Abstract

The contemporary world reveals global phenomena, which are expressed in cultural universalisation, tolerance of different attitudes, preservation and internationalization of law. Common phenomena such as functioning of international institutions, loosening of borders and the associated free movement of people and goods, computerisation and mediatisation of social life, religious syncretism, scientific and technological development and many other factors that could be mentioned infinitely influence the formation of a homogeneous global society.

Masurians occupy a special place in the mosaic of minority groups of the world. In the area inhabited by Masurians, traces of the struggles of nature and civilization were preserved. Different cultures, religions, habits and customs clashed here. Andrzej Sakson, a sociologist writes: "This is a land of people not only devastated and chased out, but also chased away". Masurians are an indigenous regional minority. The occurrence of global phenomena of unification and diversification significantly affects the Masurian population. This population actively participates in the social and economic life of the country and, to a limited extent, undertakes the effort to preserve its cultural individuality and to maintain family customs and habits. At present, this minority is an image combining the values of tradition with the ideas of the contemporary world.

The presented PhD thesis is an attempt to partially fill the gap in the research of the Masurian community in Szczytno County. So far, there is a lack of a monograph on Masurians inhabiting this county in the literature. It is also difficult to indicate a publication that deals exclusively with the analysis of adaptation and related social transformations of the Masurian population of the county of Szczytno. This issue is noteworthy because the number of Masurians is drastically decreasing. At present, there are only single people left in individual towns of the county.

In his publications, Andrzej Sakson describes the processes of adaptation, disintegration and stabilisation of the Masurian borderland population. He conducted his sociological research almost on the whole territory of Masuria. He analysed the changes taking place in this community. The aim of this research was to identify and characterise the regularities occurring in groups of social borderland, with a not fully formed national identity. Research issues were also referred to by the author of *'Masurians'* to the analysis of its maintenance and development in the German state organism and the processes taking place during the contact between Masurians and the Russian and Polish population.

The results of Andrzej Sakson's research provided important theses on the changes taking place in the Masurian community. The author of this dissertation verified the Poznań sociologist's ascertainments because Andrzej Sakson had formulated his theses more than a quarter of a century ago. Among the basic ones is the thesis that the Masurian community was affected by the disintegration process. It was treated as a research hypothesis, assuming that it continues uninterruptedly and is followed by a constantly decreasing number of Masurians. This hypothesis is verified on the territory of the mentioned county. The research results of this work are therefore a classic case study. We believe that so far the research of the Masurian community has been undertaken selectively and indicates little interest in this community. Meanwhile, the progressive disappearance of this community causes that we lose irretrievably the chance to get to know it in depth. The undertaken research is aimed at capturing this - as it seems – final phase of the community's existence and at preserving the still registrable Masurian tradition in one of the counties of the Warmia-Masuria Province. The subject of the research, the results of which are presented in this study, is an indigenous group of the Masurian population and their adaptation to the new political, social and cultural reality after 1945.

The reason for raising the thesis' topic was to recognize the process of adaptation and related socio-political transformations of the Masurian population in Szczytno County. In order to verify the hypothesis, questions, and research assumptions set out in the Introduction, the phenomena accompanying the above mentioned transformation were attempted to be recognized by using methods of political science cognition. The dissertation combines the need for greater approximation of the issues published in the literature on the subject, as well as the need to examine in detail - from the perspective of the individual fates of persons and groups of Masurian origin living in the Szczytno County. With regard to the literature on the subject, as already mentioned, there are no publications that would deal exclusively with the process of socio-political transformation of the Masurian population living in Szczytno County. In the presented study, therefore, the publications of writers were used to a large extent, which introduced a broad literary perspective to the subject under consideration.

The empirical research carried out confirmed the research assumptions mentioned in the Introduction of this paper, which emphasise that Masurians in the studied area mark their otherness shaped by historical conditions. At the same time, they state that they are at home here and are aware of the cultural changes that took place after 1945. In the new reality they feel blended into the Polish community. They assimilated and feel good about it. They also accept multiculturalism, which is expressed in the knowledge of languages and the introduction of new customs. The conformist attitude of Masurians towards cultural changes is expressed in,

among other things, the consent to German-Polish marriages, often connected with a change of religion, a change of lifestyle and the pursuit of modernity. Thus, the acceptance of bi- and multi-culturalism as well as social consent to activity in the German minority is common.

As far as the research hypothesis is concerned, the observations and verifications carried out confirm that Masurians adapted to constant socio-political changes in various historical periods. This process was also accompanied by disintegration, which eventually led to the impossibility of adaptation and destabilisation of ties in local communities. The result of discrimination and injustice was emigration of Masurians and the people who stayed integrated with their neighbours and immigrant population. The process of adaptation continues uninterruptedly and is followed by a steadily decreasing number of the Masurian population, as shown in the study.

It is very important to continue the elements of culture, because otherwise there would be a breakdown in the rules of human behaviour and norms of functioning, which are the basis for the existence of social groups. It should be noted that between 1945 and 2020, there has been a German minority in Poland, which has blended into the Polish community. Masurians feel well in it and indicate that they are a regional community, which they unambiguously express, saying: "we are here at home". It should be noted that after the signing of the Bonn Treaty in 1991 there has been a clear change in the treatment of national minorities and the authorities' desire to cooperate with their representations prevails. Poland properly conducts its policy and observes its implementation in accordance with the provisions of agreements, treaties, international conventions and the Constitution of the Republic of Poland on respect for the rights of minorities, their cultural life and non-material and material heritage. Social and political changes, institutionalization of social life determine the activation of small and larger communities of this minority.

To conclude, one cannot notice that Polish society does not know enough about the post-war tragedy of Masurians. Andrzej Sakson and Erwin Kruk, among others, wrote about their fate, but the resonance of their publications reaches only a close group of people. And outside the Masuria region, it is very weak. Wojciech Smarzowski's movie Rose (Polish: Róża) did not shock public opinion enough. In Masuria, there were no artistic or opinion-forming works on Masurians. Material and non-material culture of Masurians suffered huge losses as a result of the Second World War and related post-war events. Nevertheless, there are still signs of hope for a revival. The dialect that Masurians speak was recorded and the *Dictionary of Masurian Speech* (Mazurská gádtä / Masurische Sprache Wörterbuch) was developed. Therefore, can we hope that literature will be created in this dialect, the oldest and most original Masurian music

will be played? It seems that Masurians should benefit from the experience of their neighbours Kurpie and Kashubians, whose culture has been reborn for many years and is still developing. All periods in the history of the Kurpie-Warmia-Masuria border region require further research.