

Magda Ładuniuk
English Department
Maria Curie-Skłodowska University
Year III AM

Topic:

Try to contact some Canadians who live(d) in Poland or who are planning to come to Poland. Prepare a set of questions you'd like to ask them about their connection to this country, reflections and impressions of living here, as well as their feelings for Canada – how they have been affected by their expatriate experience. Then write a report on your correspondence and findings. Your questionnaire should be included in your report.

While the relationship between Poland and Canada has always been cordial, the rate of migration proves that it was at the same time imbalanced. Poles have eagerly traveled to Canada for both economic and political reasons. According to GUS, Polish Central Statistical Office, the number of Polish citizens living in Canada now approximates one million, but the number of Canadians of Polish origin is even greater – 1,5 million. In comparison, the Polish Census of 2002 (the results of the more recent census are unknown as it is being conducted right now) estimated that there were only 513 Canadians living in Poland at that time (GUS). What could be the reasons for such low interest in migrating to Poland among Canadians? Is it Poland's unattractiveness or Canadians' patriotism? In order to find out, but also to discuss some other intriguing issues, I contacted Canadians who are living, or lived in Poland.

The task was much more difficult than I expected. Although I approached many Canadians for answers, the response was very weak, and I managed to collect only three filled questionnaires. Fortunately, the responses obtained have been rewarding. My respondents were both men and women, whose experiences in Poland are different, and concern various periods of time. My first respondent has lived here since 1997, the second one visited Poland several times, but never stayed longer than for a month, and the last one lived here for three years, but relatively long time ago – between 1978 and 1981.

The questions I asked my respondents deal with the general attitude of Canadians towards Poland, but also towards their mother country. I asked about their expatriate experience in Poland, impressions of living here, differences and similarities between Poland and Canada. Some questions pertained to matters strictly Canadian, such as the Quebec issue, the problems that Canadians are facing today, and the compatriots they are most proud of.

When it comes to the general impressions of living in Poland, the answer was the same for all the three respondents – "positive." They declare their sympathy for Poland, as for example Respondent 1 who writes: "I like Poland and the Polish people, but for Canada, I would live nowhere else. Poland has a spirit, an atmosphere lacking in most countries." Respondent 2 supports this opinion, and adds: "I always feel at home in Poland." My respondents value Poles for their hospitality, openness, and kindness. They also unanimously admit that Polish cuisine is superior to the Canadian one. What surprised me pleasantly was the opinion of Respondent 2 describing Polish cultural life as "much more vibrant" than the Canadian. I was also happy to read that in Poland "people are more tastefully dressed. Restaurants and cafés are more creatively decorated."

Besides their positive impressions, my respondents mention also several negative sides of living in Poland. Respondent 1, although full of love for our country, enumerates Polish drawbacks: "a good lot of the Polish people irritate me with their pretensions, the corruption, the selfishness, their disorganization, mismanagement and messiness." Respondent 2 mentions "unfriendly officials and dubious public safety" as Poland's main disadvantages. Respondent 3 is the most reserved of the three in his judgments – only suggests the poor condition of the Polish infrastructure, which is mentioned also by the other two.

The opinions concerning Polish education system are divided. Respondents 2 and 3 consider it to be of good quality. Respondent 2 claims that young Poles are better-educated than their Canadian peers and reminisces: "I remember watching a biopic about Gustav Klimt in a Krakow movie theatre; most of the public were young people, presumably students. It is impossible to imagine the same audience in Canada, unless at a special screening in class." Respondent 3 did his doctoral work at the Jagiellonian University and appreciates its high educational standards. On the other hand, Respondent 1 criticizes Polish education system and finds the Canadian one superior:

The post-secondary school system [in Poland] is worse by far, there is too much cronyism and nepotism, and hands-on learning is not there, nor are ways of up-grading skills. In Canada, there is a college system and a university system. Both, but particularly the former, offer considerable facilities to upgrade skills, as well as to cater to interests.

The same respondent admits however, that the bulk of Polish teachers, educators and researchers are "skilled, competent and knowledgeable," and their competence is comparable to that of Canadian scholars.

My respondents notice that Poland is predominantly conservative, and that history and religion play an important role in both the country's policy and the lives of individual people. All the respondents indicate these facts as a main difference between Poland and Canada. Respondent 2 remarks that "religion still plays an important role in Poland, while in Canada it is in deep decline."

History also seems to be less influential in Canada. Respondent 3 writes that "Poles have a greater appreciation of their history," and Respondent 1 tries to explain why history is less visible in his mother country: "Canada's 20th century wars, barring the Gulf of Saint Lawrence submarine campaign, were fought elsewhere."

That was Poland from the point of view of my respondents. But how do they see Canada?

For Respondent 1 Canada is about geography. He misses "the freedom in many places to not encounter people, the open road and the ability to enjoy driving, apple pie, along with other pies, butter tarts too, moose, bison, antelope, bears, wolves, lynx, starry skies, the aurora-borealis, the prairie sky, bush pilots... ." Respondent's 1 admiration for Canadian nature is reflected in the list of the Canadians he is most proud of on which, in the first place, he enumerates various explorers and map makers. Respondent 2 appreciates Canada's ethnic diversity and multiculturalism, which is the official policy of the Canadian government: "It is the only country I know where one can feel fully assimilated, even having come here as an adult and speaking with an accent." Respondent's 2 list of the noble Canadians include St.

Jean de Brébeuf, a French Jesuit missionary fluent in Huron language and customs. Respondent 3 says that what distinguishes Canada from other countries is its effective organization and management; he notices proudly that even during the current global monetary crisis "Canada has managed quite well." Among the most outstanding Canadians Respondent 3 lists Canada's first prime minister John A. Macdonald, and the famous economist John Kenneth Galbraith.

Despite these different points of view, there is one thing that unites all the three respondents – their attachment to sport. Respondent 2 explains the importance of physical activities in Canada: "Sports occupy a far more significant place in Canadians' lives. People watch sport events in sport bars, play sports, jog and cycle, attend yoga classes, flock to gyms in large numbers. In a way, avoiding sport activities in Canada is sort of a capital sin, and it applies to all generations of Canadians, not young people only." That explains why, when asked about five Canadians they are most proud of, each of the three respondents mention at least one sportsman.

They are also united over the issue which usually divides Canadians – the Quebec separatist movement. Respondent 3 admits: "like the large majority of Quebecers today, I do not support the Separatist agenda." Respondent 2 finds "separatism totally unreasonable, because it would bring nothing but harm to Quebecers in the first place." Respondent 1 is particularly emotionally involved in the Quebec sovereignty movement, and I would like to quote his whole comment on this issue:

Part of my family is French Canadian, part Anglo. I was born and raised in Quebec. The issue is raised in a book by Hugh MacLennan "Two Solitudes". It describes it well. Quebec was two cultures living in the one place at the same time. One culture killed itself off in the wars of the 20th century- Anglo-Quebec, the other did not. One culture had responsible parenthood, 4 children max, the other had 12 plus...One culture went for business and engineering, the other went for law.. You can guess what happened.. the Anglos were legislated out of existence, if not murdered individually during the mass riots in the 70's. Many small businesses owned by Anglos were burned, some of my friends were just murdered – especially if they were colored. Justice was hard to find for Anglos and French Canadian federalists. There is the example of Pierre Laporte – his murderers, got away scot-free (indeed, got work with the federal government) – political expediency. Laws were enacted directly at Anglo-Quebecers – laws that are against the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms... but due to political expediency, have not been enforced. Anglo artifacts were bulldozed, including cemeteries. Facts were changed. When I was growing up, the two communities interacted, but they were two communities, now there is basically one. I will never step into Quebec. The outward appearance of Canada is a mixture of French and English. Indeed, some people think it is French and the thinking politically is always „What will Quebec think about this, how can we buy them off?“. The reality is Anglo-Canada pays for everything, Franco-Canada parasitizes. Having said that, Canada is French and English Canadian (as well as aboriginal and settler (including Poles, Chinese, Latino, East Indian), it is the contributions, reluctant or enthusiastically made by all these people that has made the Canada of today and given it its identity.

No matter how bitter these words may seem, Respondent 1 is undoubtedly a Canadian patriot. Although his criticism of Canada is severe, he has retained Canadian citizenship and has not taken Polish one. He says: "I am Canadian, I cannot be anything else." Respondent 2 also declares love for Canada, despite its drawbacks: "I love Canada dearly, even though I am not blind to its shortcomings." Their approach reminds me of the words of Howard Zinn who stated that "dissent is the highest form of patriotism" (Basco 1), because constructive criticism helps the country to develop.

Although all of my respondents have a positive attitude towards Poland, they still find Canada superior. Yet we, Poles, should not feel offended by their opinions. Canadian patriotism and love for the motherland may not only be the answer to the question why such a small number of Canadians live in Poland, but also why Canadians unwillingly move to other countries. "My expatriate experience, or better to say, my extensive travels, make me count the blessings of my life in Canada" writes Respondent 2, and I read it as a general attitude of Canadians towards their country.

WORKS CITED

Basco, Sharon. An Interview with Historian Howard Zinn. *TomPain.com*. 3 July 2002. Web. 14 May 2011. <<http://www.tompaine.com/Archive/scontent/5908.html>>.

Główny Urząd Statystyczny. Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań 2002. Web. 14 May 2011. <http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/8185_PLK_HTML.htm>.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Introduce yourself as a Canadian who lives(d) in Poland. (What are you doing/ what were you doing in Poland? How long have you been here? How long are you planning to stay? Etc.)
2. What are your impressions of living here?
3. How is Poland different from Canada? Which differences strike you the most?
4. Can you notice any similarities between these two countries?
5. What are your feelings for Canada? Have they been affected by your expatriate experience? Do you consider yourself a patriot?
6. What do/did you miss here in Poland that you had in Canada?
7. What is your attitude towards the Quebec issue? Do you support its sovereignty movement and the call for secession?
8. What are, in your opinion, the most important problems that Canada and Canadians are facing today?
9. Could you name five Canadians you are most proud of?