

**Monika Nowicka, MA**  
Collegium Civitas, Warsaw

## **MIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP AND CULTURAL SECURITY: CASE OF POLISH IMMIGRANTS IN REYKJAVIK**

### Introduction

Basically we can think of a two axes along which cultural security definitions are built: the first one is individual vs. state, the other one is culture protection vs. culture as a medium for foreign relations (Nemeth 2012, p. 1). We can observe a clear contradiction between the individual and the society as the culture of the individual is not always identical to the culture of society, as it is in case of an immigrant in the receiving society.

The perspective I would like to apply in this paper is one of an individual who on the one hand needs to protect their culture, but on the other hand uses culture as a tool to build relations with other members of the society. The case discussed in this paper is one of Polish immigrants in Reykjavik, who being immigrants need to elaborate structures and procedures to secure their home culture on the one hand, and who, on the other hand, need to become acquainted with Icelandic culture to be able to function in a receiving society. What is more, Poles as a group also need to integrate with the receiving society. Integration requires both groups: dominant (receiving society) and non-dominant (immigrants) to acquaint knowledge of each other and mutually adapt parts of their cultures (Berry 1997, pp. 10-11).

Therefore, bridging the gap between the two groups is necessary. While for immigrants the culture of dominant groups is a new milieu, the receiving society must have the culture of newcomers presented. In case of Polish immigrants it is done by organizing cultural events promoting Polish culture or by taking part in multicultural festivals where Polish culture is presented. It would not be possible without any kind of support provided by Icelandic local and state authorities and nongovernmental organizations. For immigrants to act in public space is necessary to be approved by the members of the receiving society.

The aim of this article is to analyze cultural security from the micro and meso perspective of immigrants. The paper covers following issues: cultural security in migration context, cultural citizenship, description of Polish diaspora in Reykjavik in the context of cultural activities and Icelandic support for immigrants' cultural security.

The article is based on researches carried out in Reykjavik in April and May 2010 (56 interviews), in May 2014 (6 interviews) and on a desk research carried out in May 2014.

## 1. Cultural security in migration context

Although cultural security is an issue rarely covered in scientific research papers, it is getting more and more attention (Czaja 2003, p. 3; Tehranian 2004). If dealt with, cultural security is commonly discussed on a macro level as a cultural security of the whole nation with a very strong emphasis on its importance to building nation's identity and being a key factor in maintaining both social cohesion and a feeling of security within a nation (Czaja 2003; Michałowska 1997).

Another perspective is strictly connected with material culture, cultural heritage and its protection both under the time of war and peace (Czaja 2003; Nemeh 2012) and here once again a macro perspective is used. No matter if symbolic or material culture is under discussion, in both cases the national security and integrity is the point. The assumption underlying this kind of politics is one which believes that culture is the focal point for the nation's survival. This kind of attitude is best illustrated by following definition: "cultural security can be defined as the ability of the state to protect cultural identity, culture and national heritage in terms of openness, enabling the development of culture through internalising the value of non-contradictory with its own identity" (Czaja 2003, p. 26).

On the other hand there is a micro level approach, which takes into consideration the perspective of an individual who is entitled to realization of "social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality" (DHR, art. 22). Therefore cultural security is part of human rights: "Cultural security is a dimension of human security [...]. It consists of the security of personal and collective identity negotiation that are so characteristic of our mobile postmodern world. It includes [...] cultural and political participation" (Tehranian 2004, p. 3). Cultural security of an individual is the point I would like to focus on.

Cultural security concerns two crucial aspects of individual's life, namely: constructing, maintaining and negotiating individuals identity, which is a particularly sensitive issue in case of immigrants who need to deal with "old" national identity which is under deconstruction and a new immigrant's identity which is under construction; the second aspect is feeling of security, which is a basic need of each human being (Maslow 2006, pp. 65-68). Usually feeling of security is connected with having home. And here is the point: what characterises immigrant's life is a need of building a new home, which "is based on four key elements: security, familiarity, community and sense of possibility" (Hage in: Castels, Davidson 2000, p. 131).

For immigrants who live in an unfamiliar milieu, cultural security is necessary element enabling to build a new home. By introducing cultural symbols and material goods (such as food) from the homeland immigrants are making an attempt to create a new sense of home (Hage in: Castels, Davidson 2000, p. 131).

Cultural security is of great importance especially in case of immigrants whose cultural capital is too low to integrate with receiving society and who are subjected to the process of segregation. According to the research carried out by Anna Wojtyńska, Poles living in Reykjavik find Polish traditions more intimate and relevant (Wojtyńska 2011, p. 122). Similar results were obtained in the research carried out in Reykjavik in Spring 2010<sup>1</sup>: Polish tradition are very important to most of Polish immigrants and are maintained by majority of the interlocutors who took part in the research (Nowicka 2011).

As the immigrants who we talked to had been in Iceland for two or three years then, observation of Polish traditions could have been connected more with building a new home than nostalgia for their home country, especially when we take into consideration the fact that Poles have recently become more active in not only building Polish community life but also in attempting to integrate with Icelanders and other minorities by presenting Polish culture to broaden audience and participating in multicultural events<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Research Integration or assimilation? Strategies of becoming a member of a new community: case of Polish immigrants in Iceland. A project carried out in collaboration with The Research Center on International Migration and Ethnic Relations, University of Iceland (RCIMER), with the support of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism within the framework of the Scholarship and Training Fund (No. FSS/2009/II/D4/W/0005/U/0009). Full report can be found at: <http://www.migracje.civitas.edu.pl>.

<sup>2</sup> These are the first findings of desk research and interviews with Polish activists carried out in Reykjavik in May 2014 during the research: "Competences and civic potential of Polish immigrants in Iceland" with the support of Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## 2. Cultural citizenship and cultural security

Citizenship and cultural security are strictly connected subjects. On the one hand we discuss cultural security at the state and/or national level, which is the security whose task is to protect cultural integrity of the nation and build its cultural identity. As discussed earlier, here we have a hidden assumption that there is a culture (values, patterns, practices) which are universal for the particular nation and are to be commonly shared. On the other hand there is an individual with their own private culture (values, role models, practices) which may differ from the culture dominating in the nation/state, here a very common case is immigrants in a receiving country, whose culture usually differs from the culture of the receiving society. It is also worth pointing out that it is not only the case of immigrants, but also cultural differences within a country should be considered (eg. ethnic minorities, subcultures).

Cultural citizenship's main aim is to protect citizens' cultural rights. It is of importance for a few reasons: first of all societies are not as homogeneous in their cultural dimensions as they used to be. Both globalization and regionalization have enhanced division in nations' cultures: global and regional cultures started to influence and change national cultures, which used to be homogeneous. The third factor which influences postmodern societies is increase in mobility and migration, which contribute to cultural diversification of the societies. All the factors mentioned above may be considered a threat to integrity of the nation, especially when immigrants are perceived as cultural strangers (Weiner 1993, p. 106). And here citizenship plays an important twofold role: it can either protect individuals' cultural rights if they hold a status of a citizens or be a tool for an exclusion of the strangers from the nation if they are unwelcome.

Turner defines cultural citizenship as "a set of practices which constitute individuals as competent members of community. [...] cultural citizenship consists of those social practices which enable a competent citizen to participate fully in the national culture." (Turner 1994, p. 159). Here the cultural citizenship is a tool to successfully reproduce the culture of the nation. There exists a set of practices and competences which is essential for an individual to be considered a member of the a national community. Therefore citizenship serves more as a tool to set boundaries between the members of the community and the Others who do not share the national culture.

This understanding of cultural citizenship is coherent with cultural security defined as the ability of the state to protect cultural identity, culture and national heritage. At the level of the nation exist clear outlines of what needs to be reproduced – school

curricula define knowledge to be passed to the next generation of citizens, so that the cultural national identity can be maintained. The rules of granting a status of a citizen to immigrants also define the minimum knowledge, which one must have to obtain citizenship. By regulating the curricula the state ensures its own duration in a cultural dimension. What is more it gives basis to build a national identity on an individual and group level.

Cultural citizenship can also be view “as a process of self-making and being-made in relation to nation-states and transnational processes” (Ong 1996, p. 737). Here citizenship is a tool to protect individual cultural rights. What is of importance, is the fact that an individual can exercise their cultural rights in a receiving country even if he or she does not hold a status of a citizen. This is a case of Polish immigrants in Iceland.

### 3. Polish Immigrants in Reykjavik

According to Report on Foreign Nationals and Immigrants (RFNI) in Iceland 2013, the number of registered Polish immigrants amounted to almost 9,363. Poles constitute 3 percent of the whole population, and 44 percent of all immigrants in the country (RFNI). Poles in Reykjavik constitute the largest minority in Iceland, which is unique worldwide, but at the same time it is one of the smallest Polish diasporas in any country Poles emigrate to.

Other features of Polish minority in Iceland worth mentioning are:

- 1) motives for migration: this is not only economic migration, a number of Poles have come to Iceland because of cognitive reasons (Budyta-Budzyńska 2011, pp. 8-9);
- 2) the Polish diaspora is very recent, apart from individual cases, its beginning can be dated at 1990's reaching its highest point in 2009 (Wojtyńska 2011, pp.33-34).

As many Poles have decided to stay in Iceland, there is a growing need for organizing social and civic life and engaging in politics in order to represent Poles in both national and municipal authorities. Poles' social and cultural activities are more and more advanced and visible not only among Poles themselves, but also among Icelanders and other minorities.

To build Polish community in Reykjavik a few nongovernmental organizations have been set up. Generally speaking their main aim is to strengthen, promote and secure Polish culture but also to build a cultural dialogue between Iceland and Poland. The latter purpose is being realized by Projekt Polska.is, which has already conducted such

projects as Polish couch talks which was one of the events accompanying the anti-racism week organized by the Human Rights Association in Iceland. The aim of the project was to encourage conversation about Polish culture and the life of Poles in Iceland. Projekt Polska also took an active part in the Interculturalism parade which was held in Reykjavik, where the Polish culture was promoted.

Another institution which has been established to preserve Polish culture and build Polish cultural identity is a Polish School set up in 2008 by Association of the Polish School Friends in Reykjavik. The School teaches children at primary and junior high school. The subjects covered are: the Polish language, History of Poland, Geography. The school offers weekend classes so that it does not collide with attending Icelandic school on regular basis.

The third initiative worth mentioning is “Razem Raźniej/Better Together”, which addresses its activities and projects to kindergarten children and their parents. The aim of the project is to help children integrate and to familiarize them with Polish and Icelandic culture.

And last but not least, association Pozytywni.is, which is a Polish Association of Photographers in Iceland. The Association has been established in 2010 by a group of Polish photographers living in Iceland, willing to share their passion with others. The goal of the Association is to promote culture, integration of photography-related circles, support of self-improvement and raising artistic level of photographs among their members and improving the image of Poles living in Iceland.

Emerging of a three new non-governmental organizations since the spring of 2010 is of great importance to Polish community for at least a few reasons. First of all, according to research conducted in April and May 2010, Poles living in Reykjavik did not participate actively in any kind of feast and celebrations organized by non-Poles in the city. No matter if they are Icelandic national festivals or multicultural ones. Polish cultural life, with a very few exceptions, is limited to get together and barbeques with Polish friends. Poles, due to limited command of Icelandic and even English, cannot benefit from cultural offer in the city: cinema, theatre and others. Cultural exclusion concerns as well religious festivals. Holidays such as Christmas if not spent in Poland, are celebrated with family who came from Poland or stays in Reykjavik and Polish friends (Nowicka 2011). Emerging of Polish non-governmental organizations dealing with cultural life may encourage Polish immigrants to engage in the cultural life of not only Polish minority but also the one of Reykjavik community.

The second reason why the NGO's are important is their ability to build and secure Polish cultural identity among Poles living in Reykjavik. Immigrants cannot participate in the state holidays and festivities which are organized to commemorate and celebrate historical events in their home country, they have no opportunity to participate in the life of their ethnic community. NGOs by animating and organizing Polish cultural life create environment in which Poles can maintain their identity and cultural habits and practices.

#### 4. Icelandic support for immigrants' cultural security

Both national and local governments in Iceland started to introduce regulations and institutions whose aim is to provide support for immigrants in Iceland. Among issues which are dealt with, cultural right and security can also be found.

*Government Policy on the Integration of Immigrants* gives immigrants children opportunity to learn their home language at school as a second language: "Students in preschools, elementary schools and secondary schools whose native language is not Icelandic shall enjoy their right to education in Icelandic as a second language" (GPII 2007, p. 13). What is worth pointing out, is the fact that *Government Policy on the Integration of Immigrants* does not constitute the law, therefore a school director has a free hand in implementing this rule to their curricula. According to Poles whose children attend Icelandic school, following Government Policy is not common, as Danish is still preferred as a second language for the children no matter what nationality they are.

The Multicultural Council of Reykjavík is an advisory institution dealing with diversity issues. It consists of 7 members and act as an advisory board to the Human Rights council and other departments in the city that deal with immigration issues. The members, whose role is to act as representatives of the immigrant community, were elected for their positions in November 2012. The representative of Polish immigrants is Aleksandra Chlipala. The main objective of the Council is to be a vehicle in the communication between the immigrants in the city and the local authorities, but also to bring understanding and knowledge of multicultural issues in relation to culture.

Among others, the Multicultural Council of Reykjavik organizes Congress "Let's talk" where multilingual roundtables are held and culture is one of the issues discussed. It also organizes Multicultural Day held yearly in May, when all minorities and Icelanders can present their cultures to each other.. One of the latest and important activities was a campaign "Do immigrants' votes matter?" whose aims were to encourage immigrants

to take part in municipal elections held in May 2014 and to create an opportunity for immigrants to speak their needs to the politicians, which took place during the before election meeting with political parties.

Another opportunity for the immigrants to realize activities aiming at securing their culture are created by: the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security which has created “Development Fund For Immigration Issues”. This is a fund where immigrant’s association can apply for funds to realize their projects - cultural projects are one of the core aims.; and the Ministry of Welfare also have a fund for immigrant associations where they can apply for grants.

A fine example of a grassroots initiative is Society of New Icelanders whose aim is to facilitate building social capital among immigrants and to make newcomers familiar with variety of cultures.

Another point is politicians’ attitude towards immigrants. As it was previously mentioned, immigrants were an issue in political campaign during the municipal election in Reykjavik 2014. Grapevine’s Municipal Election Guide 2014 (Grapevine 2014, pp. 14-16) examined programs of all 8 political parties, immigrant issue is included in the programs of only 3 parties: Bright Future, Samfylkingin and The Left-Green Movement. All three parties underline the benefits coming from the presence of the immigrants. The main advantage is increased multiculturalism in the city, which makes Reykjavik more a global metropolis.

However, different parties present different attitudes towards immigrants’ integration. Bright Future party wishes immigrants to “be excited to integrate into Icelandic society” (Grapevine 2014, p. 14). This expression sounds more as a wish for immigrants to abandon their culture and assimilate with Icelandic society. The Left-Green Movement applies classical integrationist approach: “The city should [...] continue to assimilate itself to the immigrants. Creating a multicultural city is not about assimilating the immigrants: it is about creating a city where people of different backgrounds can live and work together in harmony” (Grapevine 2014, p. 16).

In turn, Samfylkingin had elaborated *Immigration Action Plan*, where among other issues, education of immigrants, especially children is the point. Immigrants should have opportunities to take regular Icelandic language lesson, so that could integrate with the society and to avoid risk being second-class citizens. But Samfylkingin also put emphasis on necessity for immigrants’ children to learn their mother tongue and be supported in this aspect by local authorities.

As it can be seen local authorities and non-governmental organizations have started to support immigrants in securing their culture, however researchers point out that Icelandic integration policy is not advanced enough and Icelanders are not society free of stereotypes and glorifying their home culture (Unnur Dis Skaptadottir for Grapevine 2014). A lot is in hands of immigrants themselves who need to also want to participate in the Icelandic social life.

## Conclusion

Cultural security is an important issue for both immigrants and the members of a receiving countries. Even though, at the first sight the cultural security of these two groups may stay in obvious contradiction, it is possible for the receiving society and its authorities to establish regulations and institutions which can help immigrants in entering new society without making them abandon their home country culture. In this way immigrants can feel more secure and are probable to build their new home in a receiving country sooner. Getting both groups familiar with each other help to deconstruct the other group as hostile strangers. In this way a solution to better integration, by securing and supporting both culture, can be elaborated.

## References

- Adamson F.B. (2006): *Crossing Borders: International Migration and National Security*, "International Security", Vol. 31, No. 1
- Arendt H. (2008): *Korzenie totalitaryzmu*, t. 1, Warszawa, WAiP
- Baubock R. (1999): *National Community, Citizenship and Cultural Diversity*, Vienna, Institute for Advanced Studies
- Berry J.W. (1997): *Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation*, "Applied Psychology. An International Review" Vol. 46, No. 1
- Budyta-Budzyńska M. (2011): *Introduction*, (in:) Budyta-Budzyńska M. (ed.): *Integration or Assimilation. Poles in Iceland*, Warsaw, Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR
- Castels S., Davidson A. (2000): *Citizenship and Migration. Globalization and Politics of Belonging*, New York, Routledge
- Czaja J. (2003): *Bezpieczeństwo kulturowe Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, <http://adamkorc.winteria.pl/kultur.pdf> [13.05.2014]

- Declaration of Human Rights (DHR)*, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml> [17.05.2014]
- Government Policy on the Integration of Immigrants (GPII)*, (2007): Ministry of Social Affairs, Iceland, [http://eng.velferdarraduneyti.is/media/acrobat-enskar\\_sidur/stefna\\_integration\\_of\\_immigrants.pdf](http://eng.velferdarraduneyti.is/media/acrobat-enskar_sidur/stefna_integration_of_immigrants.pdf) [13.05.2014]
- Grapevine's Municipal Election Guide 2014, [http://grapevine.is/Media/PDF/Grapevine\\_06\\_2014.pdf](http://grapevine.is/Media/PDF/Grapevine_06_2014.pdf) [30.05.2014]
- [http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/media/MRN-pdf/Menningarstefna\\_ENSKA\\_LOKAutgafa.pdf](http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/media/MRN-pdf/Menningarstefna_ENSKA_LOKAutgafa.pdf) [13.05.2014]
- <http://pozytywni.is/> [21.05.2014]
- <http://projektpolska.is/> [20.05.2014]
- Iceland Review: <http://icelandreview.com/news/2012/11/09/multicultural-council-reykjavik-elections> [17.05.2014]
- Immigration Action Plan*, [http://www.samfylking.is/Portals/0/1\\_Skjalasafn/Kosningar%202013/Immigration%20Action%20Plan.pdf](http://www.samfylking.is/Portals/0/1_Skjalasafn/Kosningar%202013/Immigration%20Action%20Plan.pdf) [29.05.2014]
- Maslow A. (2006): *Motywacja i osobowość*, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN
- Michałowska G. (1997): *Bezpieczeństwo kulturowe w warunkach globalizacji procesów społecznych*, (in:) Bobrow D.B, Haliżak E., Zięba R (ed.): *Bezpieczeństwo narodowe i międzynarodowe u schyłku XX wieku*, Warsaw, Fundacja Studiów Międzynarodowych
- Multicultural council of Reykjavik*, [http://eldri.reykjavik.is/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid4547/7775\\_view-5626/](http://eldri.reykjavik.is/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid4547/7775_view-5626/) [13.05.2014]
- National Cultural Policy* (2013): Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Reykjavik
- Nemeth E. (2012): *Cultural Security: Potential Value of Artworks and Monuments to Foreign Policy*, Los Angeles World Affairs Council, Luncheon Talk, Santa Monica
- Nowicka M. (2011): *Celebrating and relaxing as isolation practices*, (in:) Budyta-Budzyńska M. (ed.): *Integration or Assimilation. Poles in Iceland*, Warsaw, Wyd. Nauk. SCHOLAR
- Ong A. (1996): *Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making*, "Current Anthropology", Vol. 37, No. 5
- Report on Foreign Nationals and Immigrants in Iceland (RFNI)*: <http://visionmedia.is/?p=2652> [29.05.2014]
- Society of New Icelanders: <https://www.facebook.com/SocietyOfNewIcelanders/info> [20.05.2014]
- Szkoła Polska: <http://szkolapolska.is/> [20.05.2014]
- Tehrani M. (2004): *Cultural Security and Global Governance: International Migrations and Negotiations of Identity*, (in:) Friedman J., Randeria S. (ed.): *Worlds on the Move: Globalisation*,

*Migration and Cultural Security*, London, Toda Institute Book Series on Global Peace and Policy

Turner B.S. (1994): *Postmodern Culture/Modern Citizens*, (in:) Steenbergen van B. (ed.): *The Condition of Citizenship*, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, SAGE Publications

Weiner M. (1993): *Security, Stability, and International Migration*, "International Security", Vol. 17, No. 3

Wojtyńska A. (2011): *History and characteristic of migration from Poland to Iceland*, (in:) Budyta-Budzyńska M. (ed.): *Integration or Assimilation. Poles in Iceland*, Warsaw, Wyd. Nauk. SCHOLAR

Wojtyńska A. (2011): *Traditions in Dialogue: Celebration Patterns Among Polish Migrants in Iceland*, "Studia Humanistyczne AGH", Vol. 10, No. 2

---

Monika Nowicka

## **Migration, citizenship and cultural security: Case of Polish Immigrants in Reykjavik**

### **Abstract**

The aim of this article is to analyze cultural security from the micro- and meso- perspective of immigrants. The paper covers following issues: cultural security in migration context, cultural citizenship, description of Polish diaspora in Reykjavik in the context of cultural activities and Icelandic support for immigrants' cultural security. The article is based on researches carried out in Reykjavik in 2010 and in 2014 and on a desk research carried out in May 2014.

**Key words:** *cultural security, citizenship, immigrants, Poles, Iceland*