

Polish citizens in Brazil

Abstract. Polish citizens in Brazil

This is a presentation of Polish immigrants who came to Brazil in the 19th and 20th centuries, now the second biggest Polish community in the world. In my presentation, I intend to describe the reason of the emergence of the population. Then, I continue to show the history of the community in Brazil, especially in Curitiba, the “Polish” capital of Brazil. Next in my presentation is the situation of the population of Polish origin in Brazil. I present different organisations which are a part of this community. What is more, I also describe the Parana region as a with the biggest concentration of residents with Polish roots. I also mention how Polish traditions are cultivated.

Keywords: Brazil, Polish, migration

Introduction

The main purpose of this article is to describe the history of Polish citizens, who lived in Brazil, drawing information from literature and my own observation¹. The aim of this research is also to convey an image of the current situation of Polish descendants in Brazil and present their history and everyday life in the community. I want to focus on Polish citizens who have been emigrating to Brazil from the 19th century until now. I decided to recreate this topic, because despite the fact that Polish emigration to Brazil started approximately 150 years ago this subject still is not easily found in the literature. As a result, this

¹ The Polish identity is created based on academic literature and historical memories, mainly Polish language. I take advantage of methodology from books in my bibliography. Especially, I want to mention historical Marcin Kula's approach, because he is using a lot of sources, for example, diaries, memories, formal and informal letters, photographs, maps etc. His research perspective (basic historical view) is close to me. All these sources are basic and inspiration that I enrich in my own observations, that I made during my stay in Brazil in 2013.

subject is practically an undiscovered piece of the history of Polish people in South America. We can say that Polish diaspora is the second biggest Polish community in the world. Their situation changed a lot throughout ages. The issue of finding Polish identity in this diaspora is highly visible. What is also very important is the definition of Polish identity, which is related to acquaintance of culture, language, traditions and history.

There are two points of view regarding this emigration – one draws attention to the fact that Polish descendants adapted perfectly to Brazil's conditions and another suggests that this was a difficult and lost-lasting process. Fact is that the influx of people in Brazil and other regions was growing. Mainly in the state of Parana, especially in capital Curitiba still can be found well preserved, Polish wooden houses. However, the most important are people who were strongly engaged in promoting Polish culture. There are various Polish traditions that were celebrated throughout centuries. It should be mentioned the version of the Polish language that the older people spoke there. For me, as a linguist, the fact that the language survived decades in old versions is unique on a global scale. These people still speak Polish to promote their native language among the younger generation. Thanks to them, there are some young Polish descendants who can speak at least a little bit of Polish even if they did not take any Polish lessons. It is necessary to promote the history of Polish emigration to South America, especially to Brazil. This part of discovery is strongly inimitable, so it must be shown to the bigger audience to make the nation more aware of this phenomenon, but also show and promote patriotism in everyday life.

This subject requires giving some more information on Brazil. The Federative Republic of Brazil is the fifth biggest country in the world. A country is located in the central and eastern parts of South America. The area is 8 547 400 km², as a result of which it's the largest country on the continent. The population consists of European descendants, followed by Negroes, Mulattos, Indians and Asians. The official language is Portuguese and the monetary is real. Another important thing is the distance between Poland and Brazil (around 10 130 km) what makes this cultural diversity even bigger.

The method that I used in this article is a simple observation, which is not categorized. As a consequence there are no separate categories of people's behaviours, but we observe things flexibly (Łobocki 229), what let us describe it with good quality. The technique that I used is observations' diary, which let me notice different points of views, ways of thinking, phenomenons and behaviours. My observations are rich and diversified as I could immerse myself in the culture of Brazil during my stay in this country in 2013, while I was living in Portugal with Brazilians and when I was reading Brazilian literature. Thanks to this choice of observation method I could easily identify my objective (Łobocki 68).

Reason of immigration

The main reasons for immigration were poverty and hunger. 1891 was the crucial year as more than 200 000 emigrants came to Brazil. Some of them moved to Argentina or Brazil, however, it has to be noticed that 3 500 000 people stayed in Brazil. The first period

when the Polish came to South America was after Napoleonic's epic in the 19th century. The first registered group of Polish residents came from Sołkowice, a small village close to Opole. Shortly after them, emigrants from the Prussian partition came. This period of emigration is called "Brazilian fever". It was officially known that country of Brazil gives some territory as well as there were many legends that it is a country that provides people with a number of opportunities and is rich in brilliants². As a consequence, only naive or extremely poor people decided to go to Brazil. Moreover, these journeys were illegal, but despite of this many adversities and big fear they decided to do it.



Fig. 1. The photo of Polish immigrants in Brazil

Source: <https://lovepoland.org/polish-diaspora>.

The first Poles arrived in Brazil after the November Uprising as political refugees. The settlement and economic migration date back from the beginning of the 19th and then in the 20th century (especially to the state of Parana and its capital – Curitiba). In 1914 over 150 000 Poles came to Brazil. They had their own parishes, organizations, schools; they published 18 magazines and newspapers. During the interwar period (1918–1939), the number increased by a further 50 000 people; and then, a similar phenomenon occurred during the Second World War and in the post-war period.

The beginning of Polish immigration dates back to 1869 when the first group of Polish people settled down in the state of Santa Catarina (today's Brusque). Taking further events into consideration, the phenomenon of immigration can be divided into 3 periods.

² M. Kula, *Polonia brazylijska*, Ludowa Spółdzielnia wydawnicza, Warszawa 1981.

First period took place between 1869 and 1889³ when, due to economic reasons, approximately 10 000 Polish immigrants came to Brazil. These people are told to come from the Prussian partition to the states of Parana, Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina. They were mostly countrymen who had difficult financial situation and decided to arrive to Latin America because of the opportunity to get a free land and well conditions of settlement.

Second period of migration is called “Brazilian fever” and started in 1888 when the abolition in Brazil was over. Due to that event as well as the beginning of Brazilian Republic it was much easier get to Brazil. As a consequence, more or less 100 000 people came to Brazil every year. Then, the next small period when many people came to Brazil was between 1894 and decade of 19th century was the time when biggest number of people came.

Then, the beginning of the 20th century was the third period of Polish migration to Brazil. By the First World War, 100 000–200 000 Poles had arrived in Brazil. It should be noted that the rapid growth of the Polish community meant that a considerable number of people had to adapt to the new reality. This has had many consequences, with the development of transport from Poland to South America being one of the most important. In addition, the newly arrived Poles began to associate, at first unofficially and then in the form of organizations.

The turning point was the restoration of Polish independence in 1918 and the changes in Brazilian government policies⁴ (Kula: 2012). Obviously, after Poland regained its independence, far fewer people wanted to leave their homeland, but the rural population’s situation did not improve significantly. Simultaneously, Brazil’s economic crisis significantly changed migration policy, which meant that it was much more difficult to settle there than it had been in the past.

However, the period 1918–1939 was the best period in terms of bilateral relations, as Poland and Brazil began diplomatic relations. As a result, a Polish consulate was opened in Curitiba in 1920. Moreover, many official Polish-Brazilian organizations were established during this period, so government support was necessary and important. The majority of the organizations will be described later in this article.

The most important person to impede Polish-Brazilian relations was the Brazilian President – Getúlio Vargas. He was strongly opposed to further immigration and his popularity was closely linked to the economic crisis in South America. Unquestionably, he was a nationalist who tried to create a strong, independent country with a unique identity. As one can easily guess, immigrants were not part of his plan. When he became a dictator in Brazil, he altered the law, which made it very unfavourable to immigrants.

During the Second World War, several thousand Polish refugees came to Brazil to receive shelter. However, some of them later emigrated to Canada or the United States. It is interesting to note that the people who came to Brazil at that time were often represen-

³ J. Łapaj, *Polacy w Brazylii: aspekty historyczne i współczesność*, Muzeum Historii Polski, Katowice 2013.

⁴ M. Kula, *Polonia*, op. cit.

tatives of the aristocracy, unlike the emigrants from earlier years. A great asset was that these emigrants were very engaged in helping the victims of the war.

After the Second World War, the Polish community's situation was quite bad, as it was not motivated and its hierarchy of values had changed considerably. This changed after 1960 when Poles began to cooperate and form communities again.

In the newest history particularly important was year 1978, because of the election of the Polish Pope – John Paul II, who revived the interest of Poland among Brazilians of Polish origin. Pope John Paul II visited Parana in 1980, because he wanted to meet descendants of immigrants who live in Curitiba. As we know Polish and Brazilian are religious nations, so this event caused the return to patriotism of both of them. It is necessary to add that Catholicism – missionary and priests always helped to cultivate Polish traditions by uniting people in church and celebrating religious holidays (for example Christmas or Easter).

Contemporary situation

At present, the situation of Poles living in Brazil is somewhat different than in the past. Currently, the Polish community counts between 1.5 and 3 million, although this is an approximate number, as no one has ever done any research on this subject. Most Poles live in the state of Paraná, where one in ten people is of Polish origin. In total, about 1.5% of the Brazilian population is represented by people of Polish descent. Most of them live in Paraná, Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul and the Paraná capital – Curitiba. It is estimated that up to 10% of the inhabitants of the state of Paraná are of Polish origin. The Brazilian Polish community is the second-largest, after the Polish American community.

Curitiba is also the second-largest Polish cultural centre in the world, after Chicago. The estimated number of Polish descendants in the state of Paraná – between 87 000 and 300 000 people – sounds incredible. A total of 8% of Brazil's population comes from Poland. Therefore, Polishness can be seen everywhere – traditional Polish cottages, traditional food such as „pierogi”⁵. And also churches and places where people can unite Paraná

Parana

According to a quote from “Brazil 4 business”:

Parana has the fifth largest Gross Domestic Product and the third-largest added value of the Manufacturing Industry, being the fastest-growing state in physical production and industrial employment in the South and Southeast regions in the last twelve years. In addition, it has a reference capital in quality of life, sustainability and innovation. Curitiba is considered the

⁵ „Pierogi” in Poland means course similar to dumplings.

best city to live in Brazil, the second with the best quality of life and one of the most innovative in Latin America. The region's industry seeks to develop through the qualification of the labor force to increase productivity and improve the quality of life of the people. Therefore, the state is one of the best destinations for investment in Brazil and Latin America⁶.

As mentioned earlier, Paraná became the most Polish state of Brazil, and Curitiba grew into the second largest diaspora in the world. The state of Paraná is the region where most Poles live.

Currently, the number of Poles and Brazilians of Polish origin – according to various sources – varies between 800 000 and 3 000 000. In recent history, the year 1978 is particularly significant – the Polish Cardinal Karol Wojtyła was elected the Pope and took the name John Paul II. John Paul II was particularly concerned about the fate of Brazilians of Polish origin. The Pope visited Paraná in 1980.



Fig. 2. Map of state of Paraná

Source: britannica.com.br/se%C3%A7%C3%A3o/tema/13011/13012/13014.

The attitude of the Brazilian authorities towards national minorities softened in the 1990s. Currently, the situation of Polish people in Curitiba is better than it was in the past. The Internet has facilitated regular contact between Brazil and Poland and between Brazilians and Poles. It helps a lot to cultivate traditions, promote culture and facilitate contact for young people. The Internet also enables many to learn the Polish language. Finally, after 150 years, there is even a chance that Polish descendants in Brazil attract the attention of the Brazilian government.

⁶ <http://www.portaldaindustria.com.br/cni/canais/brazil-4-business-en/states/en-pr/>.

Curitiba

Definitely, it can be said that Curitiba is the capital of Polishness in Brazil. Curitiba is the capital city of state Paraná, located in southern Brazil. It lies about 3 050 feet (930 meters) above sea level near the Atlantic margin of the Brazilian Highlands and the headwaters of the Iguazu River. The number of habitants with its surroundings approximately 3 000 000. The history of Curitiba dates back to the 17th century when people started to settle there. The city has developed thanks to European immigrants (mainly German, Italian, Poles and people from Eastern Europe) who came there throughout the years.

The forerunner of Polish settlement in Curitiba was a geographer – Sebastian Woś Saporski, who, in 1871, brought exactly thirty-two Polish families to the city. Soon, in the 1890, the first Polish organization was established in Brazil. It was named the „Tadeusz Kościuszko” society. Also, newspaper „Gazeta Polska w Brazylii” [„the Polish newspaper in Brazil”] was published in Curitiba.



Fig. 3. Example of Polish cottage in Curitiba

Source: <http://www.wilnoteka.lt/tresc/rowerami-po-brazylii>.

It is estimated that up to 300 000 people of Polish origin currently live in Curitiba, but unfortunately, there is no official data on this. Such a huge number means that one in every ten inhabitants of the city is Polish. Unfortunately, many of them have lost their connection with Poland due to various issues. However, on the other hand, the city is a place where Polish customs are still celebrated; many organizations promote Polish culture and traditions. These organizations will be described below.

This Polish community could not function well enough without Polish organizations, created by Polish descendants, thanks to whom the Polish spirit is still alive. These organizations have existed for many years, with a vibrant history. They show patriotism and commitment, and they support and develop the Polish descendants, who cultivate and promote Polish traditions, religion, and culture. The further part of the article presents the ways of cultivating Polish culture. Obviously, this article's form does not allow to describe all the contributors, but the most important figures will be mentioned. The most prominent persons in Polish-Brazilian relations are:

- Krzysztof Arciszewski (general, traveler)
- Florian Rozwadowski (engineer, revolutionist)
- Piotr Ludwik Napoelon Czerniewicz (doctor)
- Sebastian Woś-Saporski (father of Polish emigration)

The list of Polish organization we can find on an official site of the Polish embassy in Brasilia. They are divided into state in which they exist, so the division in State Parana is Associação Polônica Marcelo Janowski-Cepom.

There is a list of important organizations:

- a) Associação Cultural Polska Brasiliana Karol Wojtyła
- b) Associação Polono Brasileira PE. Daniel Niemiec
- c) Bosque João Paulo II
- d) Casa Cultural Polonesa PE. Karol Dworaczek
- e) Casa de Cultura Polônia Brasil
- f) Sociedade Cultural Abranches
- g) Sociedade Polono – Brasileira Marechal Piłsudski
- h) Sociedade Polono – Brasileira Tadeusz Kościuszko
- i) Sociedade São Casimiro
- j) Sociedade União Juventus
- k) Braspol (federation of Polish community centers from all over the country) was established in 1990 in Curitiba)

In addition, many places and events have been established which support the cultivation of Polish culture. For example, the park named after John Paul II, which is located near the Polish museum. Throughout the state, many Polish houses from the early colonization period can be found with exhibitions of items from that time. The open-air museum is the heart of Polishness. Every year a “święconka” takes place there – the traditional blessing of food on Holy Saturday before Easter Sunday. This event has become very popular, so much so that it has been included in tourist attractions' calendar.

Many different Polish traditions can be distinguished that help to promote culture among Brazilians, like: culinary traditions in Curitiba (dumplings or other Polish dishes can be easily bought there, a Polish craft brewery was established there) or Polish newspapers. Even a book dedicated to Brazilians of Polish descent has been published. Generally, Polishness can be found everywhere in this city. Even during a short walk, one can come across notice boards with Polish names. There is also a Polish Catholic Mission and the

only Polish consulate in Latin America that operates now. Furthermore,⁷ says that there is also a choir that was founded in 1975 to promote traditional folklore and religious songs. This choir was named “White Eagle”. Brazil also has the Mazowsze Institute, which is a branch of the Mazowsze School. On 26 November 2008, the Mazowsze Institute of Song and Dance was established. Dalsasso believes that Polishness is visible, especially in religion, music and folklore.

Current problems

Unfortunately, it has to be said that descendants of Poles face many problems in Brazil. These problems are often rooted in history; the major problems include:

- distance (a major problem, as many people have difficulty finding Polish products such as food, books, information about past or family history, etc.)
- no sense of belonging to the Polish community
- limited opportunities to learn the Polish language (Budakowska 2007) (in most places, the Polish language has not survived. A few years ago, a faculty of the Polish language was established at the local university, which is the only one on the continent. Naturally, this faculty is a huge benefit to local Poles, but it does not solve the problem. The Polish language has survived only in villages that are far from towns and are situated in places that are difficult to access, such as in the middle of the jungle. The Polish language survived in those places only because contact with the inhabitants was difficult throughout the 20th century, and President Vargas’ policy did not reach them)
- no knowledge of the Polish language by the young generation
- no involvement in building an image of Polishness and Poland (Souza, Zwierewicz: 150)
- weak financial support to promote Polish culture and traditions
- poor opportunities for Brazilians of Polish origin to study in Poland administration and obstructions issues (Budakowska 2007: 225).

The author of this article learned about the above issues by talking to people in Brazil. These observations were written down in a diary. To summarize the main problems, the author states that the most critical difficulties include inadequate access to Polish-language books, newspapers and Polish language teachers.

⁷ A.N. Dalsass, *Presença e contribuição dos poloneses na região sul de Santa Catarina*, Editora Insular, Florianópolis 2009.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be said that the difficulties of Poles in Brazil are much more serious and more widespread than one might think. One of the most damaging aspects may be the fact that Poles do not even know that such a large Polish community has existed in Brazil for over 150 years. Unfortunately, the government does not care about the Polish community, and thus people with Polish origins have to cope with problems on their own.

However, while searching for material to prepare this article, the author discovered that several articles had been written recently on a similar topic. This means that the Polish community is becoming more and more popular among the citizens, the government and the public. This may be because Poland is experiencing a shortage of people to work, as the Polish economy is developing very well. Hence, the second-largest Polish community in the world has become interesting for the authorities.

These are the articles published this year⁸, so one can only assume what the future prospects are. Perhaps at last, after many years, the public administration would take an interest in this community. Then, the Polish descendants in Brazil could receive some government support; they could visit Poland or even decide to live in Poland. The government should be pleased that the Polish communities want to return to Poland.

Currently, another essential aspect is access to Polish language teachers. Only a few teachers are interested in this initiative. Without knowledge of the Polish language, it will be much more challenging to understand Polish culture, to assimilate with it, and eventually to live in Poland. So if someone still feels the need to preserve Polishness in the middle of the Brazilian jungle, there is always an opportunity to do so.

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⁸ https://zpp.net.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Sprowad%C5%B4Amy-Polak%C3%B3w-z-Brazylii_raport.pdf.

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