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ARTICLE



Polish young people in Latvia: between Polish and Russian identity, a dilemma of the identity of students in Polish schools in Daugavpils and Rēzekne

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the results of field research into the Polish minority in eastern Latvia conducted in the autumn of 2016. The focus of the research was the sense of national identity felt by young people of Polish descent in Latvia and their ties with Poland, in particular as evidenced by the pupils of two Polish schools in Daugavpils and Rēzekne. The methods used were survey questions and memory maps. The findings indicate that the local Polish minority is strongly Russified, especially in their language of everyday communication. Paradoxically, however, the Polish school students express deep emotional ties with Poland.

KEYWORDS Latvia; Latgale; Polish minority; national identity

Poland's links with the territory of present-day Latvia go back to the second half of the sixteenth century, a time when the lands currently comprising Latvia and Estonia were the object of rivalry between four countries located in the Baltic Sea basin: the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark. In 1561, Russian territorial successes prompted the ruling elites of the disputed lands to put themselves under the protection of the Polish-Lithuanian Union. This decision and subsequent wars led to the division of Latvia into several parts, including the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia (Kurzeme and Zemgale), a dependency of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth until 1795, and Polish Livonia (Latgale), a Polish-Lithuanian condominium until 1772. After World War I, these territories were incorporated within the borders of independent Latvia.

The emergence of Poles as a separate national group in the area of modern Latvia was the result of both assimilation and migration. During Latgale's affiliation with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1561–1772) the local German gentry families were Polonized. In this period, and subsequently in the years of Russian rule until World War I, Latgale was also settled by Polish noble families from other parts of the Commonwealth

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(Zasztowt 2014, 246–48). Another factor in the numerical growth of the Polish minority in Latgale was that to the south it neighbored areas where Poles still constituted a majority in the 1930s (Kowalski 2008, 276). In the Soviet period, the civilizational and economic attraction of the Soviet Baltic Republics and the development of industry in Daugavpils drew Poles from other Soviet Republics (Kurczewski 2009, 10–11). The size of the Polish minority, however, was negatively impacted by voluntary and forced migration to Poland, war, and Soviet repression. The latter also led to Polish national identity being concealed and progressively eroded.

The outcome of the processes described above is a Polish minority in Latvia which numbered almost 44,800 in the 2011 census, or 2.16% of the population of the country as a whole. The Polish national minority is the fourth largest in Latvia after the Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian minorities. In 2011, nearly 21,000 Poles (46.5% of the total) lived in Latgale, thus constituting the second largest national minority there (6.84%). The region's most numerous concentration of Poles (nearly 13,300 in 2011) is in Daugavpils, the second largest city in Latvia and the largest in Latgale, which has a majority Russian population. Poles are the third largest national group in the city (14.23% in 2011), only slightly fewer in number than its Latvian population (Population and Housing Census 2011). In the period 1897–2005 the percentage of Poles in Daugavpils ranged between 14% and 18%; they are the only component in the national-ethnic structure of the city with such stability (Kurczewski 2009, 11–12). In 2011, Poles accounted for 12.84% of the population (over 3,200 people) in Daugavpils county. In neighboring Ilūkste county which lies to the west, this figure was 7.83% (over 600 people) and in Krāslava county to the east it was 7.85% (nearly 1,400). In Rēzekne, the second largest city in Latgale, some 90km from Daugavpils, Poles constituted just under 2.5% of the population (nearly 800 people) (Population and Housing Census 2011). The Polish minority in Latvia is an interesting topic of research, as it is a community which has maintained its Polish national identity despite being outside of Polish state structures for nearly 250 years (it has also been separated from Poland by the territories of other countries for over 70 years) and during this period it was subject to Russification (nearly 150 years) and Sovietization (50 years).

This article is based on field research into the distinctiveness of Latvian Poles as a nationality group, which was carried out by a team of geographers in the autumn of 2016 in Latgale. The methodology is composed of survey questions and mind mapping. The objective of this research was to diagnose the status of the preservation of Polish identity among people of Polish descent living in eastern Latvia and to demonstrate their connections with contemporary Poland. The research was conducted at three Polish schools in Daugavpils, Rēzekne, and Krāslava (the only such schools in Latgale) which are dedicated to educating youth of Polish descent, although (naturally) not all of their students are Poles. These schools allow students to learn Polish and obtain in-depth knowledge about Poland's culture, history, and geography. Their task is to preserve and strengthen the Polish identity of the members of the Polish minority in Latvia, weakened by decades of Russification and Sovietization.

There were two main reasons for choosing these Polish schools as the research sites. Firstly, there were practical considerations: the schools offered simultaneous access to a relatively large number of respondents: the entire population of students attending Polish schools in Latgale. In the end, the survey was conducted at schools in Daugavpils and Rēzekne. In the case of Rēzekne, the majority of planned research tasks were carried out independently by the school based on the materials and instructions provided. Secondly, the choice of the research method was motivated by the hypothesis that

children attending Polish schools have the best-developed national consciousness among Polish children in Latgale because their education at a Polish school is the result of the high level of national consciousness of their parents, likely passed on to the children in their families, while the Polish school additionally reinforces their Polish identity during the educational process. The consequence of this assumption was yet another hypothesis: that all the remaining children of Polish descent who do not attend Polish schools have a weaker Polish identity than those included in the surveyed population. Thus, the research at schools was supposed to determine the status of the preservation of Polish identity by diagnosing a selected group of representatives of the minority with presumably the strongest national consciousness. The weaknesses and issues diagnosed in this group would suggest their amplification among the remaining group, not included in the research, and even more indirectly in the Polish population as a whole, most of which has never been subject to a Polish education. If no shortcomings and issues were diagnosed in the analyzed group, the research conclusions would only refer to the surveyed group. Therefore, the research at schools was supposed to eventually allow for the formulation of a general hypothesis regarding the strength of the Polish identity among people of Polish origin in Latgale, which in turn should be subject to further, more extensive and in-depth research.

Polish young people in Latvia: a dilemma of identity

The theme of the identity of national minorities in Latvia has been mentioned multiple times in the academic literature. Most authors focus primarily on Latvia's Russian speakers, the most numerous national minority in Latvia. They analyze this subject in terms of identity construction, integration patterns (Cheskin 2015, 2013; Aasland 1994), and interethnic cooperation (Kronenfeld 2005; Fearon and Laitin 1996). Some authors focus on ethnic conflicts or issues associated with the formation of the identity of Latvia's Russians (Fearon and Laitin 1996, 2000; Cheskin 2012b). Interestingly, Ammon Cheskin (2012a, 2012b, 2013) points to the significant impact of the media and political discourse on integration processes and identity formation. Top-down narratives lead to a strong 'us' and 'them' distinction, which does not always reflect the actual relationships between the members of both groups. Similar conclusions were drawn by the authors of this article during field research conducted in 2016, as well as similar research carried out one year earlier in Lithuania (Solarz 2016).

Some articles in global literature also touch upon the rights of minorities in the Baltic countries in the context of the fall of the Eastern Bloc, as well as accession to the EU and European integration (Galbreath 2003, 2006; Agarin 2011). Analyses pertaining to the remaining minorities, in particular the Polish minority, have been taken up much less frequently in international literature. Therefore, the research conducted in 2016 is an important supplement to previous knowledge about the national minorities inhabiting the Baltic states.

Prior to World War II, there were 22 Polish schools in Latvia. During the postwar period, under the rule of the USSR, education in Polish was prohibited. This only changed when Latvia became independent in 1991 (Kunicka 2016). That is when the educational institutions in Riga, Daugavpils, Krāslava, and Rēzekne, which exist until this day, were established. In September 2016, these schools were attended by 1,206 students (VIIS 2016), which constitutes only a fraction of all children of Polish descent living in Latvia. According to data from the 1999/2000 school year, approximately 2,000

students attended these schools. At the same time, however, more than 2,000 Polish children attended Russian schools in the same year: 80 in Jelgava, 45 in Liepāja, 1,986 in Daugavpils (nearly five times more than the Polish school in Daugavpils), 86 in Jēkabpils, and 76 in Rēzekne (*Biuletyn Stowarzyszenia Wspólnota Polska* 2001).

A national identity survey was conducted by the research team in October 2016 at two Polish schools: the Józef Piłsudski State Polish Secondary School in Daugavpils and the State Polish Secondary School in Rēzekne. A total of 145 questionnaires were completed by pupils aged 15–19. At the school in Rēzekne, 63 students completed the survey, or 39.6% of all students in classes 8–12. At the school in Daugavpils the 82 students completed the survey, or 70.7% of all class 8–12 students.¹

The surveys were conducted in classrooms. The students of these schools had no prior knowledge of the survey form. The pollsters were present in the classrooms during all the surveys in Daugavpils and one survey in Rēzekne. The survey form contained eight questions (seven open-ended, and one closed-ended question) as well as personal information about the respondent's sex and age. The language used in the form was Polish. The survey questions regarded nationality; the language used in the family home and among acquaintances; the language of media and literature consumption; emotions felt toward Latvia and Poland; as well as the frequency of and reasons for visits to Poland. Students did not use the teachers' or the pollsters' assistance when filling in the form. Similar research on the identity of Latvia's Russian minority was conducted by Aadne Aasland (1994). The survey conducted in 1992 included questions regarding language proficiency, intermarriage, selection of mass media, books read, as well as contacts with family outside Latvia and interethnic relationships.

Most respondents (54%) stated that they felt themselves to be Polish. Next were those declaring Latvian identity (33%), and then Russian (11%). The results differed between the schools where the survey was conducted. At the Polish school in Rēzekne, 46% of the students who participated in the survey felt themselves to be Polish, and 41% Latvian. In Daugavpils the figures were 60% and 27% respectively. At the school in Daugavpils, 51 students declared Polish identity, which, on the basis of the 2011 census, represented only about 10% of all Poles in the 15–19 age group living in the city. The remaining students must, therefore, attend Latvian or Russian schools or the private Polish school in Daugavpils. The situation in Rēzekne was completely different. At the Polish school there, with almost 40% of the students surveyed, no fewer than 29 (out of 63) identified as Polish, whereas according to the census of 2011 only 17 people of Polish descent in this age group should live in Rēzekne.

It may therefore be assumed that the remaining 12 pupils commute to the school from the local area or have changed their place of residence in the last five years to Rēzekne. It is also possible that the national consciousness of the individuals concerned developed only during their time at the school.

Most of the pupils surveyed indicated Russian (71%) as the language spoken at home. Only 6% of respondents speak Polish with their family, and 22% Latvian. Among individuals who declared Polish nationality, only 9% of the respondents declared that they communicate in Polish at home (the majority, 72%, use Russian, or Latvian, at 16%). This is still more than for all Poles in Latvia, among whom, according to the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (CSP 2011), only 858 people (4%) use their mother tongue at home. Polish is, however, the second language spoken at home. 39% of the respondents indicated it in second place. Most of them were students from the school in Rēzekne. Interestingly, Polish as the second language at home dominates not only among students who declared Polish nationality, but also among those who declared Latvian and Russian nationality.

As to the language spoken by the grandparents of the respondents, the most common language spoken by the paternal grandparents is (or was) Russian (54%), followed by Polish (22%). Latvian was indicated by two students fewer than Polish (21%). The language spoken by respondents' maternal grandparents is (or was) also Russian in the majority of cases, but its predominance over the other languages was smaller (46% Russian compared to 28% Polish and 20% Latvian). Polish as the language used by the respondent's grandparents was primarily indicated by students at the Polish school in Daugavpils and mainly among those declaring Polish identity. Among the individuals declaring Polish nationality, the paternal grandparents predominantly spoke Russian (61%), followed by Polish (29%), and Latvian with the lowest frequency (9%). Among maternal grandparents, the number of Russian and Polish speakers was very similar (44% and 39%, respectively). Of these grandparents, 13% spoke Latvian.

Apparently, Russian is the dominant language in the respondents' families both among Poles and among other nationalities. This concerns both the parents' and the grandparents' generations. This information is extremely important since it is the family that determines the survival of a language (Schwartz and Verschik 2013). Therefore, there has been a large decrease in the number of Polish speakers in families; by 16 percentage points compared to their grandparents' generation as a whole, and on average by 25 percentage points among only Poles. An explanation for this phenomenon can be found in the history of Latgale. The grandparents of some of the respondents were born before World War II, so they had the opportunity to use numerous Polish educational institutions. Others, most likely the majority, were the descendants of the pre-war generation, so they still communicated in Polish at home despite repressions on the part of Soviet authorities. The parents' generation includes people born more or less before 1980, i.e. at the time of peak Russification, when there were no Polish schools in Latvia. Moreover, in Soviet times, there were many more mixed marriages, mainly between Poles and Russians (spurred by intense migration from the USSR and ease of communication). After Latvia regained independence, the authorities began a number of reforms aimed at strengthening Latvian identity among their citizens, which did not make it easy to preserve the Polish language in daily use (Ustinova 2011).

Mixed marriages occurred much more frequently among the parents of the students in Rēzekne. This can be concluded based on the responses regarding the language used by the respondents' grandparents. Students from Rēzekne primarily talk to their paternal grandparents in Russian and Latvian (Russian, 52% of responses; Latvian, 34%); Polish was stated in only 10% of responses. Yet, they talk to their maternal grandparents in all three languages with a similar frequency (Russian, 34% of responses; Latvian, 31%; Polish, 25%). At the Daugavpils school, the proportions on both the mother's and the father's side are similar: for the father, 57% Russian, 32% Polish, and 11% Latvian; for the mother: 55% Russian, 31% Polish, 11% Latvian, and 3% Latgalian. Moreover, Polish plays a much larger role at the expense of Latvian.

Currently, young Poles speak Polish more out of sentiment than for practical reasons. This is particularly noticeable in contacts with their peers and media usage. A significant number of respondents also primarily use Russian (68%) within their circle of friends and acquaintances. Only 28% of respondents use Latvian as their language of choice in this context. Polish was indicated by only four respondents (the majority of whom declared Latvian identity, and all four are students at the school in Rēzekne where Latvian is more commonly used than Russian). Respondents who identified as Latvian

are more likely to speak Russian than Latvian in their circle of friends and acquaintances, and no less than 70% of those who indicated Polish descent use Russian when communicating with their peers. At the school in Daugavpils, almost all those who took part in the survey used Russian within their circle of friends and acquaintances; while in Rēzekne, the dominant language is Latvian (62%), Russian is used by one in three students, and Polish by just 7% of the surveyed students.

Responses to the survey questions relating to the language in which the students use media and books are more diverse. When watching television, the majority of respondents choose to watch Russian-language channels (72%). Only 5% of the students surveyed select Polish channels. This is doubtless due to the diversity and attractiveness of channels available in the particular languages. Latvian television broadcasts only two Polish-language programs (on the TVM and Dautkom channels) (Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Riga *n.d.*), and there is only one television channel available from Poland (TVP Polonia). On the other hand, there are many Russian channels, which are more popular than Latvian channels (Rozukalne 2016). Nevertheless, Polish-language television programs do come second in the students' viewing choices, as indicated by 38% of respondents.

The strong position of Russian is also evident from the students' responses concerning the languages in which they read books. Almost 40% read mainly Russian-language literature, although Latvian was the most frequent response indicated (41%). Such a strong result for Latvian is no doubt largely connected with the school curriculum and required reading in the country's official language. Polish books are read by 14% of respondents, mostly those identifying as Poles (although reading choices in this group in general are dominated by Russian (42%), and Latvian (34%).

Preferences relating to reading newspapers are very similar: the majority of respondents read the Russian-language press (56%), a smaller group of 33% in Latvian, and only 5% in Polish. The Russian-language press is widespread not only in Latgale. Three national daily newspapers in Latvian are available throughout the country, with the same number of national dailies being published in Russian (Sulmane 2006). The only Polish magazine in Latvia is *Polacy na Łotwie* (Poles in Latvia), published monthly by the Latvian Polish Society (Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Riga *n.d.*). According to the survey results, Poles and Russians usually read the Russian press, while Latvians prefer the Latvian press. There is, however, a clear difference in the choice of language of the magazines between the schools. At the Polish school in Rēzekne, readership of the Latvian press dominates (52%), while the Russian press has an enormous advantage in Daugavpils (79%).

In line with their answers to the previous questions, responses concerning the language used by the school students when on the Internet indicate a majority preference for Russian, which in this case was much more pronounced (67%). Interestingly, the second language used is English (16%). Latvian was indicated by 11% of respondents, and Polish-language Internet websites are used by only one in twenty. Although the preference for Russian when using the Internet was indicated by all respondents regardless of their previously declared sense of national identity, its dominance was smallest in the case of those who identified as Latvians. In terms of the two schools, the predominance of Russian was once again more strongly visible in Daugavpils where it was indicated for Internet use by 86% of the students surveyed. Polish-language Internet use is declared mainly by respondents at the Polish school in Rēzekne, which also has the most English-language Internet users.

One of the best indicators of the strength of national self-identification among people of school age would seem to be the language they use on social networking sites, as this

represents their spontaneous peer-group communication. Here again Russian is dominant (62%). Latvian is used on social networking sites by only 21% of the surveyed students, and Polish by only 5%. Once again English is quite popular in this context: it is the medium of communication on social media for 12% of the respondents, which reflects the impact of globalization. The proportions in terms of national identities and schools are similar to those for the previous question, with the only difference being that in the Polish school in Daugavpils none of the students who participated in the survey uses Polish in their social networking.

The foregoing language analyzes clearly demonstrates that although Russian holds the strongest position, the majority of respondents use several languages simultaneously. Similar results were obtained by Kunicka (2016), according to whom Poles living in Latgale are typically bilingual or even trilingual. Another interesting phenomenon is individual responses, which indicate the use (both at home and among peers) of Latgalian, which is closely related to Latvian but also has certain features in common with Lithuanian, Russian, Belarusian, and Polish. This can suggest a relatively strong regional identity among these young inhabitants of Latgale, which sometimes precedes national identity. The evolution of the Latgalian language can be used as an example of centuries-long coexistence of different national groups, which permeate one another and make Latgale a multicultural region. As shown by the results of the conducted surveys, this phenomenon also occurs nowadays, in particular in the context of Polish-Russian relationships. Interestingly, in the context of Latgalian, there are considerable differences in language use between the schools. In Daugavpils, Russian is the dominant language, Latvian and Polish are used much less frequently, while the use of Latgalian is practically non-existent. On the other hand, in Rēzekne, although Russian still dominates, it does not have such a clear advantage over Latvian and Polish. Moreover, Latgalian is frequently mentioned. This situation results from the nationality structure of Latgale. According to research by Lazdiņa et al. (2011), this is a region with a high level of ethnic and linguistic diversity. The surroundings of Daugavpils are areas where Russian dominates. The local national minorities (Polish and Belarusian) are highly Russified. Yet, the Rēzekne area is also home to numerous communities that use Latvian and Latgalian (Lazdiņa et al. 2011). Knowledge of this specificity makes it easier to understand the diversity of responses given at the surveyed schools.

The next section of questions in the survey related to the contact that the respondents have with Poland. Almost half (44%) stated that they visit Poland less than once a year, and the second largest group indicated that they do so once a year (40%). Poland is most often visited by respondents who declare Polish identity, 13% of whom visit Poland more often than once a year, and 43% about once a year. Students from the Polish school in Daugavpils visit Poland more frequently than the students from Rēzekne (although the percentage of private visits is higher in Rēzekne than in Daugavpils). The most frequent reasons for visits to Poland are family trips (37%), school trips (31%), and competitions (15%). The majority of Poles visit Poland during family and school trips, Latvians usually go there for private visits, while Russians go as a part of school trips.

The last question in the survey addressed the respondent's perception of Latvia and Poland on a scale of 1 to 10 with the aim of identifying the emotional ties felt by the students to Poland in comparison with Latvia, their country of residence. The respondents' relationship to the latter was most often rated at the maximum, i.e. 10 (47% of responses were the maximum). The result in relation to Poland was slightly less positive, with the most common response being 9 (35% of respondents). Only 30% of the

students scored Poland as 10. When the responses from the individual schools are analyzed, it can be seen that students at the Daugavpils school most often rated Latvia at 8 (with responses ranging from 1 to 10), and they gave the same rating for Poland (with a response range of 2 to 10). In Rēzekne, Latvia was most often rated at 10 and Poland at 9 (with ranges of 6–10 and 7–10 respectively).

The results of this part of the survey may also reflect the extensive Russification of students attending the school in Daugavpils to a certain degree. These students express less favorable opinions about both Poland and Latvia. Moreover, although the majority of students are Poles, they visit Poland less frequently during private trips. This can suggest that their personal and family relationships, and thus the sense of fondness toward Poland, is weaker compared to those of students from Rēzekne.

The Russification of Latvian Poles and the Soviet occupation of Latvia (1940–1, 1944–91) had a significant negative impact on the state of Polish national consciousness among the Polish minority in Latvia. After reviving once Latvia regained independence, Polish schools are working for the restoration and preservation of Polish identity, and it is clear that they are having some success. This is the case, for example, in Rēzekne, where, on the basis of information gained during field research, the Polish school is successfully reconstructing the Polish minority. Although Polish is used relatively rarely by the surveyed students, most of them consider themselves Poles. This information is extremely important in the context of the role of education in shaping the students' identity. According to Bretherton and Vogler (1999), 'identity results from membership of social groups or the sharing of sets of norms and values among a number of individuals.' The fact that both acquaintances and families mainly speak Russian leads to the conclusion that the identity of the surveyed students (at least of the 54% who stated their nationality as Polish) is developed, to a large extent, by Polish schools.

Nevertheless, the distinctness of the Polish minority in Latvia is under threat not only because a significant number of Polish children remain outside the Polish school system, but also due to the fact that in everyday life (including on television, the Internet, and social networking sites, i.e. where modern youth 'meets') cultural hegemony is exercised by the Russian language and media (it seems that Polish students choose Russian media more frequently because of its greater variety and more widespread availability compared to Polish-language media). Therefore, the current successes of the Polish schools may turn out in the long run to be merely palliative.

Latvia's Polish young people and Poland in the light of mind maps

The next stage in the research carried out in the autumn of 2016 was to determine the perception of Poland among the students of the two Polish state schools in Daugavpils and Rēzekne using mind-mapping methodology. An analysis of the mind maps produced by the students provided the research team with valuable information concerning the students' knowledge of and emotional ties to Poland.

The imaginary map was first used as a scientific term by C.C. Trowbridge in 1913 (Trowbridge 1913). In later years, this term started being used more extensively both in geography thanks to J.K. Wright (Wright 1947) and in urban planning following the publication of K. Lynch's famous essay *The Image of the City* in 1960 (Lynch 1960). This term evolved and has many synonyms at present, such as 'mental map,' 'cognitive map,' 'metaphorical map in the head' (Kuipers 1982; Domański 2006, 276), or field map (Tolman 1948). It should be emphasized that a map, in the context of memory maps analyzed here,

is not only a collection of information but also the result of an interpretation of the world (Soini 2001). Thus, mental maps not only allow for the presentation of the external world, but also reflect its image in the author's imagination. According to *The Dictionary of Human Geography* (cited in Soini 2001, 227), mental maps represent not only what a given person knows about a location but also what they feel toward it. The information featured on a drawn map is more important than other information according to the author's knowledge or feelings.

In contemporary behavioral geography, imaginary maps are primarily a source of information about the notions relating to a given fragment of space presented by the respondent in a drawing. During the research described here, conducted in the autumn of 2016 in Latvia, the analysis covered the arrangement of objects placed on the map, their mutual location, presence or absence of certain elements, orientation of the drawing in relation to compass directions, the technique of execution, and the level of detail as well as values assigned to individual components, for example, by enlarging or reducing them. Information obtained from such an analysis indicates, among others: the method of organizing knowledge about the area drawn, the degree of familiarity with it and the nature of emotions felt by the respondent toward the presented area.

Individual respondents were asked to draw a map of Poland from memory on a blank A4 sheet. They were then to mark and label on the map up to ten places in the country that were important to them. Five minutes were allotted for this task. A total of 119 mind maps were collected in the two Polish schools. At the first school, in Rēzekne, a single group of 38 students was surveyed. The sample at the Daugavpils school was much larger, a total of 81 drawings, created by students from four classes, were collected. The maps were made by students aged 15–19. Due to there being no differences observed in the level of detail, the execution quality or strength of emotional bonds with Poland between the works of younger and older students, as well as between those from Daugavpils and Rēzekne, all of the works will be analyzed jointly.

Almost all the maps were labeled in Polish (one map was labeled in English). The choice of Polish could be due to several reasons. Firstly, the survey was about Poland and was conducted in Polish by Polish researchers. That students are obliged to use Polish during classes at both schools could have also had some impact. The survey results discussed above suggest that most respondents do not use Polish in everyday situations. Therefore, one can assume that had the survey been about a different country, Polish would not have been their first language of choice. The contents of the created maps were not elaborate and mainly comprised individual slogans and geographical names. Although it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding knowledge of the language on this basis, the very fact that the students were capable of performing this task in Polish and were willing to do so seems important. Language is an extremely important element of identity and its active knowledge can contribute to sustaining this identity in the future.

The most frequently marked objects on the maps from both schools were Polish cities. Warsaw was marked on 111 of the 119 maps (93% of the total), Kraków on 59 (50%), Zakopane on 36 (30%), Białystok on 35 (29%), Gdańsk on 33 (28%), Rybnik on 18 (15%), and Łódź and Wrocław 17 times each (14%). Other objects, usually also cities, were marked less often, i.e. fewer than 15 times. These selections are generally not surprising, which is especially true of Warsaw, Poland's capital and largest city with over 1.74 million inhabitants. Similar comments are applicable to the choices of other agglomerations that rank after Warsaw in population size: Kraków (0.76 million, Poland's ancient capital and a city that has played a significant role throughout the country's history), Łódź (0.7 million), Wrocław

(0.63 million) and Gdańsk (0.46 million). Surprisingly, Poznań appears on the maps only very rarely (2 out of 119) even though it is the fifth largest urban centre in Poland (0.54 million inhabitants), the capital of a major region, and a city which has been an important part of Polish history since the early Middle Ages. By contrast, the frequent appearance of other, smaller, places is probably due to the fact that the respondents have visited them, for example, on school trips. This observation doubtless applies to the tiny town of Zakopane (a very well-known location, referred to as the winter capital of Poland, situated at the foot of the highest mountains in Poland), and also Rybnik and Białystok. The latter is also the largest Polish agglomeration *en route* from the Baltic states (including Latvia) to Warsaw. Objects other than towns and cities which respondents marked on their maps included the Baltic Sea (12 times), the Tatras, Carpathians, and other mountains (9), and the Vistula River (6). These were generally situated on the maps in line with their actual geographical locations.

In addition to marking important places by means of written labels, respondents also represented them using pictures or associative symbols. The Vistula, for example, was drawn as a ribbon cutting through Poland from top to bottom, Warsaw was depicted by a sketched crown or the Palace of Culture and Science, Kraków by Wawel Castle, and Zakopane by grazing sheep. A number of individual associations were also presented on the maps often in the form of drawings and labels, such as 'Polish school,' 'school trips,' 'school camp' or 'waffles.' Hearts were drawn on 14 of the maps by the names of individual towns and cities or just scattered throughout the country. This is a manifestation of topophilia or the display of positive emotions associated with a given place (Domański 2006, 276). Symbols appear frequently on mental maps and their presence is a result of the authors' own initiative. In research conducted by J.J. Gieseking (2013), two-thirds of the respondents included symbols such as a heart, a star, or a shining sun on their maps. A similar phenomenon occurred when the students from both schools recorded their own associations connected with selected places, for example, by adding alongside specific place names such phrases as 'good people,' 'I like your mountains,' 'I love my homeland,' 'my future – I hope,' 'new family,' and 'new friends.' These descriptions, as well as the symbols drawn, testify to the positive emotional relationship felt by the respondent to the space described. A total of 36 maps (30% of the total) contained such emotional references. They were included at the survey participants' initiative. Their absence in other respondents' submissions, however, does not demonstrate a cooler emotional attitude toward Poland among their authors.

In attempting to assess the level of knowledge of Polish geography among the students of the two Polish schools surveyed, it is worth reviewing the shapes of the modern Polish state as drawn by them, i.e. the outline of the borders and the location of the most frequently marked objects: Warsaw and Kraków along with Gdańsk, Białystok, and Zakopane (Figure 1 from A to G).

Nearly all the respondents' maps attempted to sketch the contours of Poland (116 out of 119 maps). Most of these have a shape resembling the actual borders of the country. In Figure 1 (from C to G) it can be seen that when the respondents' maps are overlaid on one another, the majority of the lines are arranged in shapes approximating to squares or rectangles. It is justifiable to represent the contours of Poland's borders in terms of these geometric figures given that the country's longitudinal and latitudinal boundaries are of similar length. The drawings also accurately reflect the territorial compactness of the Polish state and the low sinuosity of its borders. Most of the outline maps lacked any territorial protrusions or indentations, but some featured specific and characteristic sections of the Polish border. Seventeen of them (15%), for example, depicted Poland's

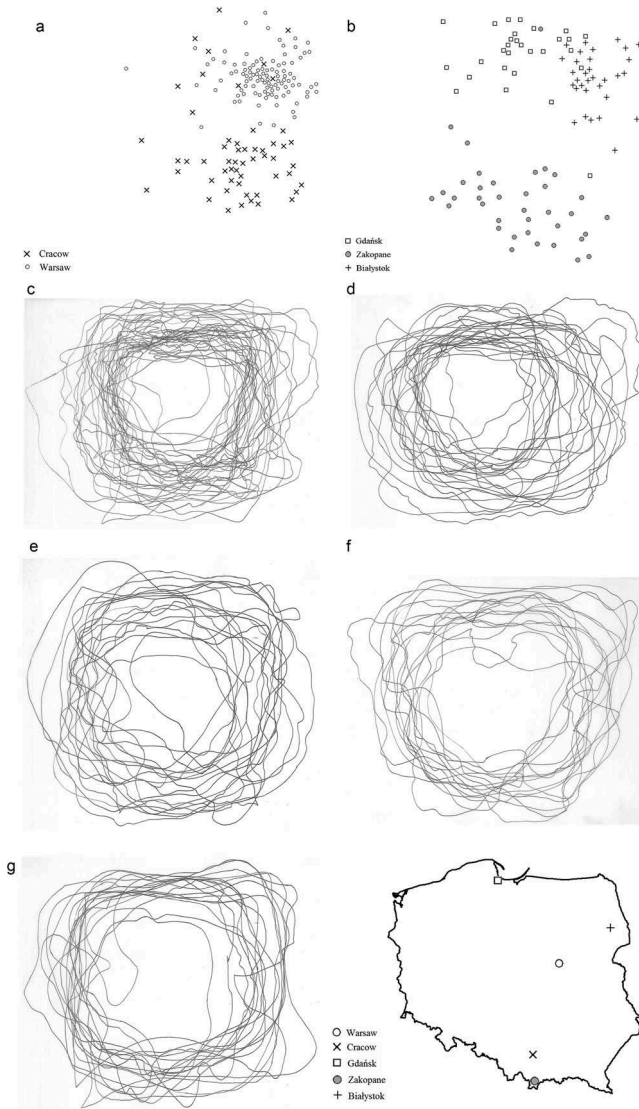


Figure 1. The location of most frequently marked cities: (a) Warsaw and Kraków, (b) Gdańsk, Białystok, and Zakopane. Sketches of the contours of Poland made by respondents of (c) Polish school in Rēzekne, (d–g) Polish school in Daugavpils (classes: (d) 9, (e) 10, (f) 11 and (g) 12) overlaid on one another. (h) proper contours of Poland and the location of the abovementioned cities.

southernmost tip (and most south-easterly point) where the Opołonek peak is located on the Ukrainian border in the Bieszczady region. In a few cases a territorial protrusion was drawn in the bottom-left corner, i.e. in the south-western part of Poland, Kotlina Żytawska (the Żytawska Valley) known informally as Worek Turossowski (the 'Turossów Sack'), which can be identified as another characteristic feature of the country's territory. The distinctive Hel Peninsula is depicted on 16 of the maps (14%), and 28 (24%) are more or less clearly curved in the upper (northern) part of the outline deep within Polish territory,

which represents the equally distinctive Bay of Gdańsk. Interestingly, several maps resemble Poland during the Second Republic (1918–39), when it directly bordered today's Latvia. Some of the drawings tend toward an oval or circular shape and thus deviate from the other representations of Poland's contours. Nevertheless, they still express the general desire which existed among the students to try to fulfil the task set before them. That this was indeed the case is shown by cities and other objects usually appearing on these oval or circular maps in locations which are in line with reality, for example, Warsaw is marked as being in the middle or on the right side of the circle or oval.

Only three maps do not contain the borders of the Polish state, but rather depict or merely name places to which the respondents feel ties or which they remember from visits to Poland. The first of these depicts mountains with the label 'Cracow,' the second one gives the names 'Warsaw' and 'Cracow,' while the third is a drawing of the University of Warsaw on which the route to Warsaw's Old Town is indicated.

On 11 maps Poland was presented in the wider geographical context of its neighbors. In seven cases, only the borders between them were drawn, while three maps had both borders and the names of countries. Lithuania appears three times, Germany, Russia, and Slovakia appear twice, Belarus and Ukraine once, and the Czech Republic does not appear at all. In all cases Poland is the central feature of the maps.

The high degree of familiarity with the map of Poland among the students of the schools surveyed is also confirmed by an analysis of the spatial location of the cities most frequently designated on their maps. [Figure 1\(a\)](#) shows the mutual positioning of the two most prominent cities, Warsaw and Kraków. The present-day capital of Poland was usually placed at the centre of the vertical axis of the maps, and slightly to the right (to the east) of the horizontal axis. On the other hand, Kraków, the ancient capital, was placed at the bottom of the maps (in the south). This mutual positioning of the two cities almost perfectly reflects reality. The situation is similar for three other places. Gdańsk, the Baltic Sea's largest container port, in the vast majority of cases was placed at the top (north) of the maps, Zakopane at the bottom (south), and Białystok in the top-right corner (north-east) near the border with Lithuania. The incorrect placement of these objects or the confusing of their names, such as Gdańsk being labeled as Zakopane, happened so rarely that our evaluation of the respondents' knowledge of the map of Poland had to be positive.

Two works deserve a slightly more detailed analysis due to the high quality of execution. [Figure 2](#) presents a map created by a student from the school in Rēzekne. Three cities were marked on it: Warsaw, Białystok, and Poznań. On the map, the outline of Poland is reminiscent of its actual borders. Similarly to other analyzed maps, the upper part contains a slight indentation which looks like the Bay of Gdańsk, while the bottom-right corner of the outline is sharp, indicating the characteristic territorial protrusion, which is the most south-easterly edge of Poland. The student also marked the borders of other countries and provided the names of three of them: Lithuania, Russia (i.e. Kaliningrad region), and Ukraine. Interestingly, all of them are Poland's eastern neighbors, in two cases also Latvia's neighbors, which may result from the lack of more detailed knowledge of the map or a decision that the presence of other neighbors of Poland is not necessary on the map. What is surprising is that the author omitted Belarus, which is also Poland's eastern neighbor as well as a neighbor of Latvia. Three other geographic items were marked in the drawing: the Baltic Sea to the north, the Carpathians to the south (accompanied by a drawing of mountain peaks), and the Vistula River, cutting across the entire map. Therefore, the student depicted Poland rather faithfully in its European context.

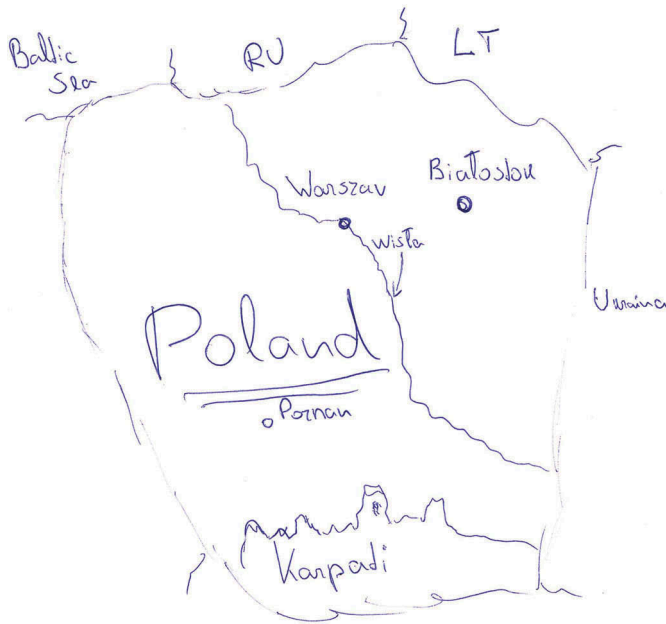


Figure 2. A map created by a student from the school in Rēzekne.

In the other drawing (Figure 3), created by a student from Daugavpils, the shape of Poland's outline resembles a square. The student marked seven cities: Warsaw, Częstochowa, Białystok, Kraków, Łeba, Rybnik, and Zakopane. In general he placed them correctly on the map (except for Rybnik). Moreover, the student drew the Baltic Sea with the symbol of a fish and waves next to the writing. Three of Poland's neighbors, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Germany (incorrectly placed in the south), were also marked on the map. What is interesting is that next to every city, the author drew a small heart, which may indicate his positive emotional attitude toward these locations. It is difficult to find any other connection between the cities indicated with hearts, which include: Poland's capital (Warsaw), former capital (Kraków), the main pilgrimage centre in the country (Częstochowa), a large Polish city which is geographically the closest to Latvia (Białystok), two known holiday destinations (Łeba, Zakopane), and one of the cities of the Silesia agglomeration (Rybnik), located in a heavily industrialized and environmentally degraded region of Poland.

In conclusion, during the mind mapping task the students not only drew the contours of Poland and marked cities and other features within its borders, but they also expressed their often-personal relationship to Poland, as evidenced by labels such as 'my future – I hope' and drawings, for example, hearts. The level of detail given in the maps shows, on the one hand, the high degree of involvement by respondents in fulfilling the assigned task, and, on the other, their relatively good knowledge of the map of Poland. Maps created by different students are similar to one another. The dominant form of drawing was a closed outline of Poland with marked geographic features. Only a few cases significantly diverged from this form. Furthermore, the mental maps did not differ considerably in terms of their content and the correctness of this content. Although the largest Polish cities, such as Warsaw, Kraków, and Gdańsk, predominate among the objects marked on the maps, much smaller locations also appear such as Zakopane and Rybnik. On the whole, the geographical objects



Figure 3. A map created by a student from the school in Daugavpils.

are positioned correctly, in line with the reality they depict. The students know that the highest Polish mountains are in the south of the country, the Baltic Sea is in the north, and that the Vistula River runs through Poland from the south to the north. Errors did occur, however, such as placing Zakopane, one of the southernmost Polish towns, on the Baltic coast. Although the outline of Poland as drawn by the students does not depict its actual borders, the shape they gave it is similar to that of a square or rectangle which does not differ significantly from reality. Perhaps contact with the Polish map not only during geography classes, but also during history or Polish language classes is the reason for familiarity with the outlines of Poland and the locations of individual cities and other geographic features of the country.

The use of the mental map method considerably enriched the research. The drawings made by the students not only demonstrate at least basic familiarity with the map of Poland; their contents (symbols and writings) also suggest emotional bonds with this country among a significant number of the research participants. The choice to use Polish when drawing the maps suggests (although according to the survey results, it is not the basic language used by the respondents) that in an environment where Polish is consistently used as the basic communication language, it becomes a proper tool for describing the world for the surveyed students. This is a particularly important observation due to the fact that exposure to a language, its knowledge, and active use are elements of developing and maintaining identity.

Conclusion

The research conducted in autumn of 2016 in Daugavpils and Rēzekne revealed a decrease in the number of Polish speakers among students compared to their parents' and grandparents' generations. Our research demonstrated that young Poles currently speak Russian

more frequently than Polish. Russian explicitly dominates in Daugavpils in all the analyzed fields of communication, while some variation can be observed in Rēzekne. Perhaps this is due to the parents of the surveyed students in Daugavpils being brought up in Russian-speaking families, while in Rēzekne, mixed families appear more frequently.

The mental map method showed that the surveyed students have a good knowledge of the map of Poland. Most drawings present the country's outline as similar to that of a square or a rectangle, which reflects the reality of Poland's borders having a low complexity ratio. The names of geographic features marked by the students were dominated by Poland's largest cities, Warsaw, Kraków, and Gdańsk. The drawings of some of the students also included Poland's key physico-geographical features, such as the Baltic Sea, the Tatra Mountains, or the Vistula River. Some of the geographic names included on the map were accompanied by drawings or associative symbols. The designation of the locations of individual features, despite some errors, was generally correct. The geographic dimension of this research, even given its extremely limited content scope, suggests that what Polish schools in Latvia teach about Poland is, potentially, one of the pillars supporting the sense of Polish identity among Latgalian Poles. Knowledge about the country of origin improves the chances of sustaining national bonds.

Nearly all maps were made in Polish. Although the motivation for choosing this language may vary and result, for example, from the nature of the survey (the survey location, subject matter, and the language of the survey and that of the researchers), using Polish for presenting one's ideas about Poland is, to some degree, symptomatic in the context of the survey research, which showed that most respondents use either Russian or Latvian in everyday situations. The process of teaching active knowledge of Polish by the schools in Daugavpils and Rēzekne, visible in the research on the basis of the mental maps, indicates that Polish educational institutions create a certain chance (how big and realistic of a chance is a separate issue) of maintaining and even recreating Polish national consciousness among the strongly Russified Polish minority in Latgale.

Nevertheless, the degree to which Polish has been supplanted by Russian in everyday communication among those of Polish descent is in the long term a real and serious threat to the maintenance of their sense of national identity. The Latvian Poles live in areas with large Russian minorities, near the Russian border, and under the strong influence of the Russian media with extremely limited access to Polish-language information sources. They are not geographically connected to Poland, and due to membership of the Schengen Area they can migrate anywhere within the European Union. These factors combined with the relatively restricted availability and attractiveness of Polish cultural and media alternatives raise questions about the real prospects for the survival of the Polish minority in Latvia.

Note

1. The difference in the number of survey participants was due to the survey conditions imposed by the school principals. While the school in Daugavpils allowed the research team to have complete freedom and access to all selected classes, the school in Rēzekne permitted the survey to be conducted on a much smaller group of students. The article, however, includes the results from both schools. The survey from Rēzekne was included in the end due to a relatively large number of participants, the value of the obtained materials (including in the context of comparisons with the Daugavpils school) as well as the objective absence of the possibility to conduct research in conditions analogous to those at the Daugavpils school due to the school's decisions and the timeframe of the research trip.

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