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Schutz Europäischer Kulturgüter / European Cultural Heritage
Europa-Universität Viadrina

APPLICATION FOR BRANDENBURGISCHES HOCHSCHUL-
INTERNATIONALISIERUNGSSSTIPENDIUM

Title:

Polish-German borderland in the German perspective: cultural heritages, historical layers and the local ways of exploration

A postdoctoral research carried out within the European Cultural Heritage/Schutz Europäischer Kulturgüter Chair of the European University Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder)

Under the supervision of Professur für Denkmalkunde, Prof. Paul Zalewski

1. QUALIFICATIONS

1.1. EDUCATION

2005 Doctoral degree in ethnology, Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of Warsaw University
1998 Jyväskyla Yliopisto, Etnologian Laitos: University of Jyväskyla (Finland), Ethnology Department; scholarship of the Tempus programme (1 semester)
1996 M.A. in ethnology, Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of Warsaw University

1.2. PUBLICATIONS

○ Forthcoming
Gra w karty – karta narodowa jako stawka w państwowej polityce narodowościowej, „Lud”.

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1.3. Field Research Experience

- 2008-present
  German-Polish borderland – long term fieldwork within the framework of the Renaissance of Polish-German cultural borderland project, Uecker-Randow district. Research concerns social processes occurring on the emergent borderland.

- 2008
  Crimea, Ukraine – pilot research among Crimean Tatars.

- 2004
  Romanian Bukovina – pilot research.

- 2002-2003
  the Latgale region, Latvia (a year-long period), doctoral dissertation field research on funeral rituals and ethnic and religious relationships.

- 2000-2002
  the Latgale region, Latvia: four field trips with supervised group of students; doctoral dissertation field research on funeral rituals and ethnic and religious relationships.

- 2001
Borderland of Estonia, Latvia and Russia: doctoral dissertation field research on funeral rituals and ethnic and religious relationships.

- 1998-2000
  Setumaa, Estonia: four field trips with supervised group of students.
- 1999
  the Latgale region, Latvia – field research on Poles in Latvia.
- 1996
  Estonian islands – field research on the fishermen culture.
- 1994-1996
  Kaliningrad District, Russia – M.A. thesis field research.
- 1994
  Jakutia, Russia – Master’s Programme field research.
- 1991-1993
  Kaunas region (Lauda region) and Vilnius region (Wieńszczyzna), Lithuania - Master’s Programme field research.
- 1991
  the Lemko region, Poland - Master’s Programme field research.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1. SHORT ABSTRACT

This project seeks answer to the question of the image of Polish-German cultural borderland shared by Germans and the ways they explore historical layers and cultural heritages of the region, studied from an anthropological perspective. The aim of the project is to find out what are the sources that shape individual perception, as well as a common picture, shared by entire community, and what effects they have on the mobility across the borderland region.

Answers to these questions will contribute to better understanding of the processes which govern the politics of cultural perspectives in the borderland societies and help build successful strategies of development of the region. In revealing the mechanisms of penetrating and presenting local heritages, understood as the process of building bridges across space and time, the project will build parallel bridges across the border by both restoring the academic cooperation and enhancing the scholarly interest between Poland and Germany.

2.2. MOTIVATION

The interest in the topic originates in my previous research, the axis of which have always been socio-cultural phenomena of the borderlands. I carried out several long term field projects, located in various, politically and culturally diverse localities, which allowed me to explore a range of topics and gain an insight into a range of aspects of everyday life in the borderland area. My initial field experience on the Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian borderland was concerned with the issue of ethnic contact. This enterprise inspired me to apply the microhistory approach in the continuation of my research, focused on the diffusion of the historical “Polish ethnic island” in the middle of ethnic Lithuania. My further research was based in Mamonovo, a small locality on the border of the Kaliningrad District, and examined the socio-cultural change occurring in relation to the fact of opening of the Polish-Russian border. New cultural horizon resulting from this fact opened up avenues into new experiences and forms of cross-cultural interaction – a context to a certain degree resembling the one currently appearing at the Polish-German borderland – due to
recent political changes (i.e. Poland’s accession to EU and signing of the Schengen Treaty). A case proving how intriguing such processes can be became the object of my further study, located on the Estonian-Russian borderland. Inhabitants of this region, the Setu, are a group whose hybrid culture (incorporating elements that historically differentiated both dominant cultures) evolved due to a centuries long contact. Recent political upheavals (dissolution of the Soviet Union and emergence of independent Estonia) resulted in establishing of the official border, which entailed new strategies of sustaining the contact with lost territory. These findings prompt my further research concerned with the endurance of historical divisions and influences on the civilization borderland of the German Livonia, i.e. current borderland of Estonia, Latvia, Belarus and Russia. At the moment I continue to develop my scholarly attention in the concept of borderland under the auspices of the University of Szczecin. I am currently engaged in an anthropological project (elaborated in cooperation with Łukasz Kaczmarek, Ph.D), entitled Renaissance of Polish-German cultural borderland, investigating the social and economic effects of the emergent common borderland region. The focus of this study is mainly on the Poles’ migration to German side of the border. However, the research proposal I am presenting currently is concerned with the German perspective of the Polish – previously German – cultural space, and as such constitutes a complementary project.

2.3. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project will examine German’s attitudes and images of the past and of the present and the cultural constructions build around the idea of shifting cultural space they share. Along with signing of the Schengen Treaty and disappearance of the political frontiers people encounter new opportunities and new social phenomena appear, among them greater mobility in relation to freedom of choice of the most convenient forms of state service provision. Such phenomena are of interest to anthropologists and sociologists, but they do not solely constitute possible research agenda. Mixed Polish-German population inhabiting (since very recent time) Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Brandenburg manifests an increasing interest in exploring cultural heritages and the historical layers of the entire borderland region. Such context confronts researchers with question about the forms such curiosity may have and the perspectives it brings to the development of the region. Initiatives which emerge “from below”, such as growing number of internet publications (including press releases, private blogs, and semi-professional portals dedicated to the transmission of knowledge about particular localities, such as e.g. www.sedina.pl in Szczecin), various forms of tourism (not only nostalgic trips to lost territories, but also student exchange and many more) are but few examples of how gaining expertise in local history becomes popular on both sides of the border.

The cultural perspectives are articulations of multiple moralities involved in reading history, which is always a subject to a different level politics. Tracing changes in these articulations may contribute to better understanding and management of cultural perspectives. Taking into account the post-war policy eradicating German influences and discourses from the Polish public space (which entails both socialist policy of condemning “the West” as well as particularly negative image of Germany’s involvement in the WWII), which resulted not only in an almost complete lack of knowledge about the neighbours, but also lack of common, shared memory. Therefore mobility in the region, particularly the one that results from the interest in both “once
ours” (previously German) and “other’s” (Polish) history and culture seems to be significant as an attempt of restoration of common historical memory.

2.4. RESEARCH METHODS

The study is focused on the everyday life, habits, motivations, and values, which is the classic field of interest of socio-cultural anthropology. Such an approach justifies the use of qualitative ethnographic methods as the most suitable tools. Since its main objective is to adopt a perspective of local people and to “see with their eyes”, anthropology has developed several techniques allowing the best accomplishment of this task: participant observation and conduction of the life story interviews are researcher’s main activities during his/her long term fieldwork. My research stay in Germany will therefore consist of living in the chosen villages in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Brandenburg and taking trips with local people travelling to Poland, while conducting observation and interviewing.

The biographic method, which includes life stories, is often used in the microhistory approach, and allows for deeper insight in the history of the region, seen “from below” – a family, a particular household, village, etc. This classical anthropological tool seems to be especially useful here, as it brings the study closer to historian’s perspective. Therefore it seems also reasonable to expand the area of investigation and conduct necessary archival research. The archives of Instytut Zachodni in Poznań (which treasures data collected during similar research conducted in 1946-1956) and Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of University of Adam Mickiewicz are of special importance. Of particular interest is also material collected by historians based at Institut für angewandte Geschichte in Europa-Universität Viadrina, representing applied history approach.

3. TIME LIMITS

1,5 month Initial stage of the project realization: archival research, preparation of the questionnaire, identification of the localities for field stay.
3 months The core of the project: fieldwork in the chosen locality.
1, 5 month Summary of the results, preparation of the publication.

4. PROJECT’S FINAL RESULT

The project, I hope, will contribute to better understanding of processes governing the cultural perspectives of the studied society and borderland societies in general. Such insight will help build successful strategies of development of the region. In revealing the mechanisms of penetrating and presenting local heritages observed at the Polish-German borderland, which may be understood as the processes of building bridges across space and time, the project will build parallel bridges across the border by both restoring the academic cooperation and enhancing the scholarly interest between Poland and Germany.

The final result of proposed research will be a publication, namely an ethnography of the researched case study. I will also plan a preparation of a joint publication on the described topic, inviting scholars from other Polish and German institutions.