in Italy, it is up to the owner and staff of the restaurant and their willingness to feed hungry tourists outside of normal meal times. I could see that my friend was surprised at first. In the next restaurant, I talked to the owner myself. We got delicious pasta with goose meat.

And that also is culture. We approach certain things habitually because that's what we do, and that's how it is accepted in our country, and we don't even consider that it may be different elsewhere. It's only when you encounter a distinct culture that you see that not everything is the same and obvious. And that, in my opinion, is multiculturalism: not only different languages but also realizing and accepting that things can be different.

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During the aforementioned workshop, you used the metaphor of culture as an iceberg. Its visible part included such phenomena as literature, theater, games, cuisine, clothing styles, architecture, fine arts.

Yes. It is what we can see and what we consciously perceive. However, what stays hidden beneath the surface of the iceberg are the gender roles in the family and society, attitudes towards family, children, or other living beings, perceptions of elder people, attitudes towards work and property, ways of communicating and expressing emotions, individual and communal ways of organizing life, and many other important aspects. And this is what constitutes us: our social part functions based on these invisible norms. We are not aware of them. No one really teaches us about them, yet they are deeply ingrained in us because we adopt these rules and attitudes as we grow up and socialize. We adopt them from our parents and from observing our surroundings—even as very young children. For example, the division of responsibilities: who spends more time with you—your mom or your dad? Who does what at home? How do they talk to you?

I used to teach a course for students on communication styles, which I called Man-to-Man Talk and Girl Talk. As you might guess, it was about gender differences. The very way we talk about a phenomenon reveals our attitude towards it. Gender differences are also culturally conditioned, which is why, despite many anti-discrimination measures, it is still fairly difficult to get rid of them.

When delving into the topic of multiculturalism, we should take a closer look at social relations and create a space where these different values, lifestyles, and world-views can be developed and co-created.

If we create conditions for people to meet, talk, and get to know each other, we give them a chance to create something new and shared. It is not about one behavior type prevailing over another but about seeing that there can be several options, and they all can be distinct.

It is said that in mixed families, where parents come from different cultures, children are raised in a somewhat “third culture.” In such families, intercultural contact occurs on a daily basis. Children from such families are more aware that there may be more than one option. I think that the most important thing in the challenge of multiculturalism is to accept that things may be different from what is generally accepted—and that this is also OK. Because we are very attached to the idea that what is mine is true, correct, and the way it should be. But we need to accept and agree that there are other options, customs, and behaviors.

After all, multiculturalism appears not only between different countries but also between regions and even between older and younger generations. Cultural differences can be gender-based, religious, linguistic, or related to life in the countryside or in a big city. Let us simply respect the way things are.

During the workshop, you led us through an exercise in which we had to identify the most important elements of our identity, individually, for each of us. It gave us all a lot to think about. We had time to write down what defines us, what we identify with—and from what I remember, we had full freedom in this task.

Yes. It was the “Who are you?” one.

The way in which you “questioned” us about these identities was also important. Everyone was free to express their opinion on the subject. But there was also a moment when we had to stand up when a certain category was brought out: “family,” “religion,” “hobby,” “city”—so we could see in what “constellations” we form common groups.

Yes. It was also important to ask how you feel when you are alone—that is, when you are the only one who defines yourself according to a certain category. These were seemingly trivial categories: do you have any pets? Do you like cooking? But also “serious” ones—language, religion, nationality.

This is a difficult exercise because when you do it for the first time, you have to think really hard about what to say about yourself. Who are you: a woman, a human being? Because on the one hand, there are so many faces to us, and on the other, we don’t think about them that often. It is also interesting to see what seems to come first and foremost: am I primarily a wife, a mother, a daughter, a teacher? These will not necessarily be aspects related to nationality.

After this workshop, I thought that if you genuinely think about it, you are never alone. You will always find someone with whom you have something in common. Maybe it will cover being a student, a parent, or having a passion for traveling. It is worth considering that sometimes we have similar fields and reference groups, but within them, we can define ourselves in various ways. For example, concerning religion, someone will put a note about themselves that they are a believer or that they belong to a particular denomination, and someone else will write that they are a non-believer. And then, even though these people have given different answers, they are bound to actually have more in common than dividing them, because the fact that they have chosen this category (religion) means that spiritual matters are important to all of them.

Organizing such a workshop doesn’t require anything complicated. All you need is a little space and, above all, time so that we can take a break from our current tasks and have a moment to ourselves—for reflection, introspection, exchange, conversation.

And that is precisely what cultural institutions are for!

How often do we think about who we are in our everyday lives, let alone who our neighbors and other people around us are? We need to find the time and place for this and invite people. It is believed that during adolescence, as teenagers, we actively seek answers to these types of questions. And then we stop, even though people and their identities change throughout their lives. So it is important and, to some extent, even a very personal experience: establishing contact with oneself, discovering who I am, what is important to me at this particular moment in my life.

On the one hand, we are dealing with the diversity of identities and relationships in society, and on the other, interpersonal relationships are disappearing. Perhaps somewhere in all this, there is also an opportunity to establish contact—both with oneself and with others?

The younger generation does indeed have a problem with interpersonal communication and with reaching out to other people. My students even told me recently that, in their opinion, calling someone is downright rude because it is too much of an invasion of their privacy. If you have something to say, you should send a message. Personally, I always prefer to call, because I don't see anything inappropriate in it, and I like talking to people. But they see it differently.

While traveling, I recently discovered self-service hotels with no reception. It works. You book your room online, print a plastic card for the lift and door access upon arrival, pay, enter, leave—there is no personal contact. Maybe it's comfortable, but I prefer a traditional reception desk so I can say hello, ask for directions, find out which restaurants they recommend in the area, and what to visit. Even if I can find out all this information online. But I strongly feel that I am a person of the twentieth century, and the twenty-first century is a slightly different reality.

Should we create shared spaces and opportunities for everyone who wants to participate?

Definitely, yes. We may not even be aware of it, but there are not that many opportunities for face-to-face meetings. Or maybe there are, but not for everyone. As a person who teaches Polish to foreigners, I often hear them ask: "Halina, where can I speak Polish?" And this is in Kraków, in the heart of Poland!

I think that everyone has the right to choose whether they want to interact or not. Cultural institutions are there to initiate and moderate these relationships. If someone doesn't wish to come, they won't, but they have to be given a chance to do so.

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At MIK, we often hear from young people, our volunteers, that they get involved in activities and make contacts with people in order to test themselves, to see if they can find their place, if there is something that suits them. It is an opportunity for them to learn about themselves.

The same applies to opening up to multiculturalism or diversity—it really comes down to the personal level. Of course, policies, strategies, and integration programs are important, but whether I am truly open to another culture, another person, depends only on me. If I have a friend from another country, I have the opportunity to get closer to that culture, to experience it.

I always say that the best way to learn a language is to get a boyfriend or girlfriend or to find friends. It really accelerates the learning process. Or I ask my students: “Have you celebrated Christmas Eve with a Polish family?” And if someone has, they will already know that Christmas in Poland is not just a time when the shops are closed. I encourage them to try the carp or mazurek for Easter. I always recommend entering into these individual, private acquaintances. It’s great to meet someone at a workshop, but what really matters is whether this transfers later into a more private space—acquaintances, friendships—because only then can a real relationship may develop.

I really appreciate the fact that when I arrived in Poland, I metaphorically jumped into the deep end. I found myself surrounded by Poles—at work, in the student dormitory, on the street, everywhere. It turned out quickly that my neighbor teaches Polish at the School of Polish Language and Culture at the University of Silesia. I started to attend there and met lots of interesting people. After the first month, when I went to Ukraine for a few days, I was looking forward to coming back because I already had friends, students, classes, and interesting things going on here in Poland. At the time, I wasn’t aware of how much it helped me in terms of “immersing” myself in Poland. Now I really appreciate it.

Although, if a larger group of people arrive at the same time, it is also natural for them to stick together as they are not acquainted with the language or customs.

That is why what we said at the beginning appears so important. It’s the willingness of people coming here to open up and their desire to leave their immediate environment.

Of course, there are difficult situations, and no one should be forced to integrate. But if you have the strength within you and you do plan to stay in this place, it’s really worth trying. You will not lose much, and you will probably gain a lot.

Direct contact also gives us a sense of security and releases us from a sense of alienation and misunderstanding. Moreover, we become less vulnerable to manipulation, political narratives, and misinformation.

Yes, that way a foreigner ceases to be someone abstract. They are someone I know, because, for example, their children come to visit mine. And that really takes on a completely different dimension.

I also think it's good to influence the younger generations, because at that age, it's still possible to develop sensitivity, openness, and a desire to get to know others. When we are adults, we have many serious issues on our minds—loans, work, children, responsibilities—and we no longer have time for such “nonsense.” It's not nonsense, though, of course.

What recommendations would you give to cultural institutions?

I think it's important to do small things. It isn't about mass events with hundreds or thousands of participants but about arranging many different opportunities for networking. Cultural institutions don't necessarily have to design specific tasks but rather make sure to provide conditions for meetings, such as time, space, and incentives.

Cultural institutions are good places, neutral for all participants. They should feel safe, as there is no obligation to attend. Simply, if you want to come, you come. From there, you can move into the private sphere. You can benefit from it or not, because no one can be forced to form deeper relationships. The sense of security in these relationships stems from the absence of obligations. You can withdraw if you're not feeling comfortable.

And what about the issue of national identities? How can we act in a way that does not preserve divisions based on linguistic or ethnic criteria? I think that it is unfavorable to focus excessively on presenting different national cultures. It's better to invite people to participate in our “normal” activities, simply organize meetings (devoted to ecology, fashion, etc.) open to many people, and support them linguistically through language assistants who can help in the event of misunderstandings. So that linguistic activity is not the most important thing.

Yes, all these evenings of Ukrainian culture—although I do not completely question their purpose—may reinforce stereotypes that Ukrainians are all about embroidery, dumplings, their flag. It should rather focus on activities such as cooking, shared hobbies, joint trips, sports, planting flowers, or other small things that will form the basis for these people to develop their contacts further. Because it turns out that language is not that important; it is only a tool. Of course, you have to communicate, but ultimately, you can use English to help you.

Those typical presentations where something Ukrainian is presented first, followed by something Polish—maybe we should just skip them? Let's eat something together, cook a Polish-Ukrainian, Italian, or some other dinner, so that it becomes an excuse for contact, for conversation. I think it's more human. It doesn't put us on a pedestal; we just move in the reality we experience every day. Eating, trips, meetings with parents, with children, playing together, because as every parent wants to provide their child with fun and growth, they wish to relax a little themselves at the same time. We need to come down to the level of everyday life.

A cultural institution should be a bridge from which one can jump into the Polish sea. Later on, it's but a private matter. What I should pay mind to is what I like or what direction I want to go in. It's great if I meet people from other cultures along the way, with whom I have something to talk about and can do something together. I think this is a good path. Or many paths—everyone can choose their own path and tread it.

CULTURE IS WHAT WE CREATE TOGETHER

**Interview with
Carlos Panek**

ELŻBIETA KAPROŃ: You are actually the godfather of this publication. After MIK organized the Solidarity Culture conference, devoted to building relations between Polish and Ukrainian cultural circles in Kraków, you proposed extending the perspective to all national groups living here. During the next conference, Together Through Culture, prepared in cooperation with the Jagiellonian University Institute of European Studies, we discussed what these different perspectives and experiences mean for cultural institutions. The main idea is probably that cultural institutions should rethink what culture is.

CARLOS PANEK: Yes. It will be slightly different for everyone.

It would seem that culture is the sphere in which someone new here tries to settle in. And that this settling in determines whether they will feel at home here. So we want to contemplate together about directions of thinking, considering integration. Such conversations are necessary because for many of us, multiculturalism is a new phenomenon.

Yes, indeed. For centuries, Poland was a multicultural country. However, it changed after World War II, and it was excluded from political discourse, yet it was still a multicultural country.

How long have you been in Poland?

For fifteen years.

OK, so your experience of Polish reality is different from that of people who grew up in the Polish People's Republic or even in the 1990s—we saw Poland as homogeneous, and the multiculturalism you talk about was a phenomenon known only from history textbooks. Many Poles still think and feel that we are a monocultural country. We don't see reality as it is now; we still consider ourselves quite uniform.

From my own experience and from what I have read, I can see that, indeed, due to collective memory, it is somewhat as you say. Some aspects had a major impact on this, such as World War II, all the border changes that resulted from it, and then the time of the Polish People's Republic, which was neither favorable nor encouraging for anyone who wanted to come here, earn money, and pursue a career. And indeed, over the course of several decades, Poland has, in my opinion, become a monocultural country.

And after that regime's fall, it was impossible to change all this at once, overnight. It is a process that requires some time. More and more people from outside Poland are arriving. Unfortunately, in recent years, political rhetoric has attempted to create an

image of Poland as a country of white Catholics born in Poland. Even references to the Second Polish Republic or earlier periods often omit the issue of multiculturalism. Unfortunately, this issue has become highly politicized. People have even stopped talking about Polish Tatars, and many assimilated Poles of other nationalities.

And how does the reality in Poland look from your perspective? When you look at Kraków, do you see a multicultural city?

Yes. Of course, it's on a different level than Amsterdam, Berlin, or Paris, but I see a multicultural city with enormous potential for dialogue, where all minorities can coexist.

Mamadou Diouf, a Senegalese-Polish musician and social activist, opened our conference with a beautiful speech about how Poland can be happy that we don't have ethnic or linguistic ghettos. And that was also the motivation behind my project—so that we don't wake up in ten years, realizing that we have overlooked something. So that divisions between better and worse citizens don't form. I wouldn't want that to happen in Poland.

Poland has the potential to become a multicultural country. I see this more and more clearly, not only in Kraków. More and more foreigners are living in Rzeszów and Opole. But if we don't create the conditions for these people to feel at home here, there will be no integration.

Can cultural institutions be such natural points of contact? Can they influence people to meet and stop treating each other like strangers?

Yes. They should be a cultural agora.

One element of culture—as a characteristic of humanity—is exchange between social groups. Culture is created through friendly dialogue. Here I can refer to my own positive experience: I was very warmly welcomed by all of my colleagues and lecturers at the university, even though I chose a rather conservative field of study—history at the Jagiellonian University.

Did you come to Poland straight from Brazil? Was it a leap from one continent to another?

Yes. At first, of course, I was thinking about applying to the best universities in the United States, England, and France, but after a while, I thought: “Why not Poland?”—that's where my family comes from, after all.

I chose history because at that time (2008, Brazil), very little was known about Poland. Even though I went to a very good secondary school, Polish history was covered

only from 1939, when Hitler invaded Poland. Poland was the country where World War II began.

Was Solidarity present?

Yes, yes. But, for example, there was not a word about the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

I was ashamed of this later, because all my friends here knew these things, and I heard about the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth for the first time at university. Or about the Commission of National Education, which I believe every Pole should be proud of, because it was a centralized body supervising education in the country. Poles knew such things from secondary school, of course, but I only learned about them at university.

I believe that Poland has the potential not only to welcome foreigners but also to ensure that Poles don't feel the constant need to prove themselves. I often see a tendency in thinking that everything from the West is better. I disagree with this statement. Maybe something works in England or the United States, but that is a different country. In Poland, perhaps it does, perhaps not. So my motivation for action is this: let's wait and see what is cool about Poland. Maybe something that doesn't work in other countries will work here.

Of course, you can be proud of your origins and of your country. But there are no better or worse cultures. And that's what I'm getting at with all this. It's not that my Brazilian culture is better, so I want to bring it to Poland, or that Polish culture is better, so it needs to be transferred to Brazil. Every culture has its value, every culture is interesting, and they will simply evolve with the world changes. We have the internet, more international marriages, and students travel freely around the world. The only question is how we will respond to these changes, because they are taking place whether we like it or not.

So let us move towards dialogue, recognizing our own value and appreciating others. The point is not to fall into cultural imperialism.

The fact that Polish history is not taught in Brazilian schools does not particularly surprise me; we don't learn Brazilian history either. But you returned to the country of your ancestors. Was Polish culture present in your home? Did you have any cultural bridges because you returned to the country your family emigrated from?

We had one contact here, but overall, the experience in Poland was completely new to me. I didn't even know the language, only "dzień dobry" (good morning), "dziękuję" (thank you), and "biedronka" (ladybug)—because my grandmother loves these insects.

As for Polishness, I didn't learn much about it at home. I think my family didn't speak Polish because my great-grandparents were deeply affected by their escape to Brazil. My great-grandfather achieved professional success in Kraków at a young age only to have to leave it all behind. He sailed to an unknown country. Of course, he talked about his life here during the interwar period, but not necessarily about things like how beautiful Poland was.

Then my grandmother arrived in Poland in the 1970s and had a terrible experience compared to what her father had told her. Because the free Second Polish Republic from his stories had turned into "gray Poland" under communism, which she was very upset about. When she went to the restaurant Hawełka, the staff were terribly rude, and the tablecloths were dirty. It wasn't what she wanted. So I think that's why there was no cult of Poland in my family.

I come from a family of assimilated Jews, so education was our priority. But there was no Polishness or Jewishness per se at home. Of course, there were elements I now see as Polish; it's hard for me to pinpoint exactly which ones, but I feel I didn't experience such a culture shock. When I came here, I unconsciously knew that I was familiar with something like this from home.

But how is it: do you feel like you're moving to another world here? For someone coming to Poland from Latin America, is it like arriving in a different reality?

It is like arriving in a different reality. In my case, it was a little different because my family is not only Polish-Brazilian but also very international. My grandmother lived for a few months in Paris, London, and New York; my father lived in the Netherlands; and I myself spent some time in the United States. In general, foreign experience was very present in our family. My dad speaks Dutch, English, and a little German.

You yourself know several languages.

Yes. Anyway, before I came to Poland, I had already been to Europe, the United States, and Argentina. And the arrival in Europe itself. Of course, there is always something strange about it for us. Especially for someone who has never been abroad, everything can be astonishing. How strangely they do things; how strangely they eat!

Where do you see the biggest cultural differences?

For Latin Americans, it will definitely be about food and weather. I would say that this is the biggest shock. And it's not even that Brazilian food is the best in the world—although it is!—but rather a matter of ingredients. When people are used to having access to a certain ingredient from Monday to Sunday, and then they come to a coun-

try where it is more expensive or difficult to find, they start to notice the difference. A simple example: I love black beans. I cook in a pressure cooker enough to last two weeks, and I eat them every day for dinner. And Poles ask: Can you really eat beans every day? Yes, I can. Because that's what Brazilians are used to. If I asked a Pole if they could eat bigos (hunter's stew) and breaded pork chops, they could too.

Someone from Mexico might miss certain spices here. And the prices at the Kuchnie Świata (World Cuisines) shop are brutal. I didn't find it that difficult, but I think for Latin Americans and probably for people from Africa or Asia as well, this can be a significant difference.

So cultural differences can have a specific flavor?

Yes! And the weather. I don't mind the weather here because I don't like the heat, so during my first winter in Poland, I was truly delighted.

What else can cause discomfort?

Latinos are, above all, very family-oriented. I am lucky that my parents come to visit me, and my grandmother now lives in Kraków, so we have always been together. And now there are more and more Latinos in Poland who may earn good money, but their parents do not have such experience abroad, so they usually go to visit their family homes.

It is far away.

True, it's far away, and it's a long journey.

Do these strong family ties—the need for contact with parents and loved ones—translate into a need to maintain close relationships with other people?

The fact that I came from Brazil does not mean that I have to be friends with Brazilians. I can, but I don't have to. I came to Poland, so I would like to get to know Poles, right? It is often said that Poles living in England only socialize with other Poles; the same can be said about Ukrainians, who only socialize with other Ukrainians. This phenomenon is frequent in every society.

There is simply a sphere of experiences that you only share with your compatriots: your shared childhood; what you watched on television. When my Polish friends say, "Do you remember when we were in high school?"—I am already excluded from the conversation. It's fun to listen, but I can't contribute because I spent my childhood in Brazil. Or when they reminisce about Komandos beer—well, I didn't drink it, did I? And they would all drink Komandos when skipping school. And you know, someone else from the same generation can relate to that, but I can't. It's very cultural.

Therefore, important memories consist not only of contact with your surroundings, not just your family circle, but also, e.g., listening to music from your country, music of a specific generation, and what was popular at the time.

Even if you are already a “native” do you sometimes need to feel as if you were home?

Yes. Like at home. Belonging to a certain generation is also important.

When we talk about multiculturalism, we often think about showcasing the cultures of different countries so that local residents can learn about them. However, from what you say, it seems that we should also pay close attention to ensuring that such events are an opportunity to spend time together, talk, reminisce, and have a beer.

Exactly.

This brings us back to my vision of why I am doing all this. I don't want it to be like this: oh, look, it's a dance group from Brazil; we watch their performance and leave. Instead, I want the Brazilians who are here to be able and willing to show themselves and their culture a little. Between Poland and Latin America, it's mainly stereotypes that are known. I've heard many times that Argentina is only about tango.

Well, and football!

Precisely! So how can I complain that people only know my country through stereotypes when I myself don't go out and say, “Listen, there's a bit more to Brazil than that.” Yes, there's carnival, there's football, but look, my wife from the north eats acai completely differently than I do in São Paulo. In Poland, Brazilian acai berries are usually eaten sweet, served with yogurt. They don't eat it like that in the north—they eat it savory, with meat.

And unfortunately, there is a stereotypical image of Poles that they don't smile and drink vodka. That's why we need to talk about what's interesting here.

And what's interesting here?

Take history, for example. Why aren't we talking about the National Education Commission? Of course, it depends on the context, but sometimes it's worth talking about things like that. Once in Ecuador, I asked the question: “What was the second constitution passed in the world after the United States?” They guessed: France, England, and I said, “No, Poland.” Wow!

It breaks down the strangeness of Poland being nowhere and no one knowing what goes on there. And vice versa. Sometimes it is worth mentioning such things to break down these stereotypes.

First and foremost, we must be aware that culture is something we create together. Cultural institutions can organize events that promote dialogue.

I understand that if you come here to study history, you get to know the history, culture, mentality, literature, and art quite well, but you are probably in the minority. Because most people come here to work, and if they come to study, they study something else. And so—what then? Is it possible to live in Poland, come here, and not know its history? Technically, yes, of course. But does showing people the history give them something that makes them feel more at home here?

First and foremost, we must be aware that culture is something we create together. Cultural institutions can organize events that promote dialogue.

That's an interesting question. One thing is for sure: Poland has been very passive about it, at least since I've been living here. On the one hand, it's cool that Poles know a lot about Polish history. Unfortunately, in recent years, we haven't been talking about Poland as the multicultural country it once was. It would be nice to show that history.

Of course, when deciding to migrate, no one is guided by history—"Hey, I'm going to move to Switzerland because it has a cool history!"—but simply because you can earn a lot of money in Switzerland, right? However, I think that Poles, by treating this multicultural issue passively, are missing out on a huge opportunity. At the beginning of our conversation, we mentioned the positive aspect of the Polish reality—that no cultural or linguistic ghettos are formed here. However, there is a lack of incentives to get involved. The point is to show that foreigners, too, can create something interesting in this country.

Through references to historical multiculturalism?

Yes. For someone who knows nothing about Poland, this can be an important point of reference.

Of course, this message needs to be adapted to the audience, but for those who arrive here, it would be worthwhile to assure them they can do a little more. Not every society has cultural institutions or independent organizations that are open and promote bonding experiences, right? That is why I think it's fantastic that a Brazilian is working at the Kraków City Hall. It also shows authenticity at various levels; that multiculturalism is beginning to appear in different spheres.

There is a certain trap in the word "culture." We automatically think of music, theater, films, and languages and focus less on the fact that multiculturalism would mean representation of different cultures in various spheres of life. How can we transform this reality? How can we support processes that will make us equal?

First and foremost, we must be aware that culture is something we create together.

Cultural institutions can organize events that promote dialogue—this is somewhat lacking. For example, I know of a group of Brazilians who meet every month in a different place to read books together and discuss them. This could be a great thing for libraries: once a month, we make a room available to Brazilians.

Of course, we would have to make sure Brazilians are aware that the Kraków Library exists and that they could do something there. Because in Brazil, institutions are somewhat what you distance yourself from. How does one write to them? Will anyone even respond? But since I've been working at the City Hall, I've seen that many institutions in Kraków are open to outside initiatives, and so are you—if someone comes and says, "Listen, I have an interesting idea," it's often accepted.

Indeed, it is worth working on reducing the distance between institutions and city residents. This applies in particular to migrants, who find it difficult to navigate local relationships; contact with cultural institutions can prove too much of a barrier and be intimidating. Is there any advice you could give us here? For example, look for informal groups and initiatives and encourage them to cooperate? Don't wait for them to come to you, because the distance is too great?

Yes, but it's best to use ambassadors.

Ambassadors? That's a distance!

No! I mean grassroots ambassadors. Representatives of various communities. When I worked at the National Agency for Academic Exchange, one of our tasks was to explain what it's like here and to encourage people to get involved. But it has to be mutual: we also need to find out how new people perceive our reality, what they understand, and what they don't.

Do we need ambassador-liaisons?

Exactly. Who knows, for example, what worries Ukrainians who come to Kraków? They themselves. But I would probably know what worries Brazilians. And you have to work with them, tell them what cultural institutions are open to, teach them to describe specifics if they want to organize their own event. So that they can communicate well: if you want to do this and that, write to such and such an institution.

But as I understand it, some networking meetings where you could come and talk to institutions would also be useful?

I don't know if that's really necessary. But it's a good question. We'd have to see how it would work out in practice. I'm not sure if such an information meeting wouldn't correlate with something boring.

I wasn't thinking about an information meeting, but more informal contacts: if I already know one or two people at a given institution, then I have someone I can call and ask whom I can present my idea to.

OK. I thought you meant something like, "There will be a meeting at MIK on Friday; come and talk." Well, I think that from the perspective of a Brazilian, there would be some doubt: so what, I'll go there to talk to someone, and probably nothing will come of it anyway. I would prefer it like this: "Hey, would you like to come for a face-to-face chat? We'll show you what kind of institution we are, what we do, what opportunities we offer." And then the reaction might be: "Wow, that sounds great, I'll come!"

So you have to cultivate various informal, personal contacts.

Definitely. Networking and informal contacts. Eating together and music also have this effect.

Since you mentioned music, is there anything in the Polish soundscape that might be particularly interesting to a foreigner?

I don't know the Polish music scene that well, but I really like Kapela Ze Wsi Warszawa, for example. It has a Slavic soul.

Polish rock doesn't appeal to me because, since rock in the 1980s was very strongly rooted in respective countries' cultures, local elements are important in it. Since I haven't been here during my childhood, I recognize some songs, but I can't name the bands. It's hard for me to identify with it, but I simply understand what it means to you. I understand its cultural significance.

It is also difficult to say what Brazilian music is, because we have different musical traditions from south to north, but some sounds just touch my heart. Polish music less so, not because it's worse, but because for the first eighteen years of my life I was exposed to something else. Because music and food are also largely a matter of memory. What my mother sang, what my mother cooked. There's even a saying: just like at mom's.

During the Together Through Culture conference, Mamadou Diouf presented us with a multicultural performance of Czesław Niemen's song "Sen o Warszawie" ("Dream of Warsaw"). The interpretation of this song by the multicultural residents of Warsaw made a big impression on us.

It is one of the most beautiful interpretations of this song.

Warsaw residents of various backgrounds identified with its message, because it's a song about "my Warsaw," the city with which they identify. In the context of mul-

multiculturalism, we often think about presenting different cultures, but the reverse process is also important—interpreting what is Polish. Seeing something fascinating—showing it in your own way, transforming it.

You have to meet halfway. Something new is born from the meeting of cultures.

Polish and multicultural at once?

Yes. It is important to assimilate what is here.

Does that also apply to language?

I think so. Remember when Mamadou said that if you are in Poland for a long time, you should try to learn Polish? That's a cool approach.

My situation is a little different because I came here to study. It's hard for me to imagine a person with, say, small children, moving here to work in a corporation that operates in English—and then, after six months, reading Mickiewicz. But learning the language is a sign of respect for this country.

Not all new residents learn Polish. For some, it is not worthwhile because they've come here for a short time or function in international circles—English is their natural language. Some people have difficulty learning the language; they are simply not gifted in this area. What can be done about this? What languages should be used to communicate with the city's multicultural residents? Should we resort to English?

Certainly, the availability of information in different languages needs to be expanded. But I have been thinking about English for a long time. For now, it is a fairly universal language.

I don't have an answer to that question. But I clearly sense a specific perspective among English speakers. I feel that there is a general assumption that the whole world uses our language. And when there is a moment when, for linguistic reasons, we are unable to speak with ease, there is an expectation to switch to English, because then it will be easier. And that is also a bit exclusionary.

Certainly, using English is very convenient in international communication. But what language should be used for meetings and workshops?

When we talk about multiculturalism, on the one hand, English is convenient, but on the other hand, not everyone feels comfortable using it. And the official language of this country is Polish. I have mixed feelings.

If we know who we are inviting to the meeting, is it worth looking for another language that will be a common denominator?

The difficulty lies in avoiding the mindset that there will always be someone who speaks a language different from everyone else. This is a topic for joint discussion. Certainly, a friendly attitude on the part of people helps a lot here.

So the conclusion is to simply help people learn this difficult language of ours and create conditions where they can talk and practice?

But not simply because you are in Poland, so you have to speak Polish; rather, show them that the Polish language is fascinating.

Is that where your initiative to create the Museum of the Polish Language came from?

I wish such a museum were created, because I think that Polish is a beautiful language—complicated, difficult, but beautiful. And it would be worth appreciating it in this way. It is difficult to say that Poland is not a multicultural country, since we have so many words from other languages: German, Italian, French, Russian, and Czech. It is difficult not to talk about it, with the hope that Poland will be true again, namely, multicultural.

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