

Polish minischools. Microhistories of democracy and portraits of parental involvement

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In light of cognitive and social advantages of thinking upon forms and meanings of the relationship between a subject and a place of its acting, and in light of my personal inexhaustible interest in *the pedagogy of place* (Mendel, 2006), I found it tempting to make an attempt of describing the existence (ontology) of a school in a specific place by using phenomenological and hermeneutical analyses. My aim was to academically describe how a school happens in a specific place, being a community event, or a social drama (Turner, 1974). I have made such an attempt and in this text I make an effort to present such a description by referring to a school situated in a Polish village; a school *raison d'être* of which is nowadays endangered; a school which is "too small" and the existence of which is refused in view of the poverty of Polish communes. As a researcher I decided that my research material will be various phenomena, that is various aspects of the school's life embraced in available narrations. On the one hand, by describing, I tell the story of the school but, simultaneously, I analyze the story material (contents of narration). This is how my microhistory is created (Domańska, 2005). On the other hand, I reconstruct the unique picture of minischools created through the exchange of meanings which happens within the space of this story. It is a story about schools which firstly are doomed to be closed down as they are unprofitable and later are saved by social forces through being created a new within a new legal framework (by an association). Consequently, because of the fact that main characters of this story proved to be parents who – as all people of the post-communist Poland – look with hope at their sense of agency and a democratic aspect of the order in which they live, the text can be perceived as a microhistory of democracy.

Keywords: mini-schools, micro-history, democracy.

The idea of microhistory, theoretical background and the aim of analysis

The idea of microhistory associated with cultural anthropology, and present e.g. in works of French chroniclers, is related to non-scientific traditions of thoughts upon the past and its descriptions (Domańska, 2005, p. 276). It is a branch of historical research where research is done on a micro scale. A microhistory is based on stories of individuals or institutions and determines the perception of what Geertz calls "nooks and crannies" of history (Domańska, 2005, p. 206).

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Microhistories concerning communitization, or the democratization of school life, which has been happening in the context of the Polish political and social transformation (since 1989) may constitute a ground where "nooks and crannies" are easily accessible and can be freely approached. Microhistories may become a part of a big picture showing how democracy was shaped in our country, they may reveal its past and current condition, and at the same time they may indicate directions of thinking on future steps leading to democratize social life of and around a school.

Additionally, as Domańska (2005) writes:

An anthropological stimulus resulted in the individualisation of the subject of analysis and the reduction of observatory scale. Historians focused on researching small communities and specific individuals in order to both achieve a maximally deep insight into the reality of the past and feel naturalness and atmosphere. A microhistory is therefore qualitative and small in size by intention, not quantitative and globalizing. The method of description applied is Geertz's thick description which was designed to help "translating" one culture into another and interpreting social relations in a specific community within its own norms and categories.
(p. 273)

School-related microhistories illustrate locally-conditioned space where the communitization of schools takes place, and as long as it is possible to translate this micro-scale (mentioned by Domańska), the stories may help to embrace multidimensionality of democratization processes.

From the perspective of social theories, including pedagogy, and taking into account advantages for practical aspects of social life, the most important value of such microhistories are questions generated all along and a *natural* critical aspect of microhistories. A narrator who is in want of understanding a story (in order to continue it) attempts to catch analysed events in the net of relations and contexts, to reveal explicit and implicit meanings, to explain causes of certain events and to form structures for personal use before telling or writing anything. Because a microhistory is a specific voicing in which the processes of telling the story and analyzing it are combined, such awareness becomes *sine qua non* of the possibility of microhistorical narration.

The microhistory presented in this text focuses on the communitization of the school and the entanglement in social games. The games existing both on macro and micro level (conf. Turner, 1974) are observable more easily in little local stories concerning actions of individuals or institutions. With these objectives in mind I prepared a pilot analysis during which I intended to preserve critical sensitivity towards discursive

meanings of school communitization and related social practices which reflect democratic order.

The microhistory which I would like to present is related to the phenomenon of so-called minischools which have been created in rural areas of Poland as a consequence of decisions to close down unprofitable educational institutions. Unfortunately, this approach has usually meant closing down the only cultural centre in a specific area. As it can be assumed on the basis of the detailed analyses of minischools made by Jakubowski (2006, p. 1), there are over 200 minischools in Poland). I owe my knowledge about them to the Federation of Educational Initiatives (FIO), which is an organization supporting such schools by providing conditions in which local communities communitize schools by making them their own not only metaphorically but also literary and legally speaking as schools are taken over by associations founded for this purpose.

The Federation of Educational Initiatives (FIO) is an association of non-governmental organizations active in the field of education and rural development. It was established in 1999 to support village residents in saving small schools destined to be closed. 350 minischools were created on the basis of model provided by the FIO – the idea is that an association launches a school which replaces a school which was closed. Since 2005 the FIO has also advocated the establishment of mini-kindergartens, where the management is taken over by the associations of parents. 130 entities of this type were established with the EU financial support ("About FIO," nd.).

Telling this story became possible after reading texts available on the FIO website and observing steps taken by the organization through my "contacts" with it (participating in various activities, mainly related to education, research and implementation) and being kept updated. What proved significant were also my conversations with Alina Kozińska-Bałyga, a founder and leader of the organization. Every microhistory has the burden of its narrator inscribed. By becoming a narrator myself I understood that due to my contacts with the

foundation and my meeting with its leaders the story about minischools is also my own story. It is a narration that remains individual disregarding of all references, quotations, materials and sources which are supposed to make the analysis as objective as possible (I relied mainly on online sources and materials obtained from the FIO). It needs to be emphasised at this point that because of this approach which demands filtering microhistory content through one's own individual experience, I did not consult any research papers concerning minischools. Among others, I neither make references to the outstanding comparative studies done by Jakubowski (2006) who places minischools on the Polish educational landscape nor to broad studies focused on these institutions done in Bydgoszcz under the supervision of Marzec-Holka. In this text, I decided to leave these studies beyond the scope of my interest.

The structure of analyses

As it was already mentioned, the microhistory to be told is specifically oriented and as I play the role of narrator it reflects my own sensitivity towards "social dramas", as Turner (1974) called them. I have had opportunity to realize that social dramas in question bear traces of a tragic plot (*mythos*). As Aristotle (nd./1994, p. 61) wrote, it is typical of tragedy to awaken pity and fear that lead to purifying them. This is exactly how actions for rural minischools are oriented; this is exactly how this – let me call it – performative¹ ontology of communitizing the school works.

When applying Aristotle's (nd./1994, p. 63) scheme of utterance forms², it is possible to distinguish in my microhistory entitled *Rural Minischool mythos* elements, such as *peripeteia* (reversal of intentions), *anagnorisis* (recognition; a change from ignorance to knowledge), *pathos* (painful or destructive event, e.g. death or suffering).

¹I refer here to the idea of democracy as a performance present in the title of Matynia's book *Demokracja performatywna [Performative Democracy]* (Matynia, 2008)

²Naturally, it is possible to apply other cultural patterns of dramas (conf. i.a. works by Malinowski, Turner or Mead). The scheme of Aristotle applied here seems perfect mainly due to the non-reducibility of classification introduced by the philosopher (tones of his *Poetics* are revoiced by any speaker in the field).

According to Domańska (2005, p. 209), such plots make people aware of being at liminal situations, the situations of choice and conflict. These plots represent "pre-historic" or even "ahistoric" knowledge which shapes a subject and defines its identity and being. It concerns both individual and group subjects which means that the analyzed action and my microhistory has a potential to influence both a social life practice as well as creative and educational acting towards specific environments, including those which directly create the school.

It appears that if one stays sensitive on a type of plot and if one carefully examines the elements which appear: *peripeteia*, *anagnorisis* and *pathos*, telling the microhistory may be perceived as a research procedure within critical analysis of reality presented in the plot through Geertz's thick description. This is how I identify a research (cognitive and methodological) opportunity and how I understand my research task reported in this paper. At the end of the day, it boils down to critical analysis of reality. It can be said that it is all about exploring Turner's *social dramas* structured by Aristotelian *poetica*. In accordance with Turner's assumption, our life is a social drama in which a plot evolves and, referring to Aristotle, we can distance ourselves from it by identifying structural elements of which it is built.

Social dramas taking place around small rural schools became for me the ground and the building material for my narration but simultaneously they became my research material. My microhistory itself has become a field of analysis. And thus, from one thought to another, from one word to another, the narration and the analysis became one.

My research project can be described as a version of action research; the action research in which an action must be critical. Otherwise, it would be pointless, academically speaking. A researcher who creates a microhistory should bring it to the centre of analyses. This assumption is to be applied to my own microhistory; constructing it is supposed to be critically-oriented research. Similar research solutions can be found in works of representatives of critical pedagogy, such as Christine Sleeter (2008). Sleeter's *Critical Family History* is a method of simultaneous exploring and changing family histories, where an educational and a social therapy happen at the same time through telling family stories with a distance to meanings that are conveyed and without any automatization or uncritical

accommodation. Another good example is Peter McLaren who presents, for instance, reconstructions of locally-differentiated perceptions of cultural icons, e.g. Paolo Freire and Che Guevara (McLaren, 2001). Researchers of this field seem to fulfil Geertz's *nooks and crannies of history* with crumbs of local and individual worlds.

Microhistory: Rural Minischool

The turn of 1989 and following years when a new act on education came into force witnessed the increased hope for a school which would be different and better than a "communist" one. In Poland, we expected a change for the better in all aspects of social life, including schooling. The feeling of going in the right direction was strengthened when local authorities started to take over schools. Not central authorities but local governments were to support schools and decide about who would become a head teacher, which was a significant difference if compared to the reality of the People's Republic of Poland. Local government, recognized due to democratic elections as the close one, gave hope for "ourness" of schools functioning under its influence and supervision.

Peripeteia – Reversal of Intentions

It was supposed to be fine, but went wrong. Aristotle's *peripeteia* of this story is a turn of events related to the feeling of disappointment experienced by village residents. It happened when "our" and „close" local governments started closing educational institutions which they could not afford. Naturally, the background of these decisions was omnipresent poverty in the area of education and the poverty of rural areas related to the political transformation, and later a new reality of our membership in the European Union. What also played a crucial role was the context of neoliberalism and the dominance of free-market economy together with the omnipresent economic rationalisation of culture and education (Szkudlarek, 2001).

Under these circumstances, Alina Kozińska-Bałdyga and her colleagues from the FIO were indefatigable in taking steps for educating village residents, mainly parents of learners whose schools were chosen to be closed. They created the FIO model which served as a road sign and helped people to organize themselves at the time of crisis, or when they faced the threat of closing the school down or when an actual closing down

the school recognized as the school of ours began. The FIO Model applied in this situation resulted in establishing an association of rural development consisting of residents who became responsible for managing a school created to replace the one which had been closed.

Through such actions, civic consciousness and the sense of community raised despite of numerous problems and difficulties or administrative and organizational barriers which, if overcome, made residents proud and happy. The proof is the enthusiasm present in the speech given by the president of the Association for Development of Olszeka and Lubaszcz who closed his appeal for supporting the "Save Schools" movement with the sentence:

*I invite all the not-convinced-by-mere-words to visit one of small rural schools (let it be one of five existing in the Nakielski District)!
(Kamiński, 2009)*

There were various options as it comes to the status of a new school created by an association which meant that an action was even more challenging. For an association, managing a public school means providing all the material background: provide equipment, heating in winter etc. and still depending on and being subject to authorities of the local government (which has already lost the trust of parents who form the association). If choosing an option of a non-public school, an association could be relatively independent but responsible not only for facilities and equipment but also for teachers' remunerations.

A non-public school was a popular solution but chosen only in the atmosphere of full solidarity and alliance of parents, members of an association and teachers, who as it was often declared on the Internet forums, made a sacrifice for the idea of saving the school. As a part of their "sacrifice" they did not receive their remuneration for months and did not ask for it but worked creatively together with parents for the benefit of the school which was the second home for them.

A specific school-but-non-school community, which resembled *communitas* and was located somewhere *between*, started to develop. It was Turner's community created in liminal circumstances, in the context of passage, near the line of liminality; a community which can be described in terms of strong mutual relations and

a total equality among its members (Turner, 1969). In such cases, the community was created by parents, teachers and residents who fought for a school which did not exist yet in a school which no longer existed. The reality of paradox and the departure from a "normal" reality formed the world of passage in which its participants, defined by the otherness and united in a common aim excluding them from the surroundings, agreed to any sacrifice, any inconvenience, and any difficulty.

Anagnorisis - Recognition

Under these circumstances, the social drama entered into another stage. There appeared the phase of recognition, a turn from ignorance to knowledge, which enabled to identify people and matters or to assess the value of events. Detailed stories of establishing specific minischools were of paramount importance. These were mainly stories about enormous efforts made several years before by parents, whose children at the moment are attending the schools, to build these schools, both literary and metaphorically speaking, with public and private means and materials. It is, for instance, a story of building the school in Lipnica which will be discussed in detail below:

The Elementary School in Lipnica went up in flames on the New Year's Eve of 1978. The fire site was cleared by residents-volunteers who used their own equipment. The school to a large extent was rebuilt by residents of Lipnica and surrounding villages (Mały Pułków, Sokoligóra, Wielki Pułków), e.g. window carpentry was made by Tadeusz Zieliński, while plumbing works by Henryk Czubek. (Muchewicz, 2009)

Parents and teachers reminded themselves details related to construction works, facts which often unanimously proved that the school is the school of *ours* since it was *we* who built it with enthusiasm and sacrifices. I heard similar voices many times from mothers and fathers, teachers who fought for every day of functioning of a school and its survival. *Anagnorisis*, which can be identified here, emphatically expresses the communitization of school. There seems to be no doubt as long as it is *the school of ours* for people who have created it.

Pathos

The economisation of school life previously mentioned is directly related to the last element of the plot presented. Features of *pathos* are represented by the sense of injustice and harm experienced by people who made an effort of saving the school through creating it anew as a school of community, the school of ours.

Pathos as a critical event appeared when they realized that in the market reality closing the schools turned into the unexpected and became a disguised privatization of common good. Rural schools, especially if situated in little clusters, are often situated in attractive locations and it is tempting to use them for commercial activities (loaning the facilities, tourism, recreation etc.).

This is how Koziońska-Bałdyga commented on it by expressing painful experience and events:

Previously it was like this: firstly, legal responsibility of informing parents about a possible closing of a school, later a resolution about the intention of closing a school, finally a resolution about closing a school and a local educational authority's opinion as a buffer. It took half a year. Under a new legal act, the opinion of a local educational authority is irrelevant, parents are not informed, and the only limit is a half-year notice concerning the change of conditions of employment. What about the decision on handing the school over? What about choosing an entity which is to take a school over and procedure of taking it over? The act leaves the gate open. The school may be taken over e.g. by a friend or a sister of the mayor in want of profits or by a large company which would care mainly about their own interests, not the interests important for a village. Due to this act a dangerous monopoly of local government [underlined by MM] without any supervision is being created (Pezda, 2009).

What sounds like an oxymoron in the context of Polish transformation, that is *the monopoly of local government*, came true; this detrimental event really took place. The term *the monopoly of local* sounds even bitterer if it is revoked and

compared with intentions, attitudes and hopes – being points of departure for the plot – of parents encouraged in 1989 as other people in Poland. The question to be posed when revoking again the parents and teachers involved in communitizing or democratizing rural schools and their actions, is the question about qualitative features of communitizing. Is it communitizing if actions are taken in the context of “the monopoly of local government”? Who does communitize the school? Under what circumstances communitization actions are good or bad? When the school is communitized and when not? Whom does the communitization of school serve and who will benefit from it? Is it possible to create the hierarchy (what kind?) of beneficiaries (a school belongs to everyone, it is a common good)? etc.

To Be Continued: A Never-ending Story

This story is not finished yet. It may be continued in further scenes of social drama which are to be recognized as *pathos* and *peripeteia* at the same time since a blow was followed by a sudden twist. The chain of events may be described also in terms of Hegel’s triad or van Gennepe’s three phases of culture-preserving rituals. Any synthesis becomes another thesis which is instantly confronted with an antithesis; entering into a new status is a promise of its rejection; the last element of the plot becomes the first element of another plot of the same story.

The FIO launched the “Save Schools” initiative which is on the one hand an initiative in the field of democratizing social life, purely educational one and aiming at increasing civic awareness of inhabitants of rural areas and at communitizing schooling there. The FIO informs about changes and intended changes of legislation, constructs legal regulations by translating the voice of authorities into public interest, and teaches democratic participation in governance or reacting on a bad law. To illustrate, below there is an excerpt of the FIO letter to minischools of January 2009, that is after a draft version of amended act on education prepared by the Ministry of Education was sent to parliamentary commissions:

Attention! Minischools! Locally-governed schools endangered with closing down (...). The lower house of the Polish parliament is currently working on amending the provisions of the act on the system of education (...). In a draft version the issue of

handing over the schools by local governments to new management entities was not raised. Among proposals made by the Ministry of Education there are provisions which in our opinion may prove unfavourable for minischools and dangerous for schools which are planned to be closed down or handed over. The provisions concern... (...). Having consulted several minischools, the federation prepared amendments which are to be submitted by members of the Sejm and the Senate.

If you have any suggestions, contact us (...). It is not everything. If we want the amendments to be introduced, we need to organize ourselves and encourage members of the Sejm and the Senate to introduce them and later to vote for them. To achieve this we have to be organized and act together. Therefore we ask you to 1. Read the materials ... (...), 2. Send the received... (...), 4. Follow the information... (...), 5. Stay updated... (...) (Kozłowska-Bałdyga, Tolwińska-Królikowska, Gassen-Piekarski, 2009).

On the other hand, it is a particularly efficient form of social activation and a project which enlarge a group of people aware of their power to influence the reality in which they live. It is particularly significant in relation to rural environments and may be an announcement of a successful struggle of these communities with a dangerous *monopoly of local governments* as Kozłowska-Bałdyga accurately called the true *pathos* of the plot.

The standing of the FAOW [Rural Areas Activation Forum] on the Save Schools initiative shows that people are not indifferent towards decisions of authorities and they react with specific solutions, give constructive answers. They feel their subjectivity in this discursive game in which they can be read as opponents aware of their role and fighting against both central and local governments (averse to local governments who disappointed them, they know that fighting against decisions of local governments means entering the battlefield of central administration).

The FAOW defines itself as a platform of rural area organizations. It may be recognized as a voice of rural environments which (not only in the quoted excerpt) sounds quite strong as its background, *the village meeting*, represents a tremendous social power:

We believe that when important decisions concerning a given rural community are taken, the opinion of the village meeting should be taken into account. Handing the school over certainly is one of such decisions (Kozińska-Bałyga et al., 2009).

'This is the communitization of school, this is democracy!,' one would like to say in the context of this quotation. The standing precisely defines entities to which the school *belongs to* (sic!), people explicitly indicate its social, communal and local character and at the same time they fight for saving it by destroying the monopoly of local government (commune authorities which are for breaking the relationship between the school and the local community):

We would like to particularly emphasise our support for the preemption right for local parental associations as for taking over schools. Basing on the FAOW members experience, we believe

that local rural association of parents and residents should have the right to take over the school prior to [underlined by MM] any natural person, foundation set by commune authorities or non-governmental organization from outside the commune (Kozińska-Bałyga et al., 2009).

It is worth observing how the tragedy of fight and a social game are visible in a specific case of the school in Lipnica described in detail by parents and teachers involved in the fight for its survival. The reason for fighting is not the school as such but the school of ours, the communitized school, and it is subjectivity that truly matters as it is all about *these* people in *these* places and *this* school.

Firstly, I would like to quote the commentary by the president of the Association of Development of Lipnica entitled "Village Residents 'Fight for the School in Lipnica'" found on the Internet (Muchewicz, 2009).

By setting it in the framework of Aristotle's tragedy plot structure (Table no. 1), I intend to show what the tragedy does to people. I will present a social work of tragedy which purifies the evoked emotions through reaching *catharsis*. In the case of Lipnica emotions to be purified are disappointment, fear, sorrow, and pity.

	Text: <i>Village Residents' Fight for the School in Lipnica</i> (Muchewicz, 2009)
Tragic Plot Elements:	
<i>Peripeteia:</i> Closing the School	<i>Currently (2008/9 School Year) there are two primary schools and one school complex (a primary school with a lower secondary school). These schools are attended by 420 learners. The school in Lipnica as of 31 August 2009, i.e. the day when it was closed down, was attended by 72 learners, including 9 kindergarten learners. "Mała ojczyzna" - the Association of Rural Development of Lipnica, Małe Pułkowo, Wielkie Pułkowo, Sokoligóra was established in 2001 when first rumours on closing down the school in Lipnica appeared in Dębowa Łąka Commune.</i>
<i>Diagnosis:</i> Association Activities	<i>The association is very active and awarded, e.g. by the Foundation of Supporting Rural Areas. At the time being it awaits the results of the call within the Human Capital Operational Programme 9.5. as it plans to open a kindergarten entity, to organize journalist workshops for adolescents and to provide adults with possibilities of learning vocational and non-vocational skills. The main objective of the association is to manage a non-public elementary school in Lipnica.</i>
<i>Pathos:</i> Lack of Mayor's Consent	<i>The main obstacle today is lack of consent on the part of Mayor Stanisław Szarowski for executing the Commune Council decision about loaning the association a building of the closed public school.</i>

Table 1. Village residents' fight for the school in Lipnica – Tragic Plot Approach

This procedure enables to form a specific knowledge about individuals and communities who colonize the areas of disempowerment through tragic acting, who overcome obstacles and come out of a crisis. The knowledge about tragedy understood as a version of social drama may prove useful if applied for example in social animation, especially if the aim is to develop democratization.

Even though what the author of the utterance in question presented later (and is presented below) was entitled: *The history of steps taken by the association to launch a non-public elementary school in Lipnica*, it does not bear any traces of narration. It mirrors a structure of drama which develops in dated scenes:

28.08.2007: Małgorzata Olejarczuk, a commune councillor, puts forward a motion to hold a debate concerning schools in Dębowa Łąka Commune.

15.11.2007: Commune Council meeting focused on the education on the area of Dębowa Łąka Commune. The Association declares the willingness of managing a non-public elementary school (...).

19.02.2008: Commune Mayor meets parents of children from the elementary school in Lipnica. Parents' unanimous standing: we understand that a state school cannot exist due to financial circumstances; we will create a non-public school.
28.02.2008: The association addresses the Mayor with a request for loaning the school building with equipment for educational purposes if the school in Lipnica is closed down.

11.04.2008: Commune Council takes decision on closing down the elementary school in Lipnica.

14.04.2008: Mayor's response for the Association's request for loaning the building is negative.

2.04.2008: Village residents want the buildings owned by the Commune to be used for their benefits (resolution of the village meeting)

12.06.2008: The village meeting makes a resolution including the opinion that the building of the closed school should become the building of a non-public school and local organizations.

7.07.2008: Residents of Lipnica meet Zofia Kilanowska and Zbigniew Jaguszewski, representatives of Regional Education Authority in Bydgoszcz, to discuss the question of loaning the school building.

July 2008: Province Governor establishes the Commission of Social Dialogue; the invitation is rejected by the Mayor. Conclusion: Since the association does not have funds to manage a non-public school until January 2009, it is necessary to wait with launching the school until the following year; in return, Commune authorities should make the building available in 2008 for activities aimed at activating residents. In the meantime, the association is to get ready to manage the school (i.e. files a subsidy application before the date specified by legal regulations).

June-August 2008: Residents' protests (postering the school building, protests in front of the Commune office, press articles, TV programmes) against withholding the initiative of launching a non-public school

October 2008: The Mayor informs two counsellors (the president and the vice-president of the association) that they cannot vote in a vote on the draft decision concerning the school building loan due to the conflict of interests (...) (Muchewicz, 2009).

Et cetera... a few pages resembling a script of a drama with its roles, vivid action, defined points of climax emphasised by the text and devices, such as behaviours, gestures, shifting audience formations, systems of standings and places occupied by characters; even stage settings are included in this description e.g. in the form of information about *postering the building*.

Discussion and conclusions

What this spectacle presents is certainly a version of a *performative democracy* as described by Matynia (2008) or an element of the society of spectacle described by Kolankiewicz (1999). This is a performative democracy but not the one played on the macro scale, as was the case with the Polish Round Table, but on the microscale of the Dębowa Łąka Commune.

The scale is different but the plot seems to be of similar form. What is behind the Round Table story and what is behind the microstory of democratic performers from Lipnica and surrounding areas? The efficiency of the order appears questionable because, as it is indicated by the state of flux in which the community functions, the school does not exist; people tired of fruitless struggle instigate internal conflicts and weaken their potential of social power. Twenty years of the Polish social transformation is seemed to bring similar fruit.

Above all, when the communitization of the school in Lipnica is confronted with the democratization of social life in Poland, it becomes visible that it is enacting as such which is important because through enacting a social order is established and preserved. It is not a ground-breaking observation. If it is assumed as anthropologists believe (cf. Gennep, 1909, 2004; Turner, 1969) that the culture is a string of ritualizations, it means that it is enacted on a social stage and that the reality we create together is a drama. So does the reality of school and its communitization.

My story about the FIO and minischools supported by it, this microhistory of democracy as it can be called if taking into account its content, shows that ontological aspect, that is the local presence of democracy equalled with the communitization of school, means enacting which gives a certain status to the participation in the life of community (*the village meeting* like *Greek agora*); it means ritual accepting or rejecting certain roles and attitudes which combined together form democratic procedures. As I mentioned, the enacting is important for people; parents and teachers of rural minischools do not seek for sense, they enter and read. Supported by the FIO, they practice democracy and create "the school of ours". The practice of democracy in this context becomes equal to the communitization of school which happens automatically by the power of cultural force (the

force of ritual) under which a social drama is played for the sake of being played and resembles an autotelic rehearsal. What orders are established and what will happen to the rules of democracy – these are separate issues. At this moment it seems that a core of confrontation can be grasped: it is the democratization of social life in Poland and the communitization of Polish schooling.

On the basis of analysed materials and in reference to the microhistory told here, I can state that it would be appropriate to summarize voices which I have heard, and which have expressed support for various visions aimed at solving problems of the school, not by speaking of the communitization of the school but of a typical and widely exhibited label which says "the school of ours". It is neither a local government school as local governments are monopolistic, nor a state school, a private school, a church school, a social school; it is a school of ours.

Using names with *school of ours* part have not became popular by a mere accident; it tended to be widely copied by schools established after 1989 in the context of transformation-related emancipation. In Toruń there existed even a publishing house the name of which used the same lexical pattern. The inscription saying "The School of Ours" was visible on walls, in newspapers and many other places when the campaign for the school in Lipnica took place. "The School of Ours" slogan was present in reform drafts (conf. The Reform of the System of Education in Poland. Draft version, 1998), resolutions by local authorities (e.g. Dębowa Góra Commune), statutes of organizations, in local and above-local political programmes.

It is not difficult to realize a tremendous universality and functionality of the label which – as the experience of minischools proved – can be dangerous. Similarly to a joker card it fits everywhere and replaces any other card for various purposes and in various configurations. In a social context such a practice may be denominated as a political exploitation which can easily become an abusive usage. Because of such an exploitation of meaning without any meaning, the communitization of school reflected in the microhistory has become an activity with a hidden agenda which allegedly would lead to a better world. It is therefore not always a process of communitizing the school through bottom-up creating and strengthening of the community involved, sometimes it is only an illusory

framework. It resembles a fuzzy promise of order (as no one can be sure what the school of ours means when it is declared in a draft version of the reform project) which if obeyed by people would enable them to come out of a difficult situation and lead them out of a liminality phase, a phase of waiting for the change of their own status or a school status.

What is an intriguing ending of the microhistory is an inescapable observation that all of plot elements support the thesis about the social nature of school which in consequence means that there is no need of communitizing the school (there is nothing to communitize if a school already belongs to the community, it is a school of ours). As I already mentioned, the story tells us that people who enter into any relation with a school, disregarding the automatized nature of social dramas and roles to be played, spontaneously gain the feeling of belonging to the school and in consequence they create and strengthen relations among themselves. The school, perceived in a micro scale of individual and social feelings, becomes the school of *ours*, and the *ourness* of the school, analogically to the *ourness* of the world which defines the culture

(Geertz, 1983), remains the strongest cement of communities. Political power of the "school of ours" label may be nothing if compared to a natural *ourness* of the school world binding together learners, parents and teachers.

Any outside attempt of communitizing the school understood only in political terms may be quickly exposed and becomes – as in the microhistory – the reason for resistance against authorities, the reason for internal, individual and social consolidations of power. My microhistory shows that rural communities, especially parents creating minischools, face the threat of becoming functional within a system (authority, privatization). Still, based on an internal cohesion, their resistance has been quite efficient. They therefore provided rationale for a statement that this microhistory is a story of democracy participated by parents and communities aware of their own subjectivity.

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