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The Specific Nature of the Detention of Foreigners, and its Exploration. The Polish Context

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Abstract

This text seeks to present basic knowledge on the detention of foreigners in Poland and the research perspective adopted in the project involving the authors of the papers published in this volume. The article has been divided into two parts. The first one contains characteristics of the detention of foreigners in the Polish context: directions of migration flows resulting from the location of our country, as well as the whereabouts and profiles of the centres administered by the Border Guard. Part two familiarises the reader with the specific nature of our detention study project: its conceptual apparatus, the adopted research paradigms, the applied methodology, and the challenges related to our exploratory efforts being performed in a very specific place – the guarded centres for foreigners. In the authors' intention, all this information is to constitute a useful background to the detailed considerations contained in the subsequent papers presented in this volume of the journal.

Keywords: detention of foreigners, detention study

Introduction

In the legal terminology, detention (from the Latin *detentio*: holding, withholding) is tantamount inter alia to the enforced placement of an individual in an isolated

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place covered by supervision. Such places include custody suites, prisons, psychiatric hospitals, rehabilitation centres for children and youth, and camps and centres for foreigners. Michel Foucault (1986: 25) defines such places as heterotopias of deviation – places, 'in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed'. Detention is a well-known practice described by the world of science, taking different forms in all historical periods (e.g. Agamben 2008; Foucault 1983; 1987; Goffman 1961). However, in view of the mass and drastic character of the detention policies of the Nazis and the communists in the previous century (e.g. Bauman 1989; Applebaum 2107; Labanca, Ceccorulli 2014: 81–108), it was possible to be optimistic in the hope that practices involving the limitation of the freedom of individuals, including migrants, would be marginalised in the contemporary democratic world of the West. This hope, however, has proved itself futile…

The gist of the detention of foreigners is well expressed in the following definition by Stephanie Silverman and Evelyne Massa (2012: 679):

> *…we define immigration detention as the holding of foreign nationals, or non-citizens, for the purposes of realising immigration-related goal. This definition is characterised by three central elements: first, detention represents a deprivation of liberty; second, it takes place in a designated facility in the custody of an immigration official; and third, it is being carried out in the service of an immigration-related goal.*

The detention of foreigners is currently a widespread phenomenon: it is used in various forms by the authorities of the majority of countries in the world, including democratic states – both the ones with immigratory origins (such as the USA and Australia) and 'homeland' states – members of the European Union. The mass character of this phenomenon is best described in figures. In the years 2000–2012, the number of detention centres in all 28 European Union states and its 16 neighbouring countries increased from 324 to 473. In 2012 alone, detention involved 570,660 immigrants, with 252,785 of them subsequently subjected to return procedures or deported (Migreurop 2014: 2). In turn, as results from the data for 14 EU states for 2011, 2013, 2015 and 2017, the number of foreigners placed in detention centres stayed at the level of about 100,000 in each of these years (Majcher, Flynn, Grange 2019: 3). The time limit for keeping a foreigner in a centre in the EU was significantly extended and amounts to as many as 18 months as of 2016–2017 in most states (Majcher, Flynn, Grange 2019: 9). If we consider the phenomenon in question in the perspective of the last 30 years, we can see a significant increase in the scale and scope of the use of the detention of foreigners (Wilsher 2014: ix; Silverman, Massa 2012: 677–678; Labanca, Ceccorulli 2014a: 3; Jansen, Celikates, de Bloois (eds) 2015).

Detention of foreigners is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon that needs to be viewed from different perspectives: legal, ethical, psychological, psychiatric, sociological, anthropological, and that of the political and management sciences. Vital and traumatic knowledge on detention can also be found in autobiographical reports

of the people who have been placed in detention centres or camps (Lemondżawa 2107; Boochani 2021), and in the data emerging from the internal materials of the given services. From the formal point of view, all the guarded centres for foreigners in the European Union function on the basis of the same three-level system of law, comprising international law,[3] EU law[4] and the national law aligned with the previous two.[5] However, in practice, these centres function in different ways in each country, which is a consequence of the execution of different state migration policies, traditions in detention management, local regulations, the architectural and spatial structure and other factors. In effect, we may consider them specific microworlds relatively isolated from the surrounding reality and setting unique principles and standards of activity – both in each country and internally within each centre's own boundaries.

Perspectives of an overview and exploration of the matter of detention

Detention as an organisational culture

Generally speaking, our perspective of an overview of the phenomenon of the detention of foreigners in Poland focused on practices of the authorities resulting from the implementation of the national migration policy in this scope. We describe and analyse the guarded centres, which are administered by the Border Guard, as an organisational culture. The metaphor (model) of culture seems to be an effective tool for an analysis of the symbolism of the meanings and interpretative schemes of actions performed by the people functioning as a part of the organisation (Morgan 2006: 141–145), and the identification of characteristics of the process of its organisation, including the legal framework, and the specificity of the physical, behavioural and linguistic artefacts of space. In the proposed approach, culture is a root metaphor, 'something the organisation is' (Kostera 2013: 31). In view of the above, in our interpretation of symbols we refer to a package of anthropological categories such as: myth, cult, usage, custom, rite, ritual (as a specific category of rite), rite of passage, ceremony, cultural performance, cultural stereotype, neotribalism, tribalism

[3] The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the UN (1948), the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the UN Geneva Convention (1951), the Convention on Human Rights (1950 with later amendments), as well as the recommendations of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

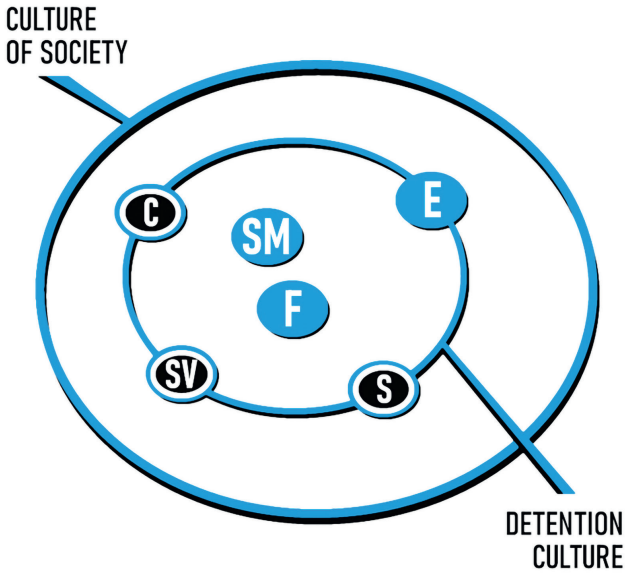
[4] The European Charter of Fundamental Rights (2012), four detention-related directives: the Return Directive (2008, recast in 2018), the Reception Directive (2003, recast in 2013), the procedural Directive (2005, recast in 2013) and the Qualification Directive (2011, recast in 2013), as well as the Dublin III Regulation (2014).

[5] The Polish Constitution (1997), the Act on granting protection to foreigners within the territory of the Republic of Poland (2003, recast in 2015), the Aliens Act (2013) and a number of implementing regulations.

and identity.[6] In all the interpretative models of organisational culture, the 'interpretation' (discovery of meanings) of artefacts takes place through their symbolisation, as well as references to the world of values through which people try to reach the basic assumptions of culture.

Fig. 1

Culture of society and detention culture (own elaboration)



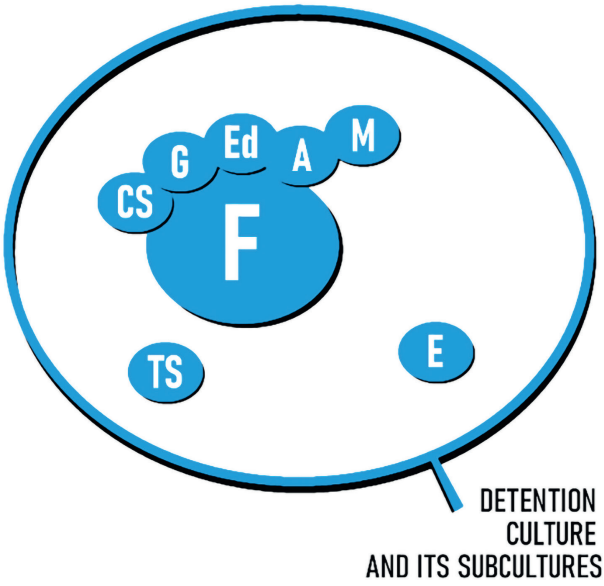
We have focused on several topics: the formal and legal determinants of the organisation of the detention space in its physical and social dimensions, ways of interpreting the space by the actors functioning within it, and behaviours – in particular interactive practices performed as a part of intra- and intergroup relations, cognitive, emotional and cultural distances emerging in these relations and the personal image

[6] In some analyses, we also referred to the conceptual apparatus from the area of theatre-related metaphors (Goffman 1959).

and the image of Others constructed on their basis. The indicated topics are marked by a high degree of generality, are closely interrelated, and contain a number of detailed threads. These include: the complexity and heterogeneity of the law, ways of its understanding and 'use' by the officers and the foreigners, routine security practices and the assumptions of dangers (risks) being their basis as a tool building relations along the line of authority-subjugation, economies of morality as indicators of the scope (in particular limitations) of the subjectivity of all the people functioning as a part of the detention culture, emotional states and manners of coping with the so-called difficult situations, proxemic and kinesic practices constructed in the conditions of a total institution, and their relation with the construction of identity in all its dimensions (individual, social and cultural).

Fig. 2

Detention culture and its subcultures (own elaboration)



LEGEND:

G - guards
E - escorts
A - administration
Ed - education
CS - contract staff (e.g. health care, catering, educational services, cleaning services)
TS - technical staff
M - management of the centre
F - foreigners

No organisational culture, analogically to national or ethnic culture, is a monolith – subcultures can be distinguished as its part. The usefulness of this measure was discussed for example by Mary Jo Hatch (2013) and Gareth Morgan (2006). From our point of view, the purposefulness of the distinguishing, for analytical purposes, of subcultures making up the organisational culture of detention was related to the need of the creation of 'little maps of meanings' generated and shared at a subcultural level, followed by their comparison. Organisational subcultures may remain in different relations to the culture as a part of which they are distinguished. They may take the form of countercultures contesting the rules in force and the common standards of thinking and behaviour; they may function next to them; and finally they may fit the organisational culture – confirm, consolidate the norms and values being a part of its mission (Posern-Zieliński 1987: 334–336; Hatch 2016: 159–160 et al.).

Multiparadigmatic nature of our study

We found it impossible to remain within just a single philosophical approach in relation to the exploration of the social space in guarded centres for foreigners. The reasons behind the above should be sought in the complexity of the research issue, the characteristics of the research team and the features of the research site, which meets the conditions to be referred to as a difficult access site. None of the members of our research team had any doubts that the adoption of the constructivist paradigm, regardless of the existence of a number of varied positions and scientific theories within it, should be as a starting point in the scope of the worldview-related assumptions. We adopted epistemological (methodological) constructivism, the foundations of which were developed by Berger and Luckman (1966), as the basic reference in our research approach. Developed as a part of the sociology of knowledge, it accentuates people's construction of subjective meanings in interaction processes as a result of the impact of social and cultural norms (Flick 2007a: 11–13).

Constructivism assumes that elements of the surrounding reality do not exist independently of the cognizing subject – rather, they are constructed by this subject in the process of cognition. For us, it was of key importance in the context of the undertaking of our exploratory, unique, not to say pioneering research in the centres. In this situation the adoption of the constructivist paradigm turned out to be a specific necessity. We were aware that the construction of the reality under study would undergo changes due to our presence, as the research was planned for 10 months and we would be exploring the particular centres in subsequent periods. Hence, we assumed that not only our perception of the centres would change over time, be reconstructed along with the acquired knowledge and experience, but we were also convinced that the authorities and employees of the subsequent centres being explored would acquire some knowledge of our stay in the previous ones, which would result in their construction of 'preparations' for our explorations.

We adopted several basic assumptions of constructivism (Crotty, 1998): first, that we need to take into account the beliefs of the participants of the research situation. Secondly, we attempted to formulate broad and general questions, which allow one to construct meanings in a way typical for the interaction with other participants of the research situation. Thirdly, we assumed that we should focus on the interactions between BG officers/civil employees and their relations with the foreigners as well as us as researchers. Fourthly, our interest in the contexts in which the subjects under study live and work was a significant element of our research and allowed us to identify and explain the spatial, temporal and in particular cultural determinants of their views, opinions, attitudes and behaviours. Fifthly, what was also important for us was a reconstruction of the process of the socialisation of our subjects related to their employment with the BG, and in particular with the guarded centre for foreigners.

The adoption of a constructivist paradigm was a starting point in the preparation of our research methods and techniques. Nevertheless, our approach was soon verified by the clash with the empirical reality. In effect, an activist paradigm also appeared in our study, combining research with broadly understood political activity for the benefit of the rejection of irrational and unjust structures in the society (Kemmis and Wilkinson 1998).

This attitude was an effect of the specificity of conducting research in a difficult access area, in a closed space, where we would 'lose' our fight for the maintenance of research distance in a situation when this space allows us limited possibilities of distancing ourselves to the subjects. An additional dimension of involvement marking the activist attitude was the fact that in the environment of the guarded centres we encountered people who in our opinion were unjustly marginalised or deprived of specific rights. This applies to the largest degree to the children placed in the centres together with their parents. In effect, we were dealing with elements of personal involvement and, unfortunately (from the point of view of the basic research), with some thought of an introduction of changes to the reality under analysis – especially that we had informal meetings with some subjects outside the space of the guarded centres. An important reason behind such meetings and collaboration outside the research situation was the fact that a BG lawyer was participating in our team.

Our research approach also included the pragmatic paradigm, classically connected with James, Mead and Peirce, and more recently with Rorty (1990), Patton (2002) and Morgan (2007). The reason behind this appearance was the fact that independently of our preparation, the undertaken explorations resulted in the construction of a world that was alien to us – and was differentiated in the particular guarded centres to boot. In consequence, our desire to explore on the one hand and the surprise with the empirical reality on the other led us to a pragmatic paradigmatic attitude (Creswell 2009). This is because it was in its framework that we could treat the particular centres as microworlds functioning in specific historical,

sociocultural and political contexts, use mixed research strategies and modify our research methods, techniques and procedures in compliance with the rule 'open method in time'.

Ethnography and triangulation

Our method of selection of the research method was guided primarily by the principle of appropriateness, understood as the adjustment of the methodological discourse to the features of the area under study and the case within its boundaries (Flick 2007a: 5–6). The method used most frequently in the segment of qualitative research aimed at the exploration of the specificity of the functioning of organisations, their management, structure and organisational culture, is ethnography[7] (Kostera 2011, 2013; Sułkowski and Sikorski 2014).

Our exploratory research was by assumption a project 'under permanent construction', undergoing constant revision in the source-related, methodological, as well as theoretical dimension marking the ethnographic method. This is best expressed in the metaphor of the funnel used by M. Hammersley and P. Atkinson (1995: 160): 'Ethnographic research should have a characteristic "funnel" structure, being progressively focused over its course. Over time the research problem needs to be developed, and may need to be transformed; and eventually its scope must be clarified and delimited, and its internal structure explored. In this sense, it is frequently well into the process of inquiry that one discovers what the research is really about; and not uncommonly it turns out to be about something rather different from the initial foreshadowed problems.'

Another feature of the ethnography implemented by us is the idea of the interpretation of images, meanings and contexts, which assumes a polyphonic character, dialogicity with the participation of all the research 'parties', and subsequently the recipients of the effects of the project works (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Silverman 2014; Angrosino 2007; Creswell 2009). Additionally, our actions are well expressed by the metaphor of a bricoleur – a creator of patchworks, a picture editor – in all its references, including methodological, interpretative, theoretical, as well as political (Denzin and Lincoln 2018: 45–46). The research optics sketched above is to lead to the acquisition of a holistic perspective reflecting the complexity of the phenomena under study by referring to many ways of their perception and interpretation – an attempt at the explanation, a platform of understanding.

The specific nature of ethnography – which is usually the acquisition of information in the natural, i.e. ordinary, daily context of functioning of social actors through the keeping of face-to-face contact with them for a prolonged time – is naturally connected

[7] Long-term research experience of three members of the research team related to the use of this method in its different variants was also a favourable circumstance (e.g. Schmidt 2009; Niedźwiedzki 2010; Chwieduk 2019).

with the activity of triangulation. The tasks attributed to this strategy are connected with attempts to reflect aspects of the explored reality from many angles – in particular, conducting comparative analyses of the obtained knowledge resources originating from different stages of the research procedure, generated with the help of different tools, from various points of view adopted by the researcher. An in-depth assessment of the methodological and theoretical accuracy as well as the reliability of results is also possible (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 183–185; Silverman 2018: 384–398).

The model of triangulation strategy we implemented can be described as comprehensive (Flick 2007b: 51). Apart from the four types of triangulation indicated in Denzin's classical concept (1978: 294–302) – sources, researchers, theories and methods, both within-method and between-method[8] – we also implemented the postulate of a systematic triangulation of perspectives (Flick 2007b: 50–51 et al.). This level of reflection appeared at the earliest stage of the project work, and was connected with the adopted paradigms, the specific nature of the applied qualitative approach, and the posed research questions. This was *de facto* about theoretical foundations indicating specific ways and excluding other approaches to the phenomena, thus profiling triangulation measures at the level of sources and methods. What is an important element of a systematic triangulation of perspectives in the case of team research is the triangulation of research themes followed by the generation of knowledge and the discussion of the results by the researchers. The use of the ethnographic method is naturally connected with a flexible triangulation of perspectives, and in view of the domination of the area over methodology, it is a permanent activity, which cannot be located as apart of a single stage of the research procedure (e.g. Flick 2007b: 77–90).

All our triangulation-related activities reflect above all our desire for an in-depth understanding (a term borrowed from Denzin (2012)) of the phenomenon under study and the construction of a multidimensional and simultaneous (by no means sequential!) picture of a stretch of social life that would document inter alia the diversity of results obtained by way of the application of different sources, methods and theories. The above led to the development of a broader interpretative model allowing the researchers to fulfil their obvious desires, such as more realistic analyses of social life and its cultural rules (Schmidt 2009: 18).

General characteristics of the detention of foreigners in Poland

Significant determinants of the organisation and functioning of the system of the detention of foreigners include the specific migration-related situation of a given country. In the case of Poland, we may be talking about three key factors determining the

[8] For detailed descriptions of the execution of the four types of triangulation in our research project, see Niedźwiedzki and Schmidt (2020: 73–78 et al.).

situation. First, recent years have brought about a significant change in the directions of people's spatial mobility. Poland has been increasingly moving from the position of an emigration country to the position of an immigration country. Important causes of the above include demographic changes of the Polish society. Another important factor is Poland's membership with the European Union. It has resulted in a gradual socioeconomic growth and in consequence an increasing attractiveness of the country for people migrating from the poorer regions of the world in search of better conditions of living. In the context of Poland's membership with the EU, its location on the eastern, external border of the Community is more significant. This is because the need to protect it applies not only to our country, but to all EU states – in particular in relation to migrants crossing the border illegally. Poland's location on the traditional migration route from the East to the West is the third important factor determining its migration-related situation. In consequence, people migrating to Poland are mostly citizens of the countries lying behind its eastern border rather than citizens of African or Near East countries as is the case in many other European countries.

Fig. 3

Border Guard Regional Units and Guarded Centres for Foreigners.[9]

[9] Polish relevant literature and vocabulary uses the term *cudzoziemcy* ('foreigners'), where the word *immigrants* is used in English-language texts.

Poland's simultaneous location at the EU border and on the traditional migration route results in a geographical distribution of its detention centres for foreigners. Five out of six guarded centres run by the Border Guard can be found in the eastern and central part of Poland.

Such locations facilitate the procedure of the detention of people detained for illegal border crossing, although it should be remembered that detention centres also keep people who applied for various forms of international protection and are deported to Poland from other EU states under the Dublin agreements. Under relevant legislation, detention may be applied in relation to foreigners for the purposes of the determination or verification of their identity, prevention of abuse in proceedings in cases concerning the granting of international protection, prevention of threats to security, health, life or property of other people, protection of national defence or the state's security, or the protection of the public safety and order (the Aliens Act, 2020: Art. 398a).

A decision of the court of law on the placement of a foreigner in a guarded detention centre (or in custody) is above all aimed at securing a return procedure (Sieniow 2016: 43–62). In practice, foreigners leave the centres not only in the situation of obtaining a decision on being obliged to return to the country of their origin – they are also released as a result of being granted some form of international protection, for health-related reasons, because of the lapse of the maximum period of stay in the centre as stipulated by the law, or the discontinuation of the procedure because of the lack of possibilities to identify them.

Although detention is a relatively small part of the complex process of the management of international migration (Castles, Miller 1993), it raises a lot of controversy in the legal environment and a firm opposition from defenders of human rights. It is also sometimes a spectacular topic for the mass media when 'crisis' situations appear.[10] It is accepted by politicians as an indispensable tool for the execution of a sovereign state's security policy. At the same time, as a topic being specifically 'embarrassing' for the authorities, it is veiled in an aura of secrecy, hermetic and inaccessible to an external observer.

As of 2008, the detention of foreigners in Poland is managed by the Border Guard of the Republic of Poland (Ottavy 2014: 139; Rafalik 2012: 52). In this role, it replaced the Police, which conducted the detention of foreigners having just one centre at Lesznowola, so out of necessity also used its custody infrastructure. The model of handling foreigners based on the experience of the prison system, which was taken over at the time, underwent a gradual evolution. After all, in contrast to the people serving their time in prisons, the foreigners detained in the centres were not criminals sentenced by law. What largely contributed to the above was changes in the law

[10] Such situations include hunger strikes and other forms of protest of the detainees, and incidental escapes from the centres – such events normally attract the attention of mass media.

concerning foreigners as well as the impact of institutions controlling the operation of the detention centres (such as the Polish Ombudsman, the Ombudsperson for Children, the Helsinki Committee, etc.) and those cooperating with them (non-governmental organisations).

Supervision over the guarded centres and custody facilities for foreigners is performed by the Board for Foreigners in the BG Headquarters. These centres function in different local organisational structures of the BG. What dominates is the functioning directly as a part of the following BG Units: Podlaski with its seat in Białystok, Warmińsko-Mazurski in Kętrzyn, Bieszczadzki in Przemyśl and Nadodrzański in Krosno Odrzańskie. In the case of the centres in Biała Podlaska and Lesznowola, they are located within the structures of the BG facilities existing in these locations. Additionally, the particular centres have different profiles: for men (Krosno Odrzańskie, Lesznowola, Białystok), for families (Biała Podlaska), for families, women and unattended minors (Kętrzyn), and for men and women (Przemyśl). The centres are able to provide space for a total of 573 foreigners: 130 in Biała Podlaska, 122 in Białystok, 120 in Kętrzyn, 103 in Przemyśl, 50 in Lesznowola, and 48 in Krosno Odrzańskie.[11] It is worth stressing that both the number of places and the profiles of the centres are subject to change: the former because of the modernisation of the space of the centres, and the latter because of the changing characteristics of the migrants illegally crossing the Polish border.[12] In Poland, an average of 1,200 people are detained each year (Global Detention Project 2019: 21).[13] In comparison with other European countries, Poland stands out for its detention of a large number of families with children (ibidem: 12–14).[14] The largest number of foreigners placed in guarded centres are the citizens of Russia, Ukraine and Vietnam.[15]

[11] The data come from the internal documentation of all the centres and apply to May 2019.

[12] Examples include a change of the profile of the centre in Białystok from one for men to one for families in the spring of 2021; subsequently, in the autumn of 2021, its capacity was doubled as a result of the BG authorities' decision to cut the minimum space per foreigner by half in connection with an outbreak of the so-called migration crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border. In the spring of 2022, the centre returned to its original norm of space per foreigner and the number of detainees decreased to about 60% of its potential capacity. Simultaneously, in the perspective of the subsequent year, the centre is to again become a facility for men. Another example of changes is the modernisation (completed in the summer of 2022) of the centre in Biała Podlaska, where the numerous modifications included a very significant one – a removal of bars from the windows of the modernised building.

[13] In 2014, there were 1,322 detainees, in 2015 – 1,051, in 2016 – 1,201, and in 2017 – 1,290. As results from our working calculations on the basis of internal documents obtained from all the guarded centres, the situation did not change significantly either in 2018 or 2019.

[14] For instance in 2014 there were 347 children (including 18 unaccompanied minors aged 15–18), and in 2016 – 292. According to the Global Detention Project, in 2021 the number dropped to 101, to increase to a record number of 567 in 2021; https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/europe/poland#statistics-data (accessed on 25.05.2022).

[15] It is worth underlining a great ethnic and religious mosaic of the foreigners detained in the guarded centres. For example, according to an internal report, the 10 most numerous groups in the centre in Białystok in the period of 1.01–31.05.2019 were the citizens of: Vietnam (36), Afghanistan (32), Russia (14), Georgia (12), Turkey (9), Iran (8), Ukraine (6), India (5), Pakistan (5), and Belarus (4).

The detention sector (we are talking about the guarded centres) has about 700 full-time jobs, but in practice some of them are vacant.[16] Jobs in the security teams/sections, operating on a shift basis, constitute a decisive majority. Apart from BG officers and civil employees, work for the guarded centres is also performed by external subjects (catering, healthcare, educational facilities, clergy, cleaning firms).

Challenges connected with the performance of research

Interdisciplinarity of the research and multidisciplinarity of the team

The undertaking of research in the area of the multidimensional analysis of the organisation of space and the functioning of people within it made it necessary to take into account legal, political, psychosocial and cultural aspects. In consequence, the leaders of the project decided to conduct the study in accordance with the interdisciplinary research model (Wierzchosławski 1996: 98; Flynn Mathew, Flynn Michael (eds), (2017).). Under this model, the synthesis of knowledge begins with the acceptance of research assumptions by the research team (with its members representing a number of academic disciplines), and lasts continuously throughout the research process. We perceive such interdisciplinarity, understood as carefully considered eclecticism – a both holistic and coherent approach to the complex sociocultural phenomena – as an optimum activity allowing to acquire a polyphonic point of view, while at the same time a means of transfer and merger of segments of disciplinary knowledge. This is because we believe that the project in question fits the metaphorical idea of interdisciplinarity referred to as bridge-building. In no place did we postulate the idea of restructuring, which would lead to the creation of hybrids reconfiguring the disciplines being part of the consilience system (Klein 2010: 21). We believe in consilience in the spirit of Wilson's epistemology (1998), as reflected in the already discussed multiparadigmatic nature of research and the use of a broad range of triangulation.

The consent to conduct our research in guarded centres was limited to 12 months, which was an additional condition determining the organisation of the work of our team. The above called for an organisation of the group in such a way that fieldwork could be conducted by two subteams.

In consequence, members of the established research team included representatives of different academic fields: cultural anthropology, ethnology, law, sociology, security studies and psychology. Additionally, leaders of the project decided to invite BG employees with whom they had already successfully cooperated on earlier projects run in cooperation with the BG, to participate in the study. It is noteworthy that

[16] In some locations, the number of vacancies reaches even as much as 20% (data from internal documents of the centres relating to May 2019).

owing to the fact that BG officers/civil employees also became team members along with scholars, the study became intersectoral.

The team included members who lived far away from each other. This territorial dislocation caused specific communication-related challenges connected with the organisation of the teamwork. Along with the organisation of seminar-like meetings, this resulted in the necessity to conduct intense communication concerning both academic and organisational aspects of the research project's execution via email, telephone and internet communicators.

The execution of the fieldwork project by a team constructed in this way carries along with it many challenges at each stage of the research; coping with them successfully is one of the significant conditions of the acquisition of satisfying empirical material. What turned out to be a significant problem related to the presence of a variety of academic fields was the negotiation of a joint scope of the research problem – one taking into account the individual interests of the team members. This is because the interdisciplinarity of research is tantamount to adopting a community metalanguage to be valid for representatives of the various disciplines at all research stages. This calls for integrating the research concept and methodology in reference to the joint complex subject of the research. Owing to the above, it is possible to acquire, through the collected empirical data, a description of reality marked by a high degree of material and formal uniformity.

An important consequence of the team's multidisciplinarity was the diversity of the researchers' theoretical and methodological scope as well as their routines pertaining to the research performance. Moreover, team members differed in terms of their experience in the area of the execution of fieldwork as well as their methodological knowledge. This differentiation resulted in, first, a broad (as mentioned above) diversity of interests in the area of research problematics, and, secondly, significant differences in the scope of preparation for the performance of the fieldwork. These two factors enforced the necessity to conduct cyclical workshop meetings for the entire team, which, in view of the territorial dislocation of its members, posed a considerable challenge. They were also related to the mode of financing of the research, including the necessity to use finance acquired from the researchers' home institutions during stage one. Additionally, the research was conducted simultaneously with the team members' due academic, didactic and organisational work in their universities; in the case of one researcher, along with her duties related to her employment with the BG.

Another serious challenge was the organisation of communication between the team members territorially distanced from each other, practically at each level of the research process. It applied to the design of the fieldwork, i.e. the negotiation of a package of theoretical-methodological positions, research attitudes, methods, tools and procedures of acquisition of empirical data and systems of recording empirical material, in particular in the form of the adoption of specific samples of various types

of observation notes, that would be accepted by everyone. Of special significance was the maintenance of communication between the researchers during fieldwork in the detention centres, allowing the maintenance of the uniformity of research attitudes, the use of research methods, tools and procedures in a way guaranteeing the acquisition of source data that was satisfying for all team members. Mutual communication was of huge importance during the ordering of the collected empirical data. It was to provide all the researchers with a relatively equal access to the empirical material by adopting uniform ways of the introduction of comments to the interviews and the drawing up of the final versions of various types of observation notes, the adoption of a uniform system of archiving the naturally occurring data, the collected documents and the obtained photographic material, as well as the selection of a joint system of processing qualitative empirical data.

As mentioned above, the identification of team members with different academic disciplines led to challenges connected with the maintenance of the theoretical cohesion, methodological cohesion and, above all, cohesion of the team members' research activities. The composition of the team had not only specific internal consequences related to its functioning, but also external ones, pertaining to the execution of the fieldwork: in particular ones connected with contacts and relations between the researchers and the subjects. The most important external consequences of such a composition of the research group included a problem with the identification of the team as a research team by the subjects – its perception as a committee, control team, etc. as well as their different perception of the individual team members.

Diversity of data sources

The triangulation of data and sources of data became a natural consequence of the scope of the research problematics, research interdisciplinarity, and the multidisciplinarity of the research team and the individual interests of its members.[17] We identified a total of 14 categories of naturally-occurring data:

1) legislation – covering international, EU and Polish legislation, constituting a framework of reference for macrostrategies of the detention system (the mission of the organisational culture and tools for its execution), but also local microstrategies (the interpretation of the law – its execution in practice);
2) documents concerning the space of the GCFs – architectural plans and other iconographic sources made available by the centres, including videos and photographs, as well as the already implemented, currently conducted and planned modernisation projects in this scope (including budget-related data – sources and outlays);

[17] For more information on this topic, see Niedźwiedzki, Schmidt, 2020: 88–93.

3) documents concerning the organisation of the use of places and spaces – various rules and regulations such as the order of the day or the rules pertaining to the use of the individual spaces;
4) documents concerning the organisational structure of the GCFs – full-time jobs and positions allocated to the particular sections and teams, vacancies, distinctions of BG officers and civil employees, etc.;
5) documents concerning the detailed scope of duties and rights of the BG officers/civil employees allocated to their particular position/function;
6) general and detailed documents/instructions concerning the execution of their duties – such as instructions in the area of the fulfilment of duties in the centres, descriptions of procedures applied in the case of children being harmed by their parents in the centres, principles of handling foreigners requiring special treatment, algorithms in cost-related procedures, etc.;
7) forms of documents used in the centres and sample documents filled in, including deposit receipts, protocols of parcel delivery, notes from conversations with foreigners, shopping cards, library catalogues and cards, official memos concerning a foreigner's aggressive behaviour, a foreigner's shopping settlement card, a foreigner's observation sheets, notes from in-depth interviews with a foreigner, applications for an extension of a foreigner's stay at the GCF or for a change of a preventative measure, decisions of authorities concerning applications for a release, applications for seeing a visitor or for virtual contact, etc.;
8) documents related to the work of the particular teams or sections – e.g. programmes of activity or reports from their execution, schedules of activities and events for foreigners, chronicles of events;
9) documents concerning the improvement of the qualifications of BG officers and civil employees – plans in this scope on a monthly, quarterly and annual scale, for both the entire centre and individual teams/sections; training on the national scale of the particular teams/sections, etc.;
10) statistical documents, including statistics concerning the number of foreigners staying in the centre by gender, country of origin, placement time, etc.; information on the frequency and scope of the foreigners' use of medical care;
11) documents addressed to foreigners – e.g. instructions on their rights and duties, information statements in different language versions, instructions for people subject to a body search;
12) documents concerning cooperation with external bodies, as well as audits carried out by external institutions such as non-governmental organisations, the Polish Ombudsman, the Ombudsperson for Children, EU entities, etc.;
13) other – e.g. descriptions of the civil employees' missions abroad, their experience related to visits to other guarded centres;

14) materials acquired prior to the commencement of the project, including observation registers and reports drawn up by students during their internship in guarded centres.

The acquired collection of documents from the above categories includes several thousand items. The vastness of this collection was largely caused by the fact that analogical packages of documents were collected in all the centres under study. This measure was guided by the need to perform a comparative analysis of the documents at a later stage to identify similarities and differences in the mode and style of the staff's work, and on this basis to diagnose the integrity, the degree of uniformity of the detention system in Poland. In view of the varied profiles of activity of the individual local institutions, this measure was of significant importance. Moreover, we wanted to take a close look at the analogical documents generated within each of the centres separately. Good examples include different rules and regulations pertaining to the use of the same type of spaces.

The group of primary sources included materials which were divided into eight categories:

1) recordings of individual interviews. We conducted 155 interviews, which were divided on a working-basis into problem-specific (114) and supplementary (41) interviews;
2) recordings of group interviews. We conducted six interviews of this type;
3) photographic material. We collected several thousand photographs taken by all the project's participants. The documentation concerns the guarded centres and their buffer zones nearest surroundings;
4) observation notes concerning behaviours and social interactions. As a part of the initial ordering works, the so-called collective notes were also drawn up, covering the entire scope of the particular types of behaviours/interactions recorded;
5) notes on the so-called social situations, i.e. events between the participants of a given space observed on an *ad hoc* basis;
6) notes of the so-called daily reflections. The notes were drawn up by the research team during the meeting closing each daily research session. They contained the most important immediate insights concerning issues related to the functioning of the centre and its actors;
7) research journals. Every project participant was obliged to keep their own research journal;
8) other materials. The collection also included recordings and protocols of from informal conversations with the personnel and the detainees, all the recorded conversations carried out in these groups, as well as presentations of the centres performed by the officers for the research team on the first day of the study visit.

The above characteristics document both the richness and the diversity of the collected source materials. The acquisition of this set did not lie in spontaneous data collection, but was connected with carefully thought-out decisions based on the predefined information-related needs of the research team. In connection with the multiplicity of the undertaken research threads and their different profiles, it is impossible to describe the status and usefulness of the particular sources in the entire project. However, it is worth highlighting two features of the source resource under discussion. First, we are dealing with a complementary set. Secondly, observational data as a source immanently integrated with other primary sources and the one most suited to verification and complementation of all other types of sources, will act as a universal binder of the set in question.

Difficult access

When applied to fieldwork, the term 'difficult access area' appears in the context of the features of the environment under study and the researchers' psychophysical states. The former refers to the environments which underwent a broadly understood disorganisation due to political, economic and ecological changes (Turnbull 1972), were subject to sudden malfunctions resulting for example from natural disasters or military conflicts, or belonged to exclusive groups or institutions such as the so-called deviant groups or organisations classified as totalizing ones. The latter applies to sensations and emotions emerging during contact with the environment under study. This applies to uncertainty, anxiety, stress felt as a result of contact with maladaptive physical and mental symptoms of the environment under study (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 86–94), as well as the sense of discomfort related to the fieldwork conditions (low living standards, a variety of potential hazards, etc.). Such emotional states may also be caused by the researcher's ambivalent feelings to the research participants (and the other way round) resulting from a broadly understood 'culture clash', different systems of values, lifestyle-related and moral norms and standards, and finally, the researcher's alienation in the reality under study (Malinowski 1989). In consequence, the abovementioned determinants of research in 'difficult access areas' posed challenges related to the access to the area as such, the selection of the optimum/possible place of access to the social situations requiring exploration, and finally the adjustment/modification of the research tool kit to fit the specific nature of the place and the social environment (Angrosino 2007: 30–33; Flick 2007a: 58–59).

In the context of our study, it is easy to identify the features of the place, group/s and institutions, which qualify them for the categories of 'difficult' and 'marked by difficult access'. First, we undertook research in a totalizing institutional environment in which, regardless of having obtained a permission to be present, we nevertheless were subject to control by 'double monitoring' (cameras and direct visual supervision). Secondly, our movement around the detention centres was difficult due to our

lack of access to codes or cards enabling movement from one segment to another. Thirdly, the sight of bars, barbed wire, security passages, cameras and uniformed officers made the detention space difficult not only to make 'comfortable', but even to accept. Because of the sense of staying in a closed space – one marked by attributes such as security passages, passes, bars, wires, detailed rules and regulations, and the related procedures or constant supervision, a day-long stay in the guarded centre resulted in the need to use relaxation techniques. Fourthly, the very sight of the foreigners under detention, in particular the children, raised frustration and objection against the legal-administrative system sanctioning such a state of things, and affected our view of the organisational culture under study. Fifthly, our presence in the guarded centre to some extent disturbed the normal course of work of the officers, who were obliged by their superiors to assist us (searching for documents and making them available, providing explanations, participating in the study, and obligatory subjection to our participant and extrospective observation). Moreover, they did not understand our presence or status – they associated it with an audit or control rather than a study. We found the personnel's mistrust towards the researchers a considerable challenge and an additional arrangement task, which was not always completed with success.

Ethical issues

Constitutive elements of the thinking and behaviour of academic circles include ethical values, reliability standards and good practices (Gościkowski 1999: 70). An increase in the importance of the ethical aspects of research is of particular significance in the social sciences and humanities, as a part of which the actions of researchers encroach on the daily life of other people. In the last few decades, the above has resulted in an increase in institutional control of the ethical side of the undertaken topics, forms of conduct of empirical studies and dissemination of their results, as well as the common inclusion of texts devoted to ethics by authors of methodological textbooks (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 209–229; Silverman 2014: 139–162; Banks 2007: 85–92; Angrosino 2007: 63–64, 85–89; Flick 2007a: 68–76; Kvale 2007: 23–31; Barbour 2007: 92–101; Flick 2007b: 124–129; Gibbs 2007: 90–104; Creswell 2009: 92–97).

At the same time, ethics constitutes an integral element of every stage of individual research procedures, which means that it cannot be reduced to any universal set of rules or standards used in any empirical context. Reflections on the morality and ethics as an immanent element of individual and team research work require constant control, and in many cases revision and optimisation.

Ethical challenges concerning our research project were related to the features of the difficult access area where we found ourselves working. A key determinant was the performance of research works in closed, centralised institutions with a hierarchical

profile, where domination, subordination and control are the basic rule of communication. This is reflected in the relations between the personnel and the foreigners, and in the groups into which the staff is divided. To some extent, the above also applied to the research team, whose relatively high status in the research environment resulted from the authorisations granted by the *Commander-in-Chief of the Border Guard*.

These conditions called for extending special efforts to meet one of the basic ethical requirements, i.e. to obtain an informed consent to participate in the study (e.g. Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 210–212; Creswell 2009: 94; Chuk and Latusek-Jurczak 2012: 26–31). In particular, we wanted to avoid a situation when anyone would be delegated to the study by their superiors (which we largely managed to achieve). The fact that the research work was preceded by organisational arrangements with the management of the guarded centres and the abovementioned high status of the research team resulted in the situation as a part of which all the personnel, when informed about the planned study, felt to some extent obliged to actively support the researchers in their work.[18] As a result, apart from incidental cases, we did not encounter refusals to talk, although on many instances we felt that some of our interlocutors were under stress when in contact with us, and perceived talking to us as a specific test of their 'rightmindedness'. In a couple of cases, our interlocutors expressed a concern that providing us with information may have negative consequences for them.[19] To neutralise these concerns among the staff members, when commencing an interview, we each time provided a package of information on the solely academic purpose of our visit and guaranteed a complete anonymisation of their statements. Each interviewee was asked to express their consent for the interview to be recorded on a dictation machine and was assured that the recorded material would be removed immediately after being transcribed. Despite these measures, we were still aware that the situation did not meet the ideal model of obtaining an informed consent – nevertheless, the only alternative would have been to discontinue research in this environment.

It was very important for us to prevent the potential harmfulness of the study for its participants in the form of revealing their identity. Hence, we focused on data protection procedures as a part of our archiving works. Apart from the researchers, only an experienced and trusted transcriber, with whom we had already worked on previous projects, had access to them. After being transcribed, the recordings were deleted. All the materials from the study were coded in compliance with the template developed by the team.

In the case of daily informal conversations with the foreigners, the situation was much easier. They were not initiated by the researchers, based on focused research

[18] As resulted from the internal documents we managed to acquire, in some cases we were presented as controllers conducting monitoring of the quality of the work of the centres.

[19] In one of the interviews, the interviewee expressed the following belief: 'If I am transferred to the border, I shall know that this is because of this interview'.

guidelines, or intentionally recorded on a dictating machine. These conversations usually had the form of friendly chats, and were initiated and, in the vast majority of cases, also 'directed' by the foreigners themselves. We provided in-depth answers to the foreigners' questions concerning the purpose of our presence and our profession. Nevertheless, some foreigners continued to have doubts as to the real purpose of our visit to the centres, as evidenced by their attempts to ask us for intervention or aid in solving the various problems they were facing whilst being kept in the detention centres.

Many methodological discussions undertake the issue of a non-ethical nature of research conducted using covert non-participant (extrospective) observation – hence, its choice calls for some explanation in the context of the specific nature of the place in which the study was conducted. In the conditions of the institution under study, constant monitoring[20] of the majority of its space, usually performed by several dozen cameras (with the exception of residential rooms, bathrooms and toilets), is a basic activity of the guard services. It is also performed using one-way mirrors in some of the spaces of the sentry guards and while patrolling the space of the centre. Foreigners are fully aware of this state of affairs and are used to it. An analogical situation takes place when direct, but fully open non-participant observation is conducted in such places as an open yard for sports and recreational activities. In connection with the above, we decided that our work connected with the use of the research technique under discussion in this specifically organised institutional space is not burdened with symptoms of immoral activity. In turn, the participant observations we carried out in public places were not connected with an abuse of the right to privacy of the observed people, a false presentation of the purpose of the study, or the construction of the so-called false identity to be granted access to the observed situation (Angrosino 2007: 61–63).

Additionally, we tried not to disturb the staff's daily routine by making our presence felt or by formulating requests disturbing their work. When observing conflict situations among the personnel or between the personnel and the foreigners, we were above all guided by the Weberian principle of value-free research. In all these situations, we avoided positioning ourselves in the role of an advocate of any of the parties or becoming involved in solving local problems. In our opinion, this allowed the team to maintain an objective academic attitude allowing a neutral description and explanation of the phenomena and processes taking place in detention centres.

We are aware that our efforts to maintain ethical standards in our research were not necessarily understandable to all the subjects or corresponded with their beliefs and expectations. This is because we agree with Gary Fine (2000: 87–95) that the model of research which does not raise any ethical concerns, in which the researcher takes the role of a fully empathic, friendly and transparent partner of the research

[20] Camera recordings are archived and stored for some time – usually a couple of weeks.

participant, is in practice impossible to fully achieve. We were made aware of this state of things in the course of our daily briefings in the field, during which our sociocultural burden and its components such as professional stereotypes, individual emotions and levels emerged.

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