

# Information on the Actions of the Academic Environment of the Adam Mickiewicz University for the Benefit of the Immigrants Placed in the Guarded Centres of the Border Guard

JACEK SCHMIDT<sup>1</sup>

ORCID: [0000-0002-4074-5942](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4074-5942)

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

## Abstract

for eight years, employees and students of the Institute of Anthropology and Ethnology at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań have been providing support activities in guarded centres for foreigners in Poland. Their work involves organising play and art, craft and music activities for children and adult foreigners. This offer has benefited at least 500 foreigners. The second form of assistance is the organisation of workshops for police officers (expansion of their legal, socio-cultural and psychological knowledge, formation of tolerant attitudes, etc.).

**Keywords:** volunteer activity, support activity, educational workshops

It has already been eight years (2014–2022) since employees and students from the Institute of Anthropology and Ethnology of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań began to carry out agreements between the University authorities and commanding officers of Border Guard units in which guarded centres for foreigners are operated. This form of cooperation with the social environment lies in the annual several-days-long study visits to the centres (Biała Podlaska, Białystok, Kętrzyn, Kros-

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<sup>1</sup> Contact: [jschmidt@amu.edu.pl](mailto:jschmidt@amu.edu.pl)

Lecturers and students during their week stay in Krośno Odrzańskie  
(educational workshops and support activities, 2017)



no Odrzańskie). The aid activity for the benefit of foreigners is primarily directed at children and youth. It involves the implementation of pre-prepared scenarios of plays and games related to sports, arts and crafts, music, etc. For the purposes of every study visit, students and their supervisors develop a package of scenarios fitting the students' interests and competencies and the profile of the guarded centre (family, men), as well as the characteristics of the detained foreigners (ethnic origin, language of communication, age, gender). Parents often participate in activities for their younger children. The foreigners' participation in the activities is entirely voluntary, and they enjoy a great popularity – we have not been monitoring the number of participants in any formal way, but it can be estimated that at least 500 people have used our offer so far. The free-time offer in the centres for men is different. A good example is the professional chess tournament for foreigners we organised in Krośno Odrzańskie in 2019. To arrange it, we brought a set of tournament chess clocks and other indispensable equipment from Poznań. The tournament was very popular – besides the participants, it attracted more than 20 viewers.

Another form of our activity in the guarded centres consists in the training workshops for officers and civilian personnel of the Border Guard during which we consistently broaden the participants' knowledge in the sociocultural, legal and psychological areas, and shape their competencies, skills and abilities of functioning in a multicultural environment. We trust that as a result of our activity, standards of communication between representatives of the services and foreigners will significantly improve for the benefit of the latter. This issue is particularly significant

Lecturers and students during their week stay in Kętrzyn  
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in the environment of a total institution, the activity of which is based on the relations of domination and subordination. The workshops usually lasted for about 5–6 hours, were focused on 3–4 subjects, and involved a Q&A session and sometimes individual consultations. They were conducted both in a seminar room for a dozen or so listeners, and halls for several dozen people. The training offer was different in the particular centres – it was adjusted to the needs and requests of the authorities of the facility. Our offer has covered the total of 21 training topics/blocks – such as *What guides our perception of 'otherness' and our attitudes to foreigners?*; *Cultural conditions of social interactions*; *Daily behaviour of Muslims. Selected examples*; *Specificity of the use of the law in guarded centres for foreigners*; *Habits in group actions. The example of the Chinese and the Vietnamese.*

For our students, participation in the implementation of the agreements was a unique form of enrichment of our teaching offer with the spaces and institutions much discussed in the media, which however are inaccessible for direct viewing. The provision of such access to the students was combined with a comprehensive training in the area of the methodology of activity in the so-called difficult area, in hardly accessible groups. Theoretical knowledge on the migration policy of the Republic of Poland, total institutions and organisational cultures, was an equally significant element of the training. However, what we consider most significant is: (1) the preparation of students for professional communication in the situation of intercultural contact; (2) development of their activist attitude directed at assistance based on the identification of the sociocultural framework in which a given organisation and its

actors are inscribed; (3) development of their attitude of tolerance, the understanding and reproduction of which takes place most effectively through action (interaction); (4) familiarisation with the concept of professional voluntary services (based on skills and abilities, expression of values desired in the civil society, negotiation in situations ruled by different systemic limitations), and, in effect, acquainting them with the concept of professional voluntary services. The implementation of the project under analysis involved about 100 bachelor's and master's students of ethnology from Adam Mickiewicz University as well as three PhD students, with a further 20 students who were theoretically and methodically prepared for work in guarded centres for foreigners – however, they were unable to enter the centres due to the pandemics and the crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border in 2020–2021.

The team of coordinators and people conducting workshops was composed by employees of both the Institute of Anthropology and Ethnology of Adam Mickiewicz University and their collaborators from the Institute of European Studies, the Jagiellonian University. The joint implementation of the described assistance actions resulted in the emergence of scientific and didactic added values. The first one was the establishment of an interdisciplinary research team (AMU-JU), which designed interdisciplinary research into the detention of foreigners in Poland, and was granted the Border Guard's consent to perform it in all the six guarded centres. The second value was the development of an inter-university (JU-AMU) project of postgraduate studies 'Immigrants in Poland – sociocultural and legal challenges'. The studies will be addressed to a broad circle of practitioners responsible for the implementation of Poland's immigration and integration policy – first of all to officials from institutions of the central and local governments and other individuals whose work involves contact with immigrants/foreigners, including the uniformed services subordinate to the Ministry of the Interior and Administration. Due to the Covid pandemics, work connected with the signing of the relevant agreements between the universities and implementation of the course were suspended. However, the examination of environments that potentially might be interested in delegating their representatives to the course indicates that the initiative is highly desired.