

Introduction

This special issue contains articles focused on the detention of foreigners in Poland, in particular the functioning of guarded centers for foreigners supervised by the Polish Border Guard. It is not an attempt to comprehensively address the issue, which covers the entire spectrum of phenomena and processes of a socio-political, economic and, above all, cultural nature related to the functioning of detention centers in Poland. Activity of guarded centers for foreigners is conditioned by legal regulations from European law to internal regulations of the Border Guard, influenced by external institutions with supervision and control powers, and constructed as a result of intercultural contact between the staff employed in the centers and the foreigners placed in them. Our intention is to analyze selected aspects of everyday reality of the functioning of guarded centers for foreigners in Poland.

The considerations of the authors of the articles are based on field research conducted in all detention centers in Poland in 2018–2019. The research team consisted of six people: Agnieszka Chwieduk, Dariusz Niedźwiedzki, Angelika Poniadowska, Jacek Schmidt, Maciej Stęпка and Przemysław Tacik. The team was interdisciplinary in nature, grouping together representatives of cultural anthropology, ethnology, law, psychology, sociology and security studies. During the research, the team obtained over 200 documents regulating the functioning of guarded centers and illustrating their daily activity. The prepared photographic material includes several hundred photos of the internal and external spaces of the centers and their buffer zones. During the research, the team members conducted 171 in-depth interviews, 6 focus groups and prepared several dozen observation notes.

The analyses presented here do not take into account the extraordinary situation in which detention centers in Poland have found themselves since the summer of 2021 – a result of the sudden influx of foreigners crossing the Polish-Belarusian border, incited by the authorities of Belarus and Russia. This so-called migration crisis led to the need, firstly, to change the rules of activity of the existing detention centers, and secondly, to open, in addition to the 6 existing detention centers (Biała Podlaska, Białystok, Lesznowola, Kętrzyn, Krosno Odrzańskie, Przemysł), new centers in Czerwony Bór and Wędrzyn.

In general, the changes caused by the aforementioned crisis contributed to a significant deterioration of the situation of foreigners staying in the centres, mainly as a consequence of their overcrowding. Nevertheless, we are convinced that the articles in this volume contain important and relevant analyses concerning the core of the functioning of detention centres. Therefore, the considerations included in the special issue are not weakened by temporal, extraordinary situations related to the intensification of migration processes and the adjustment of the activity of guarded centers for foreigners in Poland to them.

The first article in the volume, "The Specific Nature of the Detention of Foreigners and its Exploration. The Polish Context", presents 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. Przemysław Tacik ("Law, Life, Impossibility: Theorising 'Law Application' in Detention Centres for Foreigners") proposes a more general understanding of the role that law plays in total institutions such as detention centres. The next article by Maciej Stępka ("Surveillance and Security in Immigrant Detention Centres in Poland. An Overview of Key Technologies and Practices") aims to provide a discussion on the role of (in)visibility and securitization of migration by looking at specific spaces and practices of Polish centres for foreigners. Jacek Schmidt in his paper ("Spaces and Places of Detention of Foreigners") focuses on the characteristics of the space and places of guarded centres for foreigners in Poland. In the next article ("People in Total Institutions. The Case of Border Guard Functionaries and Employees in Guarded Centres for Foreigners") Dariusz Niedźwiedzki tries to identify and analyse guarded centres for foreigners as total institutions and the psycho-social consequences of such totalization for persons who work in these centres. Agnieszka Chwieduk ("'External Limbo' – 'Internal Limbo'. On the Detention of Immigrants in Polish Guarded Centres for Foreigners") analyses the problem of the mental well-being of foreigners placed in guarded centres as a consequence of the institutional dimension of the total reality in such centres. The final paper by Piotr Boćko ("On the Need for the Education of Officers and Civilian Employees of Guarded Centres for Foreigners") opens up a discussion on the possibility to create, among the courses and training offered to the officers and civilian employees of this service, a special sub-system dedicated to people employed in detention centres.

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