

Spaces and Places of Detention of Foreigners

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the characteristics of the space and places of guarded centres for foreigners in Poland. It contains a discussion of universal features of the detention space for foreigners typical of the total institution, stocktaking of the centres' space and the places which fill it, as well as characteristics of the ways of using the space and their determinants. The general perspective of the perception of the detention space focuses on its identification as a tool of authority and the execution of social control, domination and subjugation.

Keywords: space, place, detention of foreigners, guarded centres

Introduction

This text reflects on the detention of foreigners in Poland, which I describe and analyse on the basis of materials acquired in the course of the teamwork in all the six guarded centres administered by the Border Guard [BG] of the Republic of Poland (details concerning the studies are presented in the paper opening this issue of the journal: *The Specific Nature of the Detention of Foreigners and its Study. The Polish Context*). The strategy of a multi-site and simultaneously collective/multiple case study adopted in them (Stake 1994: 237–238; Yin 2013: 49–50, 53–63) was directed both at the holistic examination of the phenomenon of the space and common features of the organisational culture in question, and the discovery of the local contexts, or 'microworlds' of the particular centres.

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This paper is an introduction to the complex problematics related to the detention space and seeks to acquaint the reader with its selected, basic (albeit, as it seems, hugely significant) features, the recognition of which is a necessary condition for in-depth studies using a large number of ethnographic data of different types. The content of the article is conveniently divided into four parts distinguished by headings. Part one indicates the theoretical inspirations which were used for sketching the perspective of the overview of the phenomenon in the course of the fieldwork. Part two contains a discussion of the permanent features of the detention space which are typical for the detention of foreigners, and which can be recognised already on the basis of preliminary observational reviews and readings of the generally available written sources (legal and administrative documents, statistical reports, etc.). Part three provides stocktaking of the material substrate – architectural characteristics, the specificity of the spatial arrangements and places, elements of their furnishings, interior decoration, and their aesthetics. Part four is devoted to a discussion of selected spatial practices of the social actors, which to a considerable degree derive from the manner of the ‘organisation’ or management of the detention on the basis of the legal and administrative norms and standards, as well as the style of activity of the uniformed services, which provides little room for the agency of individuals. The latter applies both to foreigners and employees of the guarded centres. Because of its size-related limitations, the present text discloses only the very tip of the iceberg of the complex problematics connected with the detentive ‘spatiality’, is descriptive rather than analytical, and lacks space for the presentation of data related to proxemics and kinesics or a discussion of the issue of the symbolism of behaviour containing codes of norms and values characteristic for the organisational culture of detention. A description of spaces/places usually requires iconographic exemplification, which enriches such descriptions – in particular when we deal with the spaces/places which are inaccessible and hence remain unfamiliar. For this reason, this paper contains 40 photographs.

What perhaps calls for a brief explanation is the use of the words ‘spaces’ and ‘places’ in the title. Following the analogical thoughts expressed by Y. Tuan (2001: 3,6), M. Foucault (2005: 117–125) and M. de Certeau (2008: 116–117), concerning differences between their meanings and their mutual relations, we may say that, in practice, these meanings overlap, and that place is a stable element of space as a larger whole integrating a number of places and being dynamic – always associated with movement, relocation.

Theoretical framework

The contemporary, interdisciplinary perspective of the perception and exploration of space in the social sciences and humanities, referred to as a spatial turn, emerged in the 1980s. Generally speaking, the spatial turn is tantamount to a change in thinking

about space – rejecting its conception as something given, obvious, a simple background or arena in which human life is lived and assuming that it is socially established, created, shaped and reconstructed by people in the course of their interactions.² The foundations for the new thinking about space were created in the 1960s and 1970s above all by French researchers, in particular Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre.³

In 1967, Michel Foucault gave a lecture addressed to architects, in which he backed up the understanding of space as a ‘set of relations’ creating a configuration/network as a part of which people, their actions and things are positioned. Their arrangement and positioning always has a character of a process in contexts which lead to certain elements being eliminated, replaced by new ones. In the same text, Foucault presented the concept of heterotopia – spaces created in different cultures, in which different fields of meaning, being accumulations of different spaces and layers of time, intersect (Foucault 2005: 117–125). What is most significant from our perspective of a study of detention, is his reflections concerning the heterotopia of deviation, spaces defined as ‘those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed’ (Foucault 1986: 25). By nature, spaces of this kind are located in isolation from other spaces; additionally, they are very specifically related to time. There is no question here of the accumulation of time (as in the case of museum objects or library items) or ‘timelessness’ (e.g. cemeteries) – there is only transitoriness, impermanence, and ephemerality. Moreover, the heterotopia of deviation seems to be an integrated combination of many often incomparable places. In turn, Foucault’s *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* published in 1975, considered to be his most outstanding work (Foucault 2020), offers a description of the specific nature of the disciplining (disciplinary) space as well as the concept of panopticism – and I shall return to these issues further on.

In his work *La production de l’espace* published in 1974, Henri Lefebvre proposed a three-dimensional concept of social space, including: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space. *Spatial practice* is tantamount to everyday, routine practices, interactions taking place in the context of a given space, the artefacts that fill it, and coherent actions requiring appropriate competencies and effectiveness. In turn, *representations of space* should be understood as the space conceptualised by planners, architects, technocrats, lawyers, ideologists and its managers – the dominating space, which also creates possibilities for domination. In turn, *representational space* is the world of open and hidden meanings and symbols connected with the values and worldview making up the codes of space (Lefebvre 1991: 33, 38–46 and further).

² The concept of space as a social category is not the only aspect of the interdisciplinary spatial turn.

³ A justification behind recognising their thought as a breakthrough for space studies was provided by Edward Soja (1996: 2009: 17–20). However, it should be underlined that the spatial turn is not an effect of the conclusions of a couple of outstanding thinkers, but some basic changes we are dealing with in contemporary social, political and economic life, as well as in culture.

Lefebvre's typological proposal was referred to by an eminent cultural geographer and urban planner, Edward Soja, who in his concept of the *trialectics of spatiality*, also referred to as *Thirdspace* (1996), questioned its dialectics of a binary perception of space promoting focus on the material physical space as experienced by people, which is a foundation of social relations that can be empirically measured or mapped ('Firstspace') or on an imagined, subjective space 'produced' in the course of social relations ('Secondspace'). In his proposal, the Thirdspace is to be a specific conjunction of the Firstspace and the Secondspace and its supplementation with elements not fitting the binary system, located beyond this division – a hybrid structure consisting of a multi-aspect, holistic and critical spatiality (Soja 1996: 74–82 and further). Soja (1996: 3) writes as follows: '[...] there is growing awareness of the simultaneity and interwoven complexity of the social, the historical, and the spatial, their inseparability and interdependence. And this three-sided sensibility of spatiality-historicity-sociality is not only bringing about a profound change in the ways we think about space, it is also beginning to lead to major revisions in how we study history and society. The challenge being raised in Thirdspace is therefore transdisciplinary in its scope.'

One of the leading ideas in our exploration of the phenomenon of the detention of foreigners was the concept of the *non-place* put forward by Marc Augé (2010). What he used as a starting point for his considerations was places which can be referred to as anthropological, which are 'only the idea, partially materialized, that the inhabitants have of their relations with the territory, with their families and with others' (Augé 2009: 56). Non-places are located at the other extreme – 'If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place' (Augé 2009: 77–78). In connection with the above, in contrast to anthropological places, non-places do not have a *genius loci* – the spirit which would be a synthesis of the values and meanings attributed to them. Non-places are places that are anonymous, fleeting, 'aemotional', 'soulless'. According to Augé's qualification, they include transitory places of stay such as refugee camps, squats, means of transport, transit routes, and communication hubs (motorways, airports) or shopping centres. All these non-places are fast-passing (temporary) – they are a product of the super-modern world 'surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and the ephemeral'⁴ (Augé 2009: 78).

Non-places are 'no-one's places'. The term no-one's excellently expresses their perception by the people who find themselves in them. Referring to the context of the guarded centres under study: this refers both to the foreigners who are detained there without their consent and who find themselves in the trajectory of migration events (temporarily stopped in motion), and in some scope to the personnel – officers

⁴ An excellent description and analysis of non-places in the form of a literary statement was provided by the Nobel-prize winner Olga Tokarczuk (2017).

(often) temporarily posted to work there from other places of work under an order. A significant marker of such non-places is also a frequent change of the composition of the people who stay there. It is hard to talk about one's identification with such places, to perceive them as one's own.

Non-places fulfil a transitory function – one's appearance and functioning in them is not a choice but a necessity. The use of non-places is controlled by legislation and precise (local) order-related provisions, which exclude individual habits of activity. We also deal here with the anonymity of the users, depriving them of their own identity (e.g. numbers instead of names), as an effect of which they are all similar to one another. This forces a limitation in the form of 'taking up a position' and '[striking] the pose' (Augé 2009: 87).

Simultaneously, at first sight, non-places resemble anthropological places, because their architecture and furnishings are very similar. If we visit a non-place belonging to the same category and fulfilling analogical functions (e.g. a hospital), we may assume that we shall effectively find ourselves familiar with another one. Having acquainted themselves with the iconographic material contained in this text, its readers could possibly experience an optical illusion of dealing with an ordinary anthropological place...

Remaining within the area of anthropologists' interests in the phenomenon of space, we should also point out some theoretical proposals developed in the area of proxemics and kinesics. What proves to be very useful for our reflections on the detention space is Edward T. Hall's typologies: his division into fixed-features, semifixed-features and informal space, as well as sociopetal and sociofugal spaces, and codes (intimate, personal, social and public) controlling interpersonal distances (Hall 1990: 101–129). Many behaviours in the multicultural detention space are non-verbal – they come in a variety of forms (e.g. pantomimic expressions, facial expressions, haptic behaviours). Apart from this, they take place during interactions in specific sociophysical contexts in the form of synchronicity (Hall 1983: 140, 160; 1989). Hall characterises the gist of synchronicity in a vivid way:

People in interactions either move together (in whole or in part) or they don't, and in failing to do so are disruptive to others around them. Basically, people in interactions move together in a kind of dance, but they are not aware of their synchronous movement and they do it without music or conscious orchestration. Being 'in sync' is itself a form of communication. The body's messages (in or out of awareness), whether read technically or not, seldom lie, and come much closer to what the person's true but sometimes unconscious feelings are than does the spoken word. (Hall 1989: 71–72)

All the optics of space signalled above, its typologies and conceptual framework, provide inspiration for our ethnographic description and analysis of the guarded centres for foreigners. It needs to be pointed out that their authors did not create theories that were competing with one another – they were inspired by the achievements of their predecessors, and supplemented their thought with their own

reflections. In consequence, the concepts in question may be considered a relatively coherent system. For this reason, our approach should not be perceived as eclectic or fitting the triangulation of theory directed at the assessment of their strength or usefulness, falsification (Denzin 1978: 297–300; Flick 2007: 43–44). In the end, we need to add that our optics of spatial determinants dovetails the category of ‘spatial tactics’ referring to the studying of space as a strategy and/or a tool of power and social control through the binary lenses of domination vs subordination (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003: 30–32). This perspective is also adopted in the above-mentioned works by Foucault and Lefebvre, and many other researchers (such as de Certeau, Baudrillard and Rabinow).

Objective distinguishing qualities of the detention space

There are several universal distinguishing qualities of the space in which foreigners are detained which are easy to confirm on the basis of preliminary observation, the basic legal and administrative documents and statistics (Niedźwiedzki, Schmidt 2020: 123–129). It is important to recall them because they have a very significant influence on the appearance of the physical artefacts that fill it and the form in which the space/places are used by all the social actors.

Erving Goffman’s (1961) characteristics of total institutions, including guarded centres for foreigners which can certainly be identified as such, provides that their isolation from the outside world is their constitutive feature. In the case under study, the isolation concerns both the spaces outside the jurisdiction of services and the space of the BG unit or facility in which the centres are located. Isolation is secured by the walls, barbed wire, gates and guardhouses as well as by complex procedures aimed at the limitation of the foreigners’ contact with the outside world via mobile phones and the internet (e.g. lack of access to social media or the impossibility to send any images).

Owing to Michel Foucault’s book (2020) devoted to the prison system, the idea of a panopticon – an architectural vision of the ideal detention space put forward by Jeremy Bentham in 1787 (no date) – may be recalled. The panopticon allows to permanently observe, and in some variants also eavesdrop on, the detained in an isolated room, who is aware of this, without being able to see or hear the supervising person. This gives a certain guarantee of a self-discipline, even if the actual supervision is non-continuous and selective. This is an optimum situation for the authority, because it makes it depersonalised, and minimises interactions of the officers with the supervised and between the supervised themselves, which limits the potential conflicts and other threats, lowers stress related to the nature of the work, and reduces the cost to do with the operation of the institution, since it does not require a very numerous personnel (Schmidt 2021). Owing to modern monitoring

technology, such permanent supervision as a characteristic feature of the disciplinary/disciplining space implements Bentham's idea without his architectural design. In guarded centres for foreigners, camera supervision is accompanied by direct visual supervision via one-way mirrors or a specific shadowing – following the foreigner when heading to places which according to the supervisors need to be supervised (such as open spaces or computer rooms). The only places which are not covered by the monitoring are bathrooms and toilets as well as the detainees' rooms, although checks are performed regularly in the latter to verify whether their occupants possess any objects considered to be dangerous.

Photo 1

Monitoring in the GCF Białystok (photo by Dariusz Niedźwiedzki)



Another, obvious feature of the detention space for foreigners is the fact that it is enforced on them – they are detained obligatorily. They are situated in places which are already fully furnished by the managing institution and basically they have no possibility to adapt them to suit their own needs.⁵ Hence, this space is entirely alien to them, it does not fit their previous experience, cultural habits or social practices; they have to learn the rules and ways of its use.

All the aspects of functioning in the detention centre are described in detail in the rules and regulations. They concern order-related issues to do with daily life (the order of the day, principles of shopping orders, meetings with people from outside, etc.). There is a set of rules and regulations for every room in the centre. In the spatial context,

⁵ Moreover, upon detention, many foreigners do not have any objects which might be used as elements enriching the interior decoration with personal accents; some elements of their belongings are placed in the deposit by the centre's authorities as they are considered dangerous (e.g. glass or metal) or particularly valuable – other are deposited at the foreigners' request.

Fig. 1

An example of the plan of the positioning of external cameras in a guarded centre before adaptation (author's own work on the basis of BG's materials)



this means that access to particular places is rationed – it is possible at specific hours only. However, it should be underlined that not all the regulations are respected, and officers are unable to enforce them (e.g. tidying rooms, get up times and night silence, exercising). It sometimes also happens that for the sake of convenience, the officers themselves fail to execute provisions of the rules and regulations by making access to some recreational rooms more difficult by operating a complex system of issuing keys.

The detention space of the centres is an arena of intercrossing cultures. This is both about the fact that the managing subject represents a different culture than the people placed in the centres, and the cultural and racial heterogeneity of the foreigners as a community. Such a state of affairs tends to lead to various misunderstandings, sometimes even conflicts between the officers and the foreigners or between the foreigners themselves.⁶ The linguistic barrier is also of significance here. All this

⁶ A list of reasons behind such situation in the community of foreigners is extensive – e.g. they may be related to animosities transferred from the country of origin, in which the particular groups of detainees coexisted, old religion- and custom-related conflicts or the most numerous group seeking domination over other foreigners. In turn, misunderstandings between officers and foreigners are connected with, on the one hand, the former's lack of knowledge on the specificity of the foreigners' social life and culture, sometimes an absence of predispositions to perform work in a multicultural environment, and in the case of the latter – frustration and inclination to aggression resulting from being detained and, in practice, having life plans basically ruined.

is accompanied by a significant dynamics of the composition of its social actors, in particular the foreigners.

As clearly results from the above review of the most significant marking features of the detention space and places, we are dealing with model characteristics of the heterotopia of deviation as understood by M. Foucault and non-places as provided by M. Augé, as well as an interesting test battle ground for studies in the area of proxemics and kinesics in various contexts of cultural intersections (E.T. Hall).

Physical artefacts or representations of space (Lefebvre)

Physical artefacts include the spatial layout, buildings, their furnishings and interior decoration, clothes, and other attributes of human appearance. Architectural space is marked by a significant feature: it models human behaviours, emotions, beliefs and, more broadly, perceptions of the social world inscribed into the architecture (Hall and Hall 1995; Eco 1997; Toporov 2003). In the case of the detention space, the power and direction of this modelling is inscribed into the system of management in this organisational culture in the form of optimum scenarios containing the desired results related to the ways of their application.

The spaces of guarded centres are clearly isolatable enclaves separated from the outside world by a high wall or fencing made from sheet metal plates topped with barbed wire. In most cases, it is the space of the BG unit or facility to which the centre belongs from the administrative point of view which is the outer world for the centres. The space of a given unit/facility is also enclosed with a wall or other fencing and one may enter it only through strictly guarded guardhouses and official driveways. Hence, people granted access to the centre have to go through a double control procedure (including a scan of their identity card), and then head to and move around the centre under the escort of an officer.

The space of guarded centres includes one or several (most often two) buildings with a various number of floors – from two to five. In several cases the body of the building is divided into segments with the help of walkways. The buildings have very different origins – some of them were erected as far back as in the 19th century as military barracks, while the others were built in the second half of the 20th century and were used by other services (the army and police).⁷ In consequence, there are significant differences between the centres in terms of both their appearance and functionality-related standards. Despite costly adaptation to the current tasks, different limitations resulting among other things from the size or thickness of the load-bearing walls are noticeable.

⁷ In the autumn 2022, a new guarded centre – constructed from scratch – was opened (Lesznowola 2), offering a place for several hundred immigrants.

Photo 2

A belt of external fencing of the GCF and a sentry box (photo by Jacek Schmidt)



Photo 3

A variety of architectural solutions – the GCF in Lesznowola (photo by Jacek Schmidt)



Photo 4

A variety of architectural solutions – the GCF in Białystok (photo by Dariusz Niedźwiedzki)



Photo 5

A variety of architectural solutions – the GCF in Przemyśl (photo by Dariusz Niedźwiedzki)



Open spaces around the buildings fulfil recreational functions – their scope depends on the profile of the centre (for men/for families) and the size of the space. They include pitches/courts for different team games (basketball, volleyball, handball

and football), gym equipment, sometimes tables for table tennis and chess, squash walls, a place for training basketball throws, benches and walking areas, smoking areas, and playgrounds for children.

Photo 6

A basketball court – the GCF in Kętrzyn (photo by Dariusz Niedźwiedzki)



Photo 7

Chess tables, a table tennis table, gym accessories – the GCF in Krosno Odrzańskie
(photo by Angelika Poniatońska)



Photo 8

A kids' playground – the GCF in Przemyśl (photo by Angelika Poniatowska)



Photo 9

A table tennis table and a football pitch – the GCF in Przemyśl
(photo by Dariusz Niedźwiedzki)



Living quarters for foreigners are marked by very diverse standards. In some centres, there are two- or three-person rooms equipped with convertible sofas with comfortable mattresses, separate cabinets and shelves for each person, and sometimes a TV hung on the wall. However, in the majority of the centres there are rooms for six or even eight people, with metal bunk beds and very modest furnishings.

Photo 10

A variety of standards of the living quarters – the GCF in Lesznowola
(photo by Jacek Schmidt)



Photo 11

A variety of standards of the living quarters – the GCF in Krosno Odrzańskie
(photo by Jacek Schmidt)



The kitchens mainly fulfil the function of a place for the preparation of food from products purchased by the foreigners (if they have any money) as a part of weekly orders, which they forward to the officers responsible for their fulfilment. The kitchens are equipped with standard kitchen equipment (kettles, hobs, microwave ovens,

etc.) – with no differences in this scope between the centres. The kitchens are usually provided with ordinary small tables with four chairs at the most – and because of this the cooked food is rarely eaten there. There are certain differences concerning the standard and furnishings of the rooms in which the foreigners wash themselves and their clothes (with a number of sites, level of intimacy, and amount and quality of equipment).

Photo 12

The kitchen – the GCF in Krosno Odrzańskie (photo by Jacek Schmidt)



Photo 13

The bathroom and toilets – the GCF in Krosno Odrzańskie (photo by Jacek Schmidt)



Photo 14

The laundry – the GCF in Białystok (photo by Dariusz Niedźwiedzki)



Dining rooms are located in different places: next to the foreigners' living quarters or in separate wings of the building, and sometimes even in separate buildings. In the latter case, it is necessary to put on outer clothing and walk across some open space. Sometimes to enter a dining room located in another building, one needs to walk through a gate detecting metal objects. Some dining rooms serve ready meals which are supplied to them, and others have kitchens in which food is prepared on the spot.

Photo 15

The dining room – the GCF in Białystok (photo by Dariusz Niedźwiedzki)



Photo 16

The dining room – the GCF in Krosno Odrzańskie (photo by Jacek Schmidt)



Photo 17

The dining room – the GCF in Kętrzyn (photo by Dariusz Niedźwiedzki)



Every centre has the following facilities for the foreigners: one or two computer rooms (the total of 8–10 stations), a gym, a TV room and/or a room for activities with guardians from the educational section. Moreover, some centres have a table tennis room, a billiards room, and a fitness room. Every centre has a library with generally accessible shelves, usually without a catalogue. The libraries provide dictionaries and encyclopaedias, novels and magazines in different languages. The collections are not

extended in a planned or consistent way – many of them are gifts or are purchased with EU funds. In some libraries, short texts such as pieces of legislation or applications can be photocopied. Centres detaining families have a classroom, a recreation room for children, in which they may participate in arts, crafts and plays, and a room for sports and games.

Photo 18

A computer room – the GCF in Krosno Odrzańskie (photo by Jacek Schmidt)



Photo 19

A TV room – the GCF in Białystok (photo by Dariusz Niedźwiedzki)



Photo 20

A recreation room – the GCF in Kętrzyn (photo by Maciej Stęпка)



Photo 21

The gym – the GCF in Białystok (photo by Dariusz Niedźwiedzki)



Photo 22

The table tennis room – the GCF in Kętrzyn (photo by Przemysław Tacik)

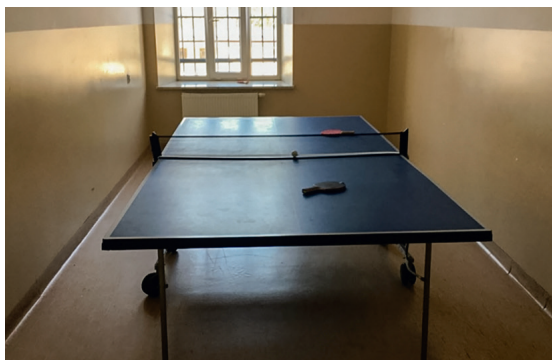


Photo 23

The billiards room – the GCF in Biała Podlaska (photo by Maciej Stęпка)



Photo 24

The fitness room – the GCF in Biała Podlaska (photo by Maciej Stęпка)



Photo 25

A games and plays room – the GCF in Kętrzyn (photo by Przemysław Tacik)



Photo 26

A library – the GCF in Biała Podlaska (photo by Jacek Schmidt)



The centres are equipped with three types of places for smoking tobacco: hermetic cabins with smoke extractors and odour extractors, external places accessible solely from inside the building, and finally, smoking areas in the open, usually near an entry to the recreational yard. In some centres, all three types of smoking areas are provided at the same time.

Photo 27

An internal smoking area – the GCF in Przemyśl (photo by Dariusz Niedźwiedzki)



Photo 28

An external smoking area – the GCF in Krosno Odrzańskie (photo by Jacek Schmidt)



Every centre provides a place for religious practices. Sometimes, it is only a single room to be used by representatives of different faiths, and sometimes there are two or three rooms – each adjusted to the needs of believers of a different faith (Islam,

Photo 29

The prayer room for Catholics – the GCF in Białystok (photo by Dariusz Niedźwiedzki)



Photo 30

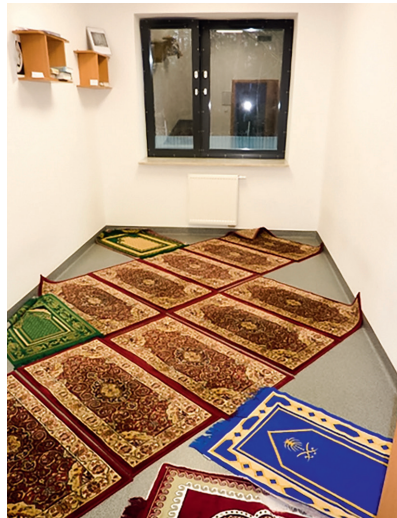
The prayer room for Orthodox Church Christians – the GCF in Białystok (photo by Dariusz Niedźwiedzki)



Catholicism, the Orthodox Church). Some of these rooms are very modestly furnished – they only provide a carpet and shelves for holy books or small objects necessary for praying; others have altars, paintings, religious symbols, prayer books, etc.

Photo 31

The prayer room – the GCF in Lesznowola (photo by Jacek Schmidt)



Most medical services in the guarded centres are provided under agreements with external entities. Their representatives (doctors and nurses) work in the doctor's room, nurse's room and a treatment room. If a given centre employs a BG officer, he/she shares the room with the nurse or has a separate room.

Photo 32

The doctor's room – the GCF in Lesznowola (photo by Jacek Schmidt)



Every centre has a separate space for administration purposes, which is not accessible to foreigners. It is sometimes located in a separate building, and sometimes in another wing or floor of the building inhabited by the foreigners. It can also be located outside the centre, on the grounds of the BG unit/facility. Most of the officers who work there have no direct contact with the foreigners and do not appear in the places for detainees at all. However, some officers from this group carry out tasks requiring periodical contact with the foreigners. They include return guardians who monitor court procedures concerning each foreigner and inform them about the legal and administrative decisions taken, people responsible for the collection of the weekly shopping orders, officers dealing with deposits, escorts dealing inter alia with transporting foreigners to medical consultations in outpatient clinics and hospitals, and finally heads of sections, whose staff work among the foreigners on a daily basis. However, none of these staff members have any separate places of work in the part of the premises for the foreigners.

The officers working with the foreigners on a daily basis are personnel of the security section (sentry guards) and the educational section (instructors, social guardians). They both have at their disposal separate kitchens, toilets, cloakrooms and recreational annexes. The sentry guards stay mostly in the guardhouses and other on-call rooms, while the instructors have a separate room for both the storage of games, balls and other accessories for play and art supplies, and for talking to the foreigners.

Photo 33

An on-duty room – Biała Podlaska (photo by Jacek Schmidt)



Photo 34

Refreshment facilities – the GCF in Biała Podlaska (photo by Dariusz Niedźwiedzi)



The list of the above places in the detention space of the guarded centres can be further supplemented with social meeting rooms – rooms in which the foreigners can meet their family members and other guests, rooms for meetings with lawyers, rooms with a computer station, in which the detainees may contact representatives of the diplomatic missions of the country of their origin, medical and disciplinary isolation rooms, and various technical rooms. Finally, we need to mention the various types of traffic routes – corridors, staircases, walkways between buildings, pavements around and between the buildings, walking paths, etc.

Photo 35

The corridor – the GCF in Krosno Odrzańskie (photo by Jacek Schmidt)



Photo 36

The corridor – the GCF in Lesznowola (photo by Przemysław Tacik)



Photo 37

The corridor – the GCF in Przemyśl (photo by Dariusz Niedźwiedzki)



Photo 38

The corridor in a centre for families – the GCF in Kętrzyn
(photo by Przemysław Tacik)



Photo 39

External stairs and the footbridge connecting the residential part of the building
with the dining room – the GCF in Przemyśl (photo by Maciej Stęпка)



Photo 40

A connector between the blocks – the GCF in Lesznowola (photo by Jacek Schmidt)



The officers working as sentry guards or escorts are obliged to wear uniforms which, without any doubt, intensifies the foreigners' sense of staying in a disciplining space. The sentry guards are not armed and there is a ban on wearing weapons throughout the centre area (arms are kept in special lockers in the guardhouse through which people enter the centre). In turn, the officers working in the educational section no longer wear uniforms (since a couple of years earlier). This is aimed at minimising the formality of their contact with the foreigners, lowering the detainees' stress, and contributing to developing the foreigners' trust towards representatives of the services whom they meet on a daily basis, sometimes intensely.

In turn, there are several factors affecting the foreigners' clothing. First, some centres for men have a security rule under which the detainees must not wear belts or braces. Hence, some of them have to hold their trousers up by hand or decide to wear tracksuit bottoms. Since the foreigners are brought to the centre from various places (directly from the border or from other EU states as a part of their readmission), their clothes can be in poor condition or they may have no sufficient quantity of clothing. Thirdly, some of the women Muslims wear clothes consistent with their tradition – scarves or hijabs, and long black dresses.

The detention space is hardly aesthetic – it is ascetic and resembles a hospital space. This results from the colours of the walls and the high partial wall oil coating, the absence of any artworks apart from single posters promoting legal support from NGOs, boards with practical information for the foreigners in several congress languages (such as admission times to the centre's head, rules and regulations)⁸ and

⁸ Some basic information provided to the foreigners in writing was prepared in their mother tongues, such as Vietnamese.

photographs reporting events organised in the centre. Moreover, there are boxes in the corridors to which one may throw various official letters (such as complaints or applications for a meeting with the head), and sometimes also distributors filtering water. The walls of the residential rooms are normally empty – the foreigners do not hang any calendars or photographs, and they do not have any space to display their objects which would allow to make their bedroom different than others. The only traces of their presence are exhibitions of the children’s works, which are prepared by the officers in the corridors, or single objects (such as paintings or mockups) made by the foreigners during activities with the staff of the educational section, which are displayed in recreational rooms. In one of the centres, the foreigners were allowed to make a several-meters-large garden for vegetables and flowers in front of the building.

The use of space, i.e. spatial practice (Lefebvre)

It is impossible to provide an integrated description of the daily use of the space for foreigners in all the six detention centres because of the significant differences between them – despite the fact that they function on the basis of the same legislation and administrative regulations. There are several reasons behind this. The first one is the profile of the centres (for men, for families). This is because the presence of women and children results in the appearance of some activities (school education, additional educational offers and other forms of spending one’s free time with the instructors, staying with other family members in their own room), which for obvious reasons do not take place in the centres for men. The second, equally obvious reason is the occupancy rate in a given centre. During our study stays, we were able to compare the situation when the occupancy rate was up to 65%, 100%, and above standard up to 300% during the conflict at the Polish-Belarusian border. These situations significantly affected the attitudes among the detainees and officers alike, access to the individual rooms, the use of the offer for spending one’s free time, etc. The third reason can be the ethnic composition of the foreigners staying in the centre at a given time. The presence/co-existence of different ethnic, religious/cultural, and sometimes racial groups can be a source of various conflicts which often result in the appropriation of space by the most numerous group, as well as self-isolation.⁹ The fourth, more rare situation, concerns the appearance of an informal leader in a given centre, who affects the behaviour of his/her compatriots or foreigners sharing his/her faith.¹⁰

⁹ The officers indicated that conflicts were most often taking place between the Chechens and the black immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa or the Vietnamese.

¹⁰ One of the centres detained a group of young Muslims (Chechens), who did not show any interest in praying in the room designated for religious practices. The situation changed after the appearance of an elder, charismatic and very religious Chechen, who made all the group undertake daily, joint prayers in the room. Another example is the involvement of an ecumenically-oriented pastor in religious activation – he visited the centre and organised regular talks, efficiently motivating people to pray together.

The fifth reason concerns the individual adaptation strategies and tactics of the people detained in the centre. Referring to the concept of Goffman's total institution (1961), Dariusz Niedźwiedzki (2017: 31) points to five different adaptation attitudes/'paths' adopted by the foreigners: 1) withdrawal, 2) rebellion, 3) domestication, 4) conversion, 5) cold calculation. Each of them is related to a different scope and intensity of the use of space. For instance, a 'withdrawn' individual usually stays in their quarters, and leaves it only to satisfy their basic needs, does not use offers of spending some free time together, and avoids contact both with the officers and other foreigners. The sixth reason is connected with the impact of the local order-related rules and regulations and the officers' attitudes and their style of work on the characteristics of the use of the space by the foreigners. Their use of the mass catering places can be a good example. Some centres run a categorical ban, justified with sanitary reasons, of taking the food outside the dining room, which in practice forces every person, regardless of their physical and mental condition, to appear at the joint meals. In other centres there is no such ban and foreigners may freely take food for their family members or friends to their rooms. Another, rather incidental circumstance affecting the scope of the use of the places in the centres is the officers making access to them harder – in this way they violate the rules and regulations, wishing to relieve themselves of their obligation to control them. Closing the list of factors/causes affecting the use of space by foreigners, we also need to mention the thermal conditions in some centres. In the summer, it is very difficult to stay in closed, heated rooms in which windows are blocked and hence cannot be opened wide – and it is virtually impossible during a heat wave.

Regardless of the above factors affecting the diversity of the use of the space by foreigners, certain typical elements for this form of detention can be indicated in the particular centres. Computer rooms are the most sociopetal places – they enjoy constant popularity among foreigners. The ratio of computer stations per number of foreigners in the centres at full occupancy is, on average, from 1 to 13, which may breed conflicts related to computer access. In connection with the above, in conflict situations, sentry guards establish time limits per user (such as an hour) and keep a list and subsequently control whether the above rules are complied with. Recreational outdoor spaces are the second sociopetal place – albeit seasonal in this case. Staying in them is connected with playing team games, talking in a group, or isolating oneself to talk on the phone in peace or simply to relax in solitude. In turn, children spend a lot of time in recreational rooms – especially that the instructors direct the most extensive offer of spending time to them. Corridors are not always empty either – children keep running up and down them in the centres for families, and in the centres for men, they are used by foreigners who want to talk on the phone without third parties listening in.

In the guarded centres for men, a significant 'disturbance' of the foreigners' activity can be observed depending on the time of the day. Their social life (e.g. team games in the rooms, watching TV, talking) intensifies in the evening and lasts well

into the night. As a result, they need to sleep it over in the morning, and so before noon the centre is quiet and rather empty. This lifestyle is in contrast to the order of the day, but the sentry guards turn a blind eye to it, since there are no tools to enforce this provision, and they do not want to create conflict.

Several other daily rituals to which the officers are particularly attached can also be pointed out. The first one concerns mass catering and activates the majority of the sentry guards. When meals are provided, the recreational spaces are locked and the space outside the building is also unavailable. The sentry guards escort the foreigners to the dining room and back, and supervise the issuing of the meals and their consumption. When occupancy is high, meals are issued in two shifts – in this case the performance of all the actions related to one meal may last even up to 1.5 hours.

Another daily ritual consists in issuing sharp shaving accessories, which are deposited in the guardhouse, to the foreigners and lending them cigarette lighters. These objects are considered dangerous and cannot be kept in the rooms.

Free time for foreigners is scheduled for the periods between meals (normally from 9:30 to 13:00, from 14:30 to 18:30, and from 21:15 to 22:00). In the centres for families, school-aged children and youth participate in classes between breakfast and lunch. Lessons are given by teachers from the local school, under contracts, and sometimes also by some of the officers from the educational section. There is only one classroom and the integrated group of pupils consists of children of different ages. Since it is impossible to deliver the core curriculum in detention centres, pupils of the compulsory school age are not graded. Kindergarten age children are usually taken care of by employees of the educational section. The activities they provide have the form of plays or arts and crafts and are optional, but are very popular among the children. Employees of this section work on two shifts (8 hours each)¹¹ and their duties include the function of the social guardian – every foreigner is attributed to one such guardian. In turn, every guardian has several foreigners under their care. Hence, it is the social guardians who remain in permanent, close contact with the foreigners, have a good understanding of their mental condition, needs, expectations, etc. In some cases, the guardians are psychologists by education, which is of benefit to the foreigners. The guardians' tasks also include the drawing up of observational reports concerning the foreigners' behaviour, which can be significant in medical procedures, the work of a psychologist and the security services.

The centres' order of the day includes the item 'evening assembly, which is to be held between 21:00 and 21:15. It aims at the checking of the number of foreigners. In some centres, foreigners have to appear by the door to their rooms, while in others the officers themselves enter the rooms and count the individuals – sometimes this is accompanied by checking whether there are any objects that might be categorised as dangerous.

¹¹ In turn, the officers from the security section work on 12-hour duties, while the administrative personnel work from 7:00 until 15:00.

An important ritual takes place only once a week – it is the placement of orders for shopping, which is subsequently done by the officers, and the collection of the ordered goods the following day. The monies the foreigners have at their disposal are kept in the centre's deposit and used towards the expenses.¹² In most centres, orders are taken by the entry door to the guardhouse, in front of which a large group of people interested in shopping is gathered; some foreigners who do not have the sufficient financial means negotiate loans with their compatriots or acquaintances, while others plan joint shopping.

The monotony of the daily life in the guarded centres is broken by cultural and other events organised by the team of the educational section or external entities cooperating with the BG.¹³ In the centre for families which was most active in this field, as many as 24 such events were organised in a single year. In turn, in one of the least active centres for men, just four events were held in the same year.¹⁴ This data is an excellent illustration of how different the personnel's involvement in actions for the benefit of foreigners can be in the particular centres. Looking at this and many other activities of the officers and civilian employees of the BG in different centres, we may conclude that the atmosphere, and relations between the foreigners and the personnel, largely depend on the officers' style of work and the middle management's style of management.

Responsibility for the cleanliness in the centre always lies with an external entity employing cleaners. Moreover, the rules and regulations of the centre contain a provision about the foreigners being obliged to tidy up twice a day (before breakfast and after supper). It is a dead letter rule and many residential rooms are very untidy, which can also be explained by the insufficient number of furniture items for storing things.¹⁵ Devastation of property in the rooms, bathrooms and toilets, is also an important problem reported by the repairmen responsible for the technical infrastructure – they are listed in the form of catalogues with photographs. It is difficult to determine who the culprits are, because this applies to rooms with no monitoring.

It is obvious that verbal communication is a significant factor determining the characteristics of social interactions. Just several years ago, Russian was the most useful language for the personnel's communication with foreigners since a lot of the detainees originated from the former USSR. More recently, because of the inflow of foreigners from other parts of the world (such as the Near East, and Central and

¹² The BG charges the foreigners who have financial means in the deposit with the cost of their stay in the centre...

¹³ For examples of such support, see the texts published in the part INFORMATION in this book.

¹⁴ Examples of titles of such events: 'Chocolate Day', 'Night Film Marathon', 'International Sports Day', 'International Dance Day', 'Chess Tournament', 'International Day of Foreign Languages', 'Polar Bear Day', 'Bird Day', 'Firemen's Day', 'The First Day of Ramadan'.

¹⁵ The condition of the furnishings in the centres, apart from some local exceptions, can be considered good, and the items undergoing decapitalisation are consistently replaced. The described state of things results from the fact that the infrastructure of the centres is largely financed using EU funds.

South-East Asia), English has been taking on the role of the leading tongue of communication. However, some foreigners speak very basic English, while others speak only their mother tongues. In turn, the linguistic competencies of the BG officers who have a daily contact with the immigrants, in particular sentry guards, can be assessed as very basic, and the optional professional training in this scope has a very limited range. The officers are equipped with modern translators servicing several dozen languages, but observations show that they are used relatively rarely.¹⁶ Because of the existing communication barrier, many messages from both sides are expressed with gestures, facial expressions, and sometimes touch – the body language typical for a given culture. Hence, they are sometimes wrongly interpreted and are a potential source of misunderstandings and even conflicts.

Conclusion

To some extent, the situation of foreigners placed in guarded centres may be described through a reference to elements of the concept of Arnold van Gennep's rites of passage (*Rites de passage*; 1960), and its development by Victor Turner (1969) as a part of his analysis of the liminal stage. After being detained at the border or in another place, or sent to Poland as the initial host country in the European Union, the foreigner is directed to a detention centre under a court decision and enters the phase of separation, which starts with reception procedures. Their first step consists in a humiliating physical search and a search through the individual's personal belongings – some of them are taken to a deposit. The second step covers an interview during which they are informed about their rights and duties, including the rules of their stay in the centre. Their understanding, as well as the functioning in an unknown space will be a longer process requiring consultation with other detainees in the centre and accumulation of one's own experience. Anyway, the foreigner moves to the liminal phase, in which as a person temporarily deprived of freedom and their previous position, stopped in motion and forced to suspend their previous life plans, is located outside the society, somewhere 'between' and at the same time 'in the middle', marginalised and suspended in some spacious physical, social and psychological void. Moreover, what emerges here is the indetermination of the duration of their stay in the liminal phase – an element typical for detention. Although, to be on the safe side, EU authorities provide that the maximum period of detention amounts to 18 months, this is in practice very rarely implemented in its entirety. Many foreigners are aware that their law-related endeavours (appeals against decisions) will always prolong their time of detention in the centre. The absence of knowledge on how long they will stay in a place perceived as a prison, this specific 'stopping of the clock' makes this period, of awaiting, a strongly stressful, even traumatic experience.

¹⁶ In routine daily situations, translators in mobile phones are a more convenient tool.

One of the most spectacular moments of the foreigner's stay in the centre is the end of the liminal phase – with the provision of information on the court's final decision concerning their further fate (a forcible return to the country of their origin, a voluntary departure from Poland – if they express their readiness to do so – or being granted some form of international protection). This information is forwarded to the foreigner by the return guardian in the company of the social guardian and usually also a sentry guard, as it is hard to anticipate what reaction this is going to evoke.

Interestingly, both BG officers and civil employees are divided as to whether guarded centres are at all necessary. Those with a sceptical attitude to the existing form of detention indicated that it is necessary to develop new, more flexible regulations and procedures, which will open the road to a broader implementation of alternative forms of control over the foreigner, while taking into account the diversity of the individual cases in the area of the form of a violation of the law, as well as their health- and family-related situation and consequences of sending them back to their country of origin. Regardless of the above, it was underlined that foreigners are kept in the detention centre for too long, which results from the slow work of the courts and complex, multistage appeal procedures.

There is agreement among the personnel as to the shortcomings of the detention space and its onerousness to the foreigners. They above all mention the multi-person residential rooms and their ascetic furnishings (such as uncomfortable bunk beds, no TV sets), lack of bathrooms or even washbasins in the rooms, barred windows which cannot be opened in the summer, and finally no grocery store on the grounds of the centre. They also believe that mixed-gender/coeducational centres would facilitate more positive social relations than centres for men only. At the same time, officers indicated many foreigners' behaviours which they find improper, such as lack of respect for property, a permanent mess in the rooms, and failure to meet the rules guiding the foreigners' meetings with the officers – in particular the social guardian. The officers' numerous concerns related to the quality of the space in which they work apply mainly to the social infrastructure, but also complex procedures concerning one's movement around the centre, the absence of special places for meetings with the foreigners, and one-way mirrors that would isolate the glassed rooms from foreigners and would be mounted on doors (Schmidt 2021: 165–177; Niedźwiedzki, Schmidt, Stęпка, Tacik 2021).

The physical and social space in the guarded centres for foreigners is divided into 'the world of the personnel' (BG officers and civilian employees) and the 'world of the subjugated' (the detained foreigners) (Niedźwiedzki, 2017: 31). However, these worlds permeate each other; some of their representatives enter into interactions, give them meanings, contribute to the development of a network of actions which make up the process of organisation. Without their in-depth examination, an attempt at a comprehensive 'reading' of the detention space would not be effective. It seems that an indispensable perspective for such in-depth analysis can be provided by H.

Lefebvre's concept of representational space and E. Soja's idea of the Thirdspace, as signalled at the beginning, as well as the latest proposals of the identification of organisational cultures which emerged on the grounds of the anthropology of organisations and the management sciences.

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