

# Regional children's literature about Olsztyn as a domain for learning about the cultural heritage of «interrupted countries». In search of positive models

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**ABSTRACT:** The Region of Warmia and its capital city, Olsztyn, are examples of borderland that is referred to as an «interrupted country». The present study analyzes children's books about Olsztyn that were published after 1989. The aim of the analysis was to identify the elements of regional cultural heritage in the evaluated books, the meanings assigned to the discussed locations, and the associated cultural heritage concepts. The study combines a functional approach to literary criticism with a pedagogical approach that makes a reference to place-based education. Despite the fact that the analyzed books contain numerous examples of Olsztyn's tangible and intangible cultural heritage, they do not examine issues of multiculturalism which are clearly present in the local landscape. Therefore the analyzed books play an important role in shaping children's perceptions of Warmia. The very idea of presenting Olsztyn in children's books seems commendable, but the manner in which the city's cultural heritage is depicted does not do justice to the «interrupted country».

**EET/TEE KEYWORDS:** Regional literature; Children's literature; Cultural heritage; Place-based education; XX Century.

## Introduction

This study analyzes children's books dedicated to Olsztyn, the capital city of Warmia – a historical Polish region which constitutes an example of a territory with disrupted cultural continuity. Children's books published after the political transformation of 1989 were selected for analysis. The aim of the study was to determine which elements of regional cultural identity were presented in the analyzed books and in what context, and to identify cultural heritage concepts that were accentuated by the authors. Attempts were also made to interpret the meanings assigned to the discussed 'places' in Olsztyn. The results were used to examine the current state of children's literature and its potential functions in the process of learning about regional cultural heritage.

Michał Maleszka refers to Warmia, its capital city of Olsztyn, and the neighboring region of Mazury as an «interrupted country»<sup>1</sup>. He cites historian Robert Traba and cultural studies researcher expert Rafał Żytniec who wrote that: «1945 was a clear watershed moment for Warmia and Mazury that disrupted the continuity of the region's history»<sup>2</sup>. Maleszka argues that the cultural heritage of Warmia and Mazury, as well as other German territories that had been granted to Poland under the agreements reached during Yalta and Potsdam conferences, cannot be discussed without considering the ruptures that occurred in the region's recent history in the previous sixty years<sup>3</sup>. This lack of continuity is accentuated in three dimensions: historical, ethnic, and political. Before World War II, Warmia and Mazury was inhabited by German and Polish-speaking Warmians and a small community of German-speaking Jews. When the analyzed region was incorporated into Poland after the war, it was largely deserted because many inhabitants had been killed during the war, whereas others fled from their homes in fear of the advancing Red Army. Shortly after the war, the Recovered Territories became an arena of unprecedented migration whose aim was to build an ethnically homogeneous state. German residents were deported. Settlers from central Poland and migrants from the Eastern Borderlands, followed by the Ukrainians who were forced to resettle during the Operation Vistula in 1947, arrived in Warmia and Mazury<sup>4</sup>. The resettlement campaigns were fueled by the propaganda surrounding the recovery of Polish territories and the 'return to motherland'. For these campaigns to be successful, all traces of multiculturalism that had shaped Warmia's heritage for centuries had to be eradicated.

<sup>1</sup> M. Maleszka, *Nostalgia bez pamięci. Spojrzenie na przestrzeń kulturową Warmii i Mazur*, «Studia Etnologiczne i Antropologiczne», n. 12, 2012, pp. 94-113, in partic. p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> R. Traba, R. Żytniec, *Myślenie nie boli..., czyli przeciw „pozornej nowoczesności” na Mazurach i Warmii*, «Borussia», n. 43, 2008, pp. 3-11, in partic. p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Maleszka, *Nostalgia bez pamięci. Spojrzenie na przestrzeń kulturową Warmii i Mazur*, cit., p. 96.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

### 1. *Cultural heritage in the open regionalism concept*

Cultural heritage is a term that is used in various disciplines of the humanities, where each discipline focuses on a different aspect of this phenomenon. Cultural heritage escapes easy definition because the meaning attached to the concept by scientists, theoreticians, and heritage protection institutions changes over time<sup>5</sup>. It seems that the most comprehensive definition of cultural heritage was proposed by the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, which was adopted in Faro, Portugal, in 2005. In the Faro Convention, cultural heritage was defined as

a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions (Article 2, section 1a). Cultural heritage also includes intangible products of human activities, including the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith [...]<sup>6</sup>.

When considering its role in the local value system, it is also necessary to look at the state policy pursued towards heritage and its protection and dissemination. There is an ongoing debate in the humanities about approaches to heritage, which Christoph Brumann has narrowed down to two positions<sup>7</sup>. The first involves an affirmative approach to heritage which has its own (autotelic) significance for a specific community. Cultural heritage is a relic of the past and a means of intergenerational communication, and it is regarded as a permanent component of social identity. This definition of heritage is a mnemonic construct that involves constant remembrance of objects, sites, and traditions with a lasting value<sup>8</sup>. The second approach is based on constructivist theory, and it makes a reference to the concept of «invented traditions»<sup>9</sup>, namely symbolic objects and practices that have been developed in the recent past and are helpful in instilling norms and values that promote a sense of

<sup>5</sup> B. Skaldawski, *Problematyka definicji dziedzictwa*, in A. Chabiera *et alii* (edd.), *Polacy wobec dziedzictwa. Raport z badań społecznych*, Warszawa-Kraków, Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa, 2017, pp. 9-12, in part. p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, Paris, 17 October 2003, Article 2, section 1, point 1, <<https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>> (last access: 31.05.2024).

<sup>7</sup> C. Brumann, *Heritage Agnosticism: A Third Path For the Study of Cultural Geritage*, «Social Anthropology», vol. 22, n. 2, 2014, pp. 173-188.

<sup>8</sup> N. Silberman, *Heritage Places: Evolving Conceptions and Changing Forms*, in W. Logan, M.N. Craith, U. Kockel (edd.), *A Companion to Heritage Studies*, London, Wiley Blackwell, 2015, pp. 29-41.

<sup>9</sup> E.J. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger (edd.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983; Polish transl. *Tradycja wynaleziona*, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2008.

connectivity with historical events in a community. Traditions are usually invented in periods of profound social change which undermine the process of intergenerational cultural transmission. In this approach, cultural heritage is a tool that legitimizes authority, and it is perceived a capital resource. Cultural heritage emerges as a political instrument, and its hidden function is the effective exercise of power. The constructivist approach could be warranted in some cases, for example when analyzing the communist authorities' attempts to legitimize the transfer of East Prussia and Silesia to Poland after World War II. At the time, the central and local authorities launched various social campaigns to validate the return of the Recovered Territories and build a sense of community in areas colonized by migrants whose cultural experiences differed considerably from those of autochthons. Cultural goods were nearly mass produced, and they involved both tangible (statues and monuments) and intangible (local legends) elements. It should be noted that similar processes are being encountered at present, albeit in a more concealed form. Sociologist Marcin Lubaś analyzed the global cultural heritage boom and the widespread political, legal and institutional measures to instrumentalize historical resources and turn them into elements of cultural heritage<sup>10</sup>.

In 2015, the National Institute of Cultural Heritage commissioned a study on cultural heritage in local communities in Poland. Cultural heritage was not regarded as a valuable source of knowledge by 16% of the youngest respondents<sup>11</sup>. The Internet (more than 56% of the answers), followed by television as well as books (12%) were the main sources of knowledge about it for the youngest respondents. The authors concluded that contact with cultural heritage during educational activities (such as visits to museums) is not an important experience for many young people. They concluded that further research was needed to explore the role of cultural heritage in school curricula. Future studies should examine not only whether cultural heritage is incorporated into school curricula, but also the way in which it is used in the educational process<sup>12</sup>.

Cultural competences that are acquired during socialization, institutional learning and informal education are required for participating in cultural heritage. These competences are not only essential for decoding heritage, but they also encourage people to become acquainted with their culture. According to Pierre Bourdieu, due to the unique character of cultural capital, its full assimilation requires long-term socialization, in particular in the first years of life. If

<sup>10</sup> M. Lubaś, *Teoria dziedzictwa kulturowego w naukach społecznych*, in A. Chabiera *et alii* (edd.), *Polacy wobec dziedzictwa. Raport z badań społecznych*, Warszawa-Kraków, Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa, 2017, pp. 17-19, p. 18.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-62.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

we fully recognize the importance of protecting the cultural heritage, our task is to find a way of transmitting these values to the next generations<sup>13</sup>.

In the early 1990s, in the first years after the democratic revolution, new approaches to understanding cultural heritage emerged in Poland, in particular in northern and eastern peripheries, i.e. borderlands with a difficult history. As mentioned in the Introduction, the 'return to the motherland' of the territories that had not been part of Poland until 1939, including Warmia and Olsztyn, was a popular slogan after World War II that not only ignored, but actively eradicated all tangible and intangible manifestations of foreign culture<sup>14</sup>. In Olsztyn, the new approach to analyzing the region's history and cultural heritage was promoted by researchers affiliated with the Borussia Cultural Community Association that had been established already in 1990. The main aim of the proposed approach was to separate ideology from cultural capital. According to Professor Robert Traba, one of Borussia's founders, cultural capital should be recreated without neglecting the memories and experiences of the parents' generation and by confronting them with the memories embedded in the cultural landscape<sup>15</sup>. The proponents of this approach argued that communities should not become locked in their own social space but should open up to national or religious minorities in the region. Borussia's activities were best epitomized in the motto: «history as a space for dialogue»<sup>16</sup>, which enriches the region's historical and cultural canon, enables the local residents to discover the region's potential and reflect on own identity. Borussia described its philosophy as open regionalism, thus redefining the concept that had been hitherto used to describe global political and economic phenomena. Open regionalism is a civil philosophy that is strongly rooted in practice and constitutes a modern and, from our perspective, attractive alternative for communities and institutions responsible for education in the region.

As previously mentioned, literature is a one of the cultural carriers that familiarize children with the region's cultural heritage. Bruno Bettelheim formulated a universal criterion for selecting valuable reading materials for children: a book should enable children to «find deeper meaning»<sup>17</sup> through elements that are both familiar and hidden, but always important for children. Bettel-

<sup>13</sup> P. Bordieu, *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1978; Engl. transl., *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London, Routledge, 1984.

<sup>14</sup> M. Wagińska-Marzec, *Ustalenie nazw miejscowości na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych*, in Z. Mazur (ed.), *Wokół niemieckiego dziedzictwa kulturowego na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych*, Poznań, Instytut Zachodni, 1997, pp. 369-416; Z. Mazur, *Das deutsche Kulturerbe in den polnischen West- und Nordgebieten (Studien der Forschungsstelle Ostmitteleuropa an der Universität Dortmund)*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> R. Traba, "Otwarty regionalizm" – praktyczna filozofia obywatelska, «Borussia. Kultura. Historia. Literatura», n. 49, pp. 9-14, p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> B. Bettelheim, *Kinder brauchen Märchen*, Stuttgart, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1977; Pol-

heim advised against books that are *barren* and do not address important and difficult topics, childhood dilemmas and strong emotions.

Fairy tales, myths and legends constitute a vast portion of children's literature which is used by the educators to popularize regional culture among the youngest readers. Krystyna Zabawa described the criteria that should be met by children's literature, and these criteria can also be applied to other texts on regional culture for children. Such literary works should:

- be relatively short, to ensure that children can read / listen to them without becoming bored;
- be written in contemporary language, with infrequent usage of archaic language that is easy to understand in a given context;
- contain dialogues;
- have at least one child hero;
- feature humor;
- present topographic details that can be easily identified by children, such as popular streets or objects (if this cannot be accomplished in writing, such details should be presented in photographs or video material);
- have an intersemiotic character to enable the reader to recreate the read/heard text with the use of other semiotic modes (art, music, drama)<sup>18</sup>.

## 2. Description of the analyzed books

Three of the analyzed books about Olsztyn were authored by Agata Grzegorzcyk-Wosiek. The first book is entitled *Miasto bajek* [*The City of Fairy Tales*]<sup>19</sup>.

The book contains 16 poems about material objects and famous people associated with Olsztyn. Most of the titles make a reference to popular sites in the city, including historical monuments, modern sculptures and statues, natural sites and elements of Olsztyn's urban design like streets and parks. The heroes are also historical figures.

The book has a hard cover and 36 pages. Each poem is accompanied by two illustrations painted by Ryszard Ratuszyński. The titles are printed in large gold letters, and they run vertically. The book was printed on gloss-coated paper, which enhances the quality of graphic design. The publication was co-financed by the City of Olsztyn.

ish transl. *Cudowne i pożyteczne. O znaczeniach i wartościach baśni*, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo WAB, 2010, p. 24.

<sup>18</sup> K. Zabawa, *Literatura dla dzieci w edukacji regionalnej*, «Edukacja Elementarna w Teorii i Praktyce», vol. 15-16, n. 1-2, pp. 52-60, p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> A. Grzegorzcyk-Wosiek, *Miasto bajek*, Olsztyn, Pracownia Wydawnicza Elset, 2008.



Pic. 1. Cover of the book entitled *Miasto bajek* [*The City of Fairy Tales*]

The second book by Agata Grzegorzczak-Wosiek is entitled *Spacer pana Kopernika* [*Mr. Copernicus' Walk*]<sup>20</sup>.

One day, the titular hero, Nicolaus Copernicus, decides to leave his statue and take a stroll down Olsztyn's streets. He passes historical and contemporary buildings on his walk. He notices changes in the city skyline, including the absence of a gate and a drawbridge dating back to the turbulent Teutonic era, round glass houses, and the redesigned Old Town Hall building. The book has a soft cover and 16 pages. The text is printed in large font to accommodate the needs of the youngest readers. The book features drawings of the

<sup>20</sup> Ead., *Spacer pana Kopernika*, Olsztyn, Pracownia Wydawnicza Elset, 2009.



Pic. 2. Cover of the book entitled *Spacer pana Kopernika* [Mr. Copernicus' Walk]

presented monuments and other popular sites in Olsztyn that occupy a large part of each page and can be colored in.

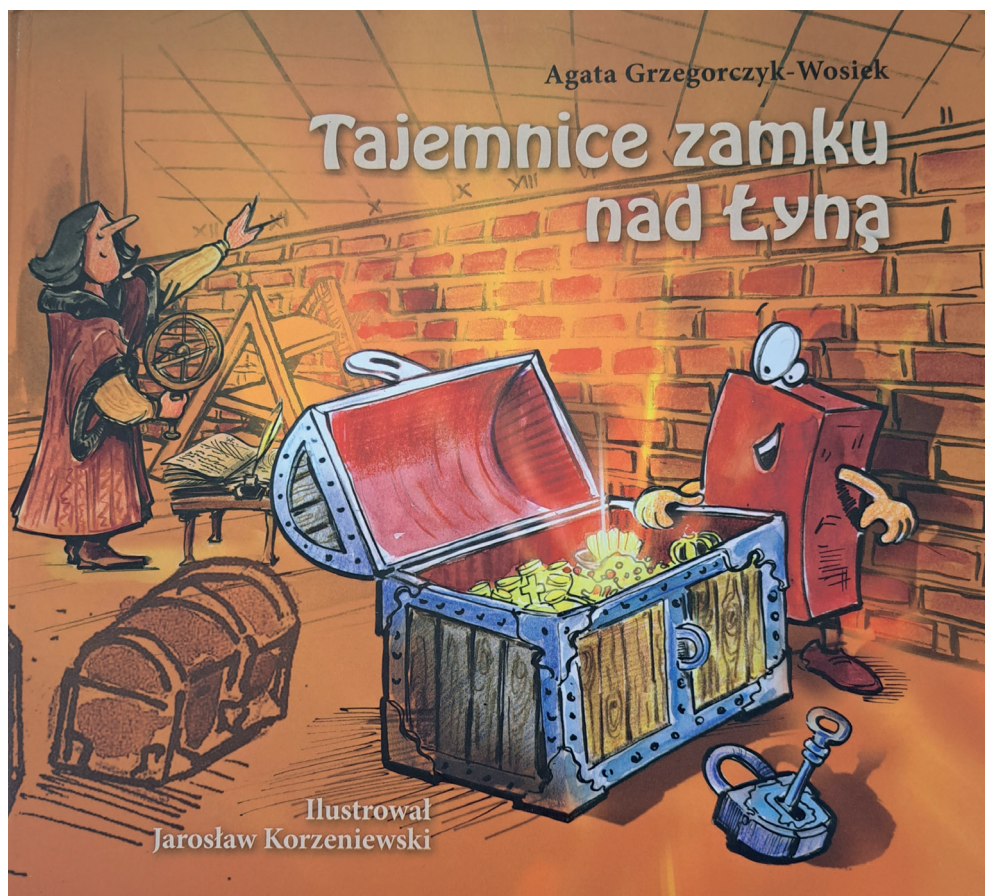
The third book by Agata Grzegorzcyk-Wosiek is entitled *Tajemnice zamku nad Łyną* [The Secrets of the Castle on the Łyna River]<sup>21</sup>.

The book contains a rhymed story about the history of the Olsztyn castle which is narrated by a red brick from the castle wall that bears witness to the city's history. The author describes the castle's architecture in the context of changing artistic styles, Teutonic Knights' attempts to seize the castle and mentions the castle's famous residents and guests. Difficult words are printed in bold font and explained in the *Glossary* in page margins. The story is illustrated with large and detailed drawings by Jarosław Korzeniowski. The book has 34 pages, and it is printed on gloss-coated paper. Similarly to the first book, the concept was developed by the Association of Friends of the Museum of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, and the publication was co-financed by the City of Olsztyn.

Important information about the reach of Agata Grzegorzcyk-Wosiek's books is available. According to ELSet Publishing House, *The City of Fairy*

<sup>21</sup> Ead., *Tajemnice zamku nad Łyną*, Olsztyn, Pracownia Wydawnicza Elset, 2013.





Pic. 3. Cover of the book entitled *Tajemnice zamku nad Łyną* [*The Secrets of the Castle on the Łyna River*]

*Tales* and *The Secrets of the Castle on the Łyna River* had a print run of 1000 copies, and *Mr. Copernicus' Walk* – 9000 copies. All books were sold, and second-hand books fetch much higher prices than those sold in retail. Publications are available in the city's libraries. Based on her books, Grzegorzczuk-Wosiek organizes workshops for schools and other educational and culture institutions. In 2022, the author was invited by the Warmia and Mazury Center for Teacher Training in Olsztyn to organize *A Walk with Copernicus in Olsztyn* webinar for elementary education teachers, and Polish language teachers in primary schools. The webinar was to provide teachers with tools for incorporating fairy tales in the process of teaching history and regional studies. Her books were adapted for stage by the Olsztyn Puppet Theater; they were used to produce a record, stage a literary and art competition for children, and her poems are recited by students during regional competitions.

In recent months, *Mr. Copernicus' Walk* was translated into Ukrainian, and meetings and workshops were organized for Ukrainian migrants to familiarize them with Olsztyn and its history.

The fourth publication entitled *Opowieści Baby Pruskiej* [*The Tales of Baba Pruska*]<sup>22</sup> differs from the previous books because it is a collection of short stories written by children. The book is a 31-page brochure, and it contains prize-winning stories from a competition held by municipal institutions. The competition was open to children aged 7 to 13 who were residents of Olsztyn and the surrounding municipalities. The contestants were asked to submit short stories, poems, or art works dedicated to Olsztyn. The authors of the ten most interesting submissions were invited to participate in workshops. According to the book's editors,

the purpose of the workshops was to share tales about Olsztyn and its residents throughout the centuries. We talked about different professions, the ways in which Olsztyn residents fended off the enemies, about famous people who visited the city, by exploring Olsztyn's history through documents, Warmian fairy tales and legends, to inspire curiosity and encourage the participants to search for undiscovered mysteries<sup>23</sup>.

Nine short stories, one poem, and 11 art works were ultimately accepted for print. The book was printed on gloss-coated paper to enhance the quality of the presented art works.

### 3. *Theoretical approaches to analyzing and interpreting literary works*

The selected literary works were analyzed with the use of a method rooted in bibliology and the sociology of literature. According to Ingeborg Fialová, a researcher of Czech regional literature, this approach is particularly useful for analyzing regional literary works<sup>24</sup>. The functional method developed by Bronisława Woźniczka-Paruzelis highly suited for exploring regional literature<sup>25</sup>. According to her, a book is an autonomous literary work that relies on the interplay between text and meaning and is materialized through publication. Therefore, a book's components such as graphic design, spatial organiza-

<sup>22</sup> B. Rybak, D. Krajewska (edd.), *Opowieści Baby Pruskiej*, Olsztyn, Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Olsztynie, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> I. Fialová, *Über die Brauchbarkeit literatursoziologischer Methoden beim Erforschen regionaler Literatur*, «LiTheS», n. 1, 2008, pp. 43-51.

<sup>25</sup> B. Woźniczka-Paruzel, *Polskie kalendarze pomorskie z lat 1850-1914: wprowadzenie w problematykę badawczą*, in B. Woźniczka-Paruzel (ed.), *Szkice z dziejów piśmiennictwa piśmiennictwa pomorskiego XVI-XIX wieku*, Toruń, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 1999, pp. 87-95.

tion of printed texts, color scheme, and even type of paper can significantly influence readability, the book's appeal, and its effect on the reader. All of the above elements have to be analyzed to explore a publication's role in the social communication process and its social function. According to Woźniczka-Paruzel, the social function of any publication is determined by the relationship between intended functions and the functions that are actually served by a book. Intended functions are conceived by the author and serve purposes that are unrelated to the text. These functions are encoded in the structure of a literary work and the meanings that are articulated with the use of these structures. Intended functions are uncovered during content analysis. These meanings are activated during the reading process, and they affect the audience, thus serving a real-life function. The extent to which a book serves a real-life function can be measured based on reader reviews and publishing data, including the print run, number of editions, number of sold copies, and library circulation.

The analyzed publications, in particular their educational value, can also be interpreted in the context of place-based education. In this approach, the term «place» is ambiguous, and it can denote various elements of our daily lives, both private and public. In most cases, this term makes a reference to microspace that is closely related to the reader's physical and emotional experience<sup>26</sup>. According to Ilona Copik, the term «place» is a category that is semantically related to the concept of a «region», which is a collective category that is also referred to as the «small motherland»<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, place-based education reveals the geographical and cultural aspects of human life and posits that these elements play an important role in identity formation.

In the constructivist approach, places are not what they are, but what they mean to people. The meanings assigned to specific locations play the most important role. Therefore, a place is the result of a communal process of assigning and preserving meanings<sup>28</sup>. According to David Gruenewald who coined the term «critical pedagogy of place», people are place makers, and places are the artefacts of human culture<sup>29</sup>. In this approach, people are burdened with substantial responsibility – by creating a place and endowing it with meaning, people need to be aware that this process involves social, cultural, and political factors. Gruenewald argued that places are not neutral formations of material cultural or inevitable elements of the social and geographic landscape. In his opinion, this line of thinking is dangerous because it draws our attention

<sup>26</sup> M. Mendel, *Pedagogika miejsca*, Wrocław, Wydawnictwo Naukowe DSWE TWP, 2006.

<sup>27</sup> I. Copik, *Pedagogika miejsca – kultura lokalna a kształtowanie się tożsamości współczesnego człowieka*, «Pedagogika», n. 22, 2003, pp. 179-189.

<sup>28</sup> Mendel, *Pedagogika miejsca*, cit., p. 29.

<sup>29</sup> D. Gruenewald, *The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place*, «Educational Researcher», vol. 32, n. 4, 2003, pp. 3-12.

away from the links between a place, education, culture, and our perceptions of that place, and it legitimizes the associated ideology that is regarded as obvious. In this context, the educational process is faced with the greatest challenge of becoming place-conscious education<sup>30</sup>. The aim of place-based education is to situate the learner in a familiar environment which provides the context for identity building, provided that the developed identity is not cohesive or exclusive<sup>31</sup>. In the process of assigning meanings to places such as regions or cities, their history, even if difficult, and contemporary changes in culture, national and administrative identity, religious and ethnic differences, and the permeation of and conflict between distinct cultures must be given a voice. The silenced stories of local places that play an important role in identity formation must be confronted in the educational process<sup>32</sup>. This approach to place-based education seems to be an emanation of the open regionalism concept that is promoted in Warmia and Mazury.

#### 4. *Cultural heritage and cultural continuity in the evaluated publications – analysis and interpretation*

In literary works where the main character is a city, the author assigns meanings by selecting real-life topographic spaces, products of tangible and intangible culture, urban symbols, as well as fictional and real-life characters who are linked with the discussed 'place'. The described place/person, as well as the way it/he/she is portrayed should be analyzed at a deeper level.

Material objects, including historical monuments and contemporary buildings, are cultural heritage products that are easiest to identify. The Olsztyn castle is mentioned in all of the analyzed publications. *The Secrets of the Castle on the Łyna River* is dedicated exclusively to the Olsztyn castle, and it contains a detailed description of its history, and the local residents' attempts to protect the castle against Teutonic invaders. Nicholas Copernicus, a resident of Olsztyn and a key figure in the castle's defense, is one of the most important characters in the book. In *Mr. Copernicus' Walk*, the famous astronomer strolls down the streets of contemporary Olsztyn and takes a peek inside castle premises where his laboratory was once located. In the author's previous book, *The City of Fairy Tales*, the construction of the Olsztyn castle is the subject of the poem entitled *Zamkowe duchy* [*Ghosts of the Castle*]. The Castle of the

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Copik, *Pedagogika miejsca – kultura lokalna a kształtowanie się tożsamości współczesnego człowieka*, cit., p. 184.

<sup>32</sup> M. Somerville, *Place Literacies*, «Australian Journal of Language and Literacy», vol. 30, n. 2, 2007, pp. 149-164.

Warmian Chapter is also mentioned in *The Tales of Baba Pruska*, a collection of short stories penned by children: *Tajemnicze lochy smoka* [*The Dragon's Secret Dungeons*] by Aleksandra Wiśniewska, *The Tales of Baba Pruska* by Piotr Domański, and *Spacerkiem po Olsztynie* [*A Stroll Through Olsztyn*] by Klaudia Wojtukiewicz.

The High Gate is the second most widely encountered monument in the analyzed texts. Other monuments that are portrayed in the studied publications include the Medieval stone sculpture of «baba pruska», St. John's Cathedral, Old Town Hall, New Town Hall, Old Town tenement buildings, St. John's bridge, and cobbled streets. Contemporary buildings and structures are also described, including statues, the planetarium, the Old Town fountain, and urban design elements (street names in Olsztyn and Górka Jasia Park).

Natural sites are represented by Lake Ukiel, Lake Podkówka, and the Łyna River. Olsztyn is a city of great natural value, but the beauty of local nature received little attention in the examined publications. This is surprising in view of the «Olsztyn – Europe's Garden» promotional campaign which was in full swing when the analyzed books were published. Books that emphasize Olsztyn's attractiveness and its natural and recreational value are particularly well suited for children. These features were effectively accentuated in board games.

The region's intangible culture is depicted through historical characters who are the heroes in the analyzed tests and make a reference to Warmian legends. In *The City of Fairy Tales*, the author introduces Johannes von Leysen, a local landlord, Saint James, one of the apostles and the patron saint of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Co-Cathedral Basilica and Olsztyn who is also depicted in the city's coat of arms, the famous astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus, and Warmian composer Feliks Nowowiejski. Except for Johannes von Leysen, the remaining characters are well-known to the general public, and their accomplishments extend beyond the region's boundaries. In *A Stroll Through Olsztyn*, the young author Klaudia Wojtukiewicz added Warmian poet Maria Zientara-Malewska to the list of distinguished characters. In turn, Warmian legends in *The Tales of Baba Pruska* have a largely local scope.

In the context of place-based education, the examined literary works should be analyzed to answer the following questions: What meanings are assigned by the authors to selected elements of cultural heritage? The analyzed publications make a reference to numerous sites in the city, but all of them place the greatest emphasis on the Old Town which is described as a «magical place». The titles of the evaluated books, short stories and poems create an atmosphere of myth and mystery (e.g. *The City of Fairy Tales*). In her book, Grzegorzyczyk-Wosiek emphasizes that Olsztyn is full of fairy tales that «walk the streets» (*The City of Fairy Tales*), and the characters in many of her poems have secrets and perform acts of magic (e.g. Copernicus leaves his statue at night and flies above the city). Olsztyn's magical ambience is underscored by

Edward Ratuszyński's beautiful illustrations which present the titular sites in an oneiric manner.

The titles and content of the examined texts respond to children's need for miracles and animistic beliefs about the world, which are particularly pronounced in the youngest readers<sup>33</sup>. Similar concepts can be found in *Mr. Copernicus' Walk*, where the titular hero comes alive and strolls through the city, and in *The Secrets of the Castle on the Łyna River*, where a red brick narrates the history of the castle. The children who authored short stories for *The Tales of Baba Pruska* also loosely based their fantastic tales on Warmian legends and Olsztyn's history, although contemporary and realistic short stories could also be submitted for the competition.

Agata Grzegorzczyk-Wosiek, the author of a series of three books about Olsztyn, set out to familiarize children with the city's history and the achievements of its famous residents. Olsztyn is presented as a place with a rich history. To achieve that goal, the author focuses mainly on material objects and maps physical spaces that are linked with products of intangible cultural heritage. Unfortunately, *The Secrets of the Castle on the Łyna River* is a book saturated with difficult words and expressions, which rather discourages the young reader from reading. A total of 39 words that require an explanation have been identified in the 31-page-long book. Difficult vocabulary can be found in passages related to architecture (e.g. hoarding), weapons (arquebus), functions and titles (e.g. landlord), artistic styles (e.g. Baroque), and other concepts. The *Glossary* in the margins is not very helpful. It seems that the author's main objective was to write in rhyme, whereas the clarity of the content was a secondary consideration. The provided explanations obscure, rather than clarify the meaning of the introduced concepts because they also contain new words that require additional explanation. Teachers are advised to introduce historical concepts and vocabulary before working with a literary text, but even prior preparation may not be sufficient because the book is teeming with difficult words.

The achievements of Olsztyn's famous residents are also explained in a convoluted manner, and the resulting content overload may be overwhelming for children. *The Secrets of the Castle on the Łyna River* contains a list of Copernicus' works, and the author uses difficult terms such as «aequinocetium»<sup>34</sup>, «solar quadrant», «astrolabe», and «bread tariff». Only the first term is explained in detail, whereas only single lines are devoted to the remaining words, which have short, enigmatic and complicated definitions in the *Glossary*. The fragment of *Mr. Copernicus' Walk*, where the great astronomer travels in time

<sup>33</sup> Bettelheim, *Cudowne i pożyteczne. O znaczeniach i wartościach baśni*, cit., pp. 84-85.

<sup>34</sup> A diagram of the spring equinox which was probably drawn by Nicolaus Copernicus on the castle wall in the first half of 1517.

to contemporary Olsztyn and visits the castle courtyard, is easier to comprehend:

From here  
I watched the Sun  
Climb the firmament  
Every day

To determine  
When spring  
Is really  
Underway<sup>35</sup>.

The poem makes a reference to Copernicus' groundbreaking theory of revolution and the heliocentric model of the solar system, as presented in his seminal work *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*.

Other historical figures in *The Secrets of the Castle on the Łyna River* include Johannes von Leysen who is portrayed as a «wise landlord in a city with brick buildings»; Mikołaj of Olsztyn, a master mason who built the castle's barrel vault ceiling; Bishop Kromer of Warmia who ruled the castle in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; and Bishop Krasicki, «the duke of poets and the Polish language». The connection between Johannes von Leysen and the beginning of the castle's construction is justified because according to source materials, the construction process coincided with the city's foundation<sup>36</sup>. However, the reference to Bishop Marcin Kromer, who only consecrated the castle chapel in 1580 serve little purpose. The reference to Ignacy Krasicki, one of the greatest Polish poets of the Enlightenment period, who visited the castle and the cathedral «in haste because he was running late» is especially surprising because the poet resided in another Warmian town, Lidzbark Warmiński<sup>37</sup>.

One of the poems in *The City of Fairy Tales* is dedicated to Saint James. The author writes that Saint James of Palestine «was driven *in our direction*», «the purpose of his journey was sometimes difficult to understand» (italics were used for emphasis by M.S. and B.S.). Therefore, the text suggests that Olsztyn was the actual destination of Jacob's travels; but it should be noted that Olsztyn was placed on a map of pilgrimage routes only in recent years. This raises important questions about the boundaries between fantasy and reality, and poetic license in literary works aiming to familiarize children with cities, their history and culture. The author analyzes the apostle's relations with Olsztyn, what brought him to the city, and «what keeps him in the city on the

<sup>35</sup> Grzegorzczyk-Wosiek, *Spacer pana Kopernika*, cit., p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> S. Achremczyk, *Olsztyn: stolica Warmii i Mazur*, Olsztyn, Wydawnictwo Edytor Wers, 2016, p. 23.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. J.T. Pokrzywniak, *Ignacy Krasicki. Wśród pisarzy polskiego oświecenia*, Poznań, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2016.

Łyna River». The poem does not answer these questions, simply because these facts cannot be ascertained. Saint James was just the patron of the first church in Olsztyn (the present-day Co-Cathedral Basilica), and in recognition of his close ties with Olsztyn, the pilgrim's image was placed on the seal used by church dignitaries already in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and, subsequently, on the city's coat of arms<sup>38</sup>.

Saint James is also the main character of two short stories in *The Tales of Baba Pruska*. According to the authors, the pilgrim was enchanted with local nature and the residents' hospitality, and he named the wooden settlement "Olsztyn". These stories make a direct reference to a legend by Warmian poet Maria Zientara-Malewska which posits that St. James named the wooden village after alder trees that grew abundantly in the region (the Polish word «olsza» means an alder tree)<sup>39</sup>. As a literary genre, the legend abides by its own rules and mixes facts with magical elements, but in this case, the story has a clear political and historical context. Zientara-Malewska was an ardent supporter of the Polish cause in Warmia, and her work was strongly promoted in the socialist era because it claimed that Warmia had always been a Polish region<sup>40</sup>. A legend 'confirming' the Polish origin of the name «Olsztyn» conformed to the socialist historical narrative aiming to eradicate all traces of foreign culture. The fact that Olsztyn was named by a neutral character, who was neither a Polish or a German saint, somewhat alleviated the uncomfortable truth that the city had been founded by a German colonizer, Johannes von Leysen. The short story penned by a student demonstrates that unreflective use of regional cultural texts promotes a false historical narrative<sup>41</sup>. A similar approach was used by Grzegorzczyk-Wosiek in the discussed poem, where Olsztyn is depicted as St. James' destination during his pilgrimage. The question probing the reasons for the pilgrim's journey to Olsztyn was probably intended to inspire creative thinking, but it actually leads readers to a dead-end street.

The titular «baba pruska» («pruska» – Prussian; in Slavic languages, «baba» denotes an old woman, or a magical being) in the collection of children's short stories also symbolizes the false narrative about the region's history.

<sup>38</sup> <<https://visit.olsztyn.eu/article/242/olsztyn-w-legendach>> (last access: 31.05.2024).

<sup>39</sup> T. Brzeska-Smerek, *Antologia Warmińska. Warmia w baśniach, podaniach i legendach*, Olsztyn, Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna, 2011, pp. 39-41.

<sup>40</sup> H. Sawicka, *Maria Zientara-Malewska. Zarys monograficzny życia i twórczości*, Olsztyn, Pojezierze, 1981.

<sup>41</sup> The website of Primary School No. 7 in Olsztyn contains the following entry which indicates that Zientara-Malewska's legend gave rise to a mistaken belief that Olsztyn had been founded by Saint James: «We learned about our city and its history from the legends in the book entitled *Antologia warmińska w baśniach i legendach* [Warmian Anthology in Fairy Tales and Legends]. The first story was *Legenda o świętym Jakubie* [The Legend of Saint James] which explains why St. James became the patron saint of our city». <<https://sp7.olsztyn.eu/dlaczego-swiety-jakub-widnieje-w-herbie-olsztyna-poznajemy-historie-naszego-miasta/>> (last access: 30.06.2022).



*Baba pruska* is the main character in two short stories. «Baba pruska» is a stone statue and one of the eight preserved anthropomorphic sculptures that had been built by Prussian tribes and whose purpose remains unknown. The statue was originally discovered in a completely different location in Mazury, and it was transported to the Museum of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn after World War II<sup>42</sup>. In 2011, the Olsztyn City Council decided to turn «baba pruska» into the city's official mascot, arguing that it was a friendly character that could be easily rendered in stone and wood, or even depicted in confectionery products<sup>43</sup>. Olsztyn's councilors did not reflect on the city's actual history, and they were not bothered by the fact that the statue was only vaguely linked with the city. At present, images of «baba pruska» in various colors and designs decorate Olsztyn's squares and store displays, and they are popular tourist souvenirs that represent the city's cultural heritage<sup>44</sup>. Robert Klimek concluded that the images of «baba pruska» are shallow visualizations that are devoid of any educational value<sup>45</sup>. In this context, the meanings assigned to «baba pruska» in children's short stories seem less surprising. In *Legenda o Olsztynie* [*Legend About Olsztyn*], 11-year-old Karolina Smolińska writes: «It was a long, long time ago, when local roads were guarded by boulders known as 'baba pruska'». The story also suggests that «baba pruska» accompanied Saint James during his stay in the settlement that the patron saint named «Olsztyn» (sic!). Piotr Domański, a fourth-grade student, writes: «My name is Pruska, Baba Pruska. I have been living in Olsztyn since the Middle Ages»<sup>46</sup>. Children can easily identify the statue as an element of public space in Olsztyn, but they are not familiar with the cultural and historical context, and they are mistakenly convinced that «baba pruska» has been a permanent feature of the city for many centuries.

Children's stories present an excellent opportunity for allocating personal meanings to urban spaces and the city culture. However, despite the fantastic aura conjured by the authors and the creative interpretations of Warmian legends, these places are still a part of public space. Young authors generally refrain from 'personalizing' these spaces – they do not share their private feelings about the places and heroes in their stories, they do not make references to their personal lives, and do not look at them through 'their own eyes'. In one short story (*A Stroll Through Olsztyn* of Klaudia Wojtukiewicz), the presented sites, which are the high points during sightseeing tours of Olsztyn, are

<sup>42</sup> R. Klimek, *Kamienie kultowe Prusów – ołtarze starej wiary*, in T. Sowiński (ed.), *Prusowie i Krzyżacy w mrokach tajemnic*, Olsztyn, Regionalista, 2012, pp. 20-35.

<sup>43</sup> <<https://www.wprost.pl/zycie/263318/baba-pruska-maskotka-olsztyna-wdzieczna-i-mozna-ja-zrobic-z-ka.html>> (last access: 31.05.2024).

<sup>44</sup> M. Banaszkiwicz, *Pamiętki turystyczne — miniatura czy karykatura dziedzictwa kulturowego?*, «Studia Etnologiczne i Antropologiczne», n. 12, 2012, pp. 167-178.

<sup>45</sup> Klimek, *Kamienie kultowe Prusów – ołtarze starej wiary*, cit., p. 32.

<sup>46</sup> Rybak, Krajewska (edd.), *Opowieści Baby Pruskiej*, cit., p. 13.

described in a way that is reminiscent of standard tourist guides. The author writes:

Then I walked to tenement houses with arcades, where local vendors operate flower stalls. The beautifully renovated Old Town Hall building, the former seat of the city's authorities, stands in the center of the market square. Today, the building hosts a public library.

The story ends with a typical A-grade conclusion:

Olsztyn is a beautiful city which is replete with greenery and lakes. It is a city where the visitors can pursue various recreational activities and admire beautiful landscapes. (...) I was truly enchanted by Olsztyn's beauty, history and monuments<sup>47</sup>.

In *The Tales of Baba Pruska*, the authors make only a handful of personal references from a child's perspective. Klaudia Wojtukiewicz remarks that she hoped «to invite Copernicus to delicious ice-cream in the coffee shop on Kołłątaj Street»<sup>48</sup>. The extent to which the analyzed short stories are the young authors' own invention or a reproduction of the narrative pushed by adults is difficult to determine.

## 5. Conclusions

In the context of the rising popularity of regionalism<sup>49</sup> in Polish education, at the beginning of this study, we expected to discover a wide variety of literary works addressed to children as tools for exploring the local cultural heritage. Meanwhile only four publications dedicated to Olsztyn and targeting the youngest audience, one of which summarized the results of an educational project, appeared on the market in the last 30 years. The examined books (excluding the works authored by children, for obvious reasons) only partially fulfill Zabawa's criteria for identifying high-quality children's literature that promotes regional values. The main advantages of the analyzed books are that they are relatively short, have well-defined heroes, feature humor, and have an intersemiotic character, as demonstrated by the fact that they have been adapted into plays and used to stage art competitions. They do not contain

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> In 1995, the Ministry of National Education developed the *Cultural heritage in the region* curriculum for schools and other educational institutions to familiarize young people with their cultural heritage and regional traditions, and to facilitate the internalization of regional values and themes (G. Odoj, *Dziedzictwo kulturowe jako kluczowe pojęcie edukacji regionalnej. Rozważania terminologiczne*, «Studia Etnologiczne i Antropologiczne», n. 12, 2012, pp. 44-55, p. 44).

archaisms, but *The Secrets of the Castle on the Łyna River* is written in a difficult language that is difficult to accept and prevents independent reading.

The examined books contain many proper names and descriptions that enable children to identify the main sites and streets in the city, thus building a sense of familiarity with the local scenery. In the work of Grzegorzczyk-Wosiek, the semantic layer seems to play the most important role, whereas the literary layer requires certain improvement. Most works lack clear child heroes, excluding two poems in *The City of Fairy Tales*, where children are featured alongside other characters<sup>50</sup>. However, the author of *The City of Fairy Tales* makes attempts to relate Olsztyn's tourist attractions to children's needs and experiences. Grzegorzczyk-Wosiek searches for secrets that could be discovered by children in the discussed sites. She makes also a reference to popular children's activities, including sledding (poem *Górka Jasia*) or fishing (the poem *Gold Fish*). Therefore, the author draws a map of Olsztyn by identifying historical sites that play an important role in Olsztyn and Poland, and by encouraging children to explore and attach personal significance to these places. The books also contain illustrations and graphic elements that have been designed specifically for young readers.

Grzegorzczyk-Wosiek's books have been adapted into plays and used in other educational activities, and all copies in the print run have been sold out, which suggests that her books are highly popular among both children and educators. According to source materials, those books are widely used to promote knowledge about the region and strengthen children's bonds with Olsztyn. However, the popularity of her books could also be attributed to the absence of competition on the publishing market. Grzegorzczyk-Wosiek's works are used in the educational process in line with the author's original intentions. In the context of the functional method proposed by Woźniczka-Paruzel, the intended function of the author's books is consistent with their real-life functions.

The following conclusions can be drawn from an analysis focusing on the elements of local cultural heritage in Grzegorzczyk-Wosiek's books:

- The author makes a contribution to the popular literary discourse on 'magical' places, which is increasingly regarded as cultural capital that maximizes profits, both symbolic and financial. An attractive narrative rooted in myth is essential for building capital<sup>51</sup>. Therefore, the author 'generates a map' of important sites in the city, but she does not provide readers with reliable knowledge about these places. Moreover, the 'magical' narrative seems to legitimize false information as long as it can be used to spin a tale.

<sup>50</sup> E.g.: *Copernicus' Bench*, p. 8; *Górka Jasia*, p. 22.

<sup>51</sup> E. Rybicka, *Ponowoczesny regionalizm i badania komparatystyczne*, «Rocznik Komparatystyczny», n. 2, 2011, pp. 141-161.

One of such examples is Saint James' purported visit to Olsztyn in one of the poems. As previously mentioned, the book is promoted and used as an educational tool to familiarize children with the city and its history, which raises serious doubts regarding the historical accuracy of the presented story. The collection of short stories written by children in *The Tales of Baba Pruska* proves that such myths can be deeply lodged, while dismissing, or even replacing knowledge that is rooted in science.

- Grzegorzycy-Wosiek's books, including those that are dedicated to the history of Olsztyn and the Olsztyn castle, do not contain references to the open regionalism concept or historical and cultural reflections that are indicative of a critical approach to Warmia's turbulent history. The fact that Warmia and Olsztyn embraced multiple cultures both before and after World War II, as well as the fact that before 1945, Olsztyn was a part of East Prussia and most of its inhabitants spoke German rather than Polish, are completely omitted. As a result, the region's true history becomes yet another silenced story described by Somerville. The author not only fails to perceive Warmia's complex history and multicultural identity as an asset, fails to build dialogue or ask questions, but she completely disregards this important element of regional identity. Children who 'learn' about the city's history through Grzegorzycy-Wosiek's books are thus presented with a convenient, monolithic image of a metropolis with purely Polish roots. While failing to make any references to 'foreign' components of the cultural heritage, the author incorporates new elements into her stories. She introduces characters with alleged ties to Olsztyn, such as Bishop Marcin Kromer and Ignacy Krasicki. Both men made important contributions to Polish history, but despite the fact that they visited Olsztyn only briefly, the author conveniently decides to link these characters with the city's heritage. On the other hand, Erich Mendelsohn, the world-renowned German architect and ethnic Jew who was born and raised in Olsztyn, is never mentioned in any of the stories. Such examples could be multiplied. It is difficult to ascertain whether the author dismisses foreign elements of the local cultural heritage to intentionally manipulate her readers, whether she considers these issues to be too complex for children and thus resorts to a simplified and, in her opinion, a true history of Olsztyn, or whether her approach can be attributed to a lack of knowledge and historical and cultural reflection.

The democratic revolution of 1989 provided Warmian culture creators with an opportunity to revise the region's cultural heritage and incorporate elements and events that had been silenced in the socialist era. However, the analyzed children's books about Olsztyn suggest that this opportunity was not fully harnessed. The local cultural heritage is portrayed through the use of unwitting methods that do away with uncomfortable facts, reinforce myths and popular culture stereotypes, and freely introduce loanwords. The famous

sociologist Andrzej Tyszka argued that false alternatives should be avoided to make rational and objective use of historical heritage<sup>52</sup>. The approach adopted in the analyzed books does not promote respect for cultural diversity, it prevents children from discovering the region's full potential and does not encourage self-reflection.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Olsztyn and the Region of Warmia have a complex history and political past. The map of Europe is replete with «interrupted countries», including the Polish Region of Silesia, northern and south-western regions of German (Schleswig, Holstein, and Alsace), the Baltic states, and other parts of the European continent. Profound administrative, ethnic, and demographic changes that are characteristic of borderlands make these areas susceptible to various ideologies that are rooted in prejudice and stereotype<sup>53</sup>. These obstacles can be overcome by adopting the civil philosophy approach (open regionalism) or the concept of critical pedagogy of place, which postulate that education should take place in a «diverse and inclusive environment»<sup>54</sup>. Astrid Męczkowska argued that educational processes should be locally rooted to serve their social functions, but they should also imbue or 'saturate' places with diversity to serve their emancipatory role<sup>55</sup>. Children's books that are a reliable source of knowledge about the region and its cultural heritage and foster intergenerational connectivity are not easy to write. In addition to creative literary competence, the authors are also expected to possess broad historical knowledge and cultural sensitivity. The results of the present analysis indicate that the author of children's books about Olsztyn did not fully rise to the challenge.

<sup>52</sup> A. Tyszka, *Dziedzictwo kultury jako dowód tożsamości*, in S. Bednarek, E. Repsch (edd.), *Edukacja kulturowa dzieci i młodzieży szkolnej. Koncepcje i propozycje*, Wrocław, Silesia, 2004, pp. 22-38, in partic. p. 31.

<sup>53</sup> J. Nikitorowicz, *Pogranicze. Tożsamość. Edukacja międzykulturowa*, Białystok, Trans Humana, 1995, pp. 52-53.

<sup>54</sup> L. Witkowski, *Normatywność pedagogiczna w świetle przekrojów i przekształceń w humanistyce i kulturze współczesnej (próba rekonesansu)*, «Teraźniejszość – Człowiek – Edukacja», special issue, 2001, pp. 45-59.

<sup>55</sup> A. Męczkowska, *Locus educandi. Wokół problematyki miejsca w refleksji pedagogicznej*, in M. Mendel (ed.), *Pedagogika miejsca*, Wrocław, Wydawnictwo Naukowe DSWE TW, 2013, pp. 38-51, in partic. p. 49.