

# Marzenna Nowicka, Marta Śliwa

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## Culturally programmed space of nursery – where we are going?

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*Marzenna Nowicka*

Uniwersytet Warmińsko-Mazurski w Olsztynie  
marzenna.nowicka@uwm.edu.pl

*Marta Śliwa*

Uniwersytet Warmińsko-Mazurski w Olsztynie  
marta.sliwa@uwm.edu.pl

## **Culturally programmed space of nursery<sup>1</sup> – where we are going?**

### **Summary**

The arrangement of the physical space of the nursery is culturally conditioned and is a very important element that influences the child development. The social functioning of children is being shaped directly by the type and origin of the elements present in kindergarten space, their arrangement, diversity and availability of different materials. Background of the research presented in the text refers to the theoretical perspective of the pedagogy of space, which emphasizes the role of the dialectical relationship between man and space in the formation of individual identity and the development of social relations. The method of visual ethnography and photographic documentation techniques supported by interviews with teachers of kindergarten were used in the study. The study included 9 kindergartens from Poland, Lithuania and the UK. The basic conclusion that emerges from the analysis of the accumulated body of research indicates that the spatial arrangement of kindergartens in post-communist countries still induces/ predisposes to the development of mirror identity operating efficiently under authoritarian rule. This kind of the interior arrangement reflects the conservative tendency to subordinate children and persistently correct their imperfections. Such a situation equals cultural look back, not forward – toward preparing children for a conscious and creative participation in society. Space of English nurseries promotes children's autonomy and self-determination.

**Key words:** physical space of nursery, cultural determinants, pedagogy of space, visual ethnography

### **Introduction**

Discussions concerning the quality of pre-school education usually focus on the core curriculum, diversity of the didactic offer of kindergartens, availability of those facilities in various areas, applied methods or the teacher's preparation to work with children. Con-

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<sup>1</sup> Different terms/names (nursery, preschool, kindergarten) relating to childcare are adopted in EU countries. It depends on children's age. Generally, in this article we refer to institutions of care and education for children between 3 and 5–6 years of age.

centration on those issues most frequently leaves out a very important element related to the quality of early education of children, namely, the conditions in which it is carried out, and more precisely – the physical space of a kindergarten.

Meanwhile, the place of education of a small child, the physical environment in which the child stays, is very important for development. The type and origin of elements present in the space of the kindergarten, their layout, availability, directly determine/shape the cognitive and social functioning of children.

Physical space is a part of material culture, understood as the totality of the products of the particular community. It consists of the immaterial part, such as patterns of thinking, human behaviour, norms, values, ideologies. These parts are closely linked, mutually influenced, impacted on each other. This connection is particularly emphasized in the anthropological approach to culture seen as a set of dependencies and inter-related elements. Layer of material is treated as a result of human behaviour, as R. Linton describes: “Culture is a configuration of learned behaviour and results, which components are shared and transmitted by the members of a given society” (Linton 2000: 44).

Thus, the arrangement of each space is always the result/outcome and reflects the symbolic and social space of culture (Kłoskowska 2007: 67–81). This also applies to public spaces, the pre-school facilities.

Transformation of culture in Poland and Eastern bloc countries associated with the transformation of the political system in the ensuing 90 years of the last century are also reflected in the appearance of pre-primary education of children. Democratization of social life in conjunction with the free flow of educational ideas from the West, resulted in many educational reforms. They changed the nursery space and made it more friendly for children and parents. However, the question arises: has the transformation of culture made a fundamental change in the transmission of pre-semiotic space? This question has become an impulse of exploration undertaken by our research.

### **What is space and what is its meaning for a human being?**

All activities undertaken by man are performed at a specific place and within a specific space. Space does not exist by itself; it is a human product and a tool of his thought. A human being is a point of reference in studies concerning space, since he is the one that affects its form. Space is “always *created by something* and exists *in time*, makes space for *something* and is created between *something*: objects, places, continents, events and thoughts (...)” (Papp 2002: 43).

Space is a starting point, the beginning for the existence of a place. H. Kwiatkowska observes that man, by taming space, creates places, through which the world becomes closer and more favourable to him (Kwiatkowska 2001: 63–64). The place has specific limits, clear barriers, but in return gives intimacy, safety and shelter; it is an asylum. On the other hand, space is limitless and boundless; it is considered equivalent to freedom and movement. Space becomes a place when it starts to be perceived as well-known to a given

entity (Zwiernik, 2009: 404). In the opinion of Y.-F. Tuan, “a place means safety, space means freedom: we are attached to the former and we miss the latter” (Tuan 1987: 13).

While analysing relations between the man and space, we should draw attention to E.T. Hall’s proxemic theory of space. This theory clearly articulates an inseparable relation between the man and his environment. Hall claims that “the relationship between man and the cultural dimension is one in which both man and his environment participate in moulding each other. Humans are in a position of creating the worlds in which they life, (...) which determines what kind of an organism they will be” (Hall 1997:13).

According to the social and cultural paradigm of environmental psychology, an entity is also not treated as an autonomous form, “but as an element of society, which in association (interaction) with other persons, searches for meanings in the environment and creates them” (Bańka 2002: 97). The essence of this paradigm lies in treating the environment as the entirety of social and physical processes, which constitute a result, but also a cause, of specific behaviours of the entity. “The entity is not therefore totally free in defining its own environment, since it is continuously defined by the environment” (Ibidem).

A small child is also defined by the conditions of the environment in which it stays – first of the family home, then the kindergarten. By undergoing socialization processes, the child internalizes the world that surrounds it. In the space of kindergarten, the child becomes a part of its surrounding, which includes things and other persons (Modrzewski 2008: 96).

### **Pedagogy of place and development of child identity**

The Polish precursor of the idea concerning the pedagogical role of the place in which educational processes are run is Maria Mendel. She created a category of “pedagogy of place”, emphasizing the educational importance of the physical environment conditions. She emphasized that “place is always meaningful, since ‘everything’ has its place. Events are held in some places, senses through which we understand the reality, and ourselves within it, are set in some places, with more or less clear, but always a present sense of relationship with a place” (Mendel 2006: 21). Places cannot exist without the meaning given to them by people, but at the same time, people cannot exist without places. Various relations are formed between those components (Mendel 2006: 32). Each place makes it an important space for humans, affecting their activity. Both adults and children behave differently at home and differently in various places outside. The understanding of the place is subjective, since this is what individual people take it for; one place can have many meanings (Męczkowska 2006: 29).

The space of the institution where children spend time is closely related to the course and the effects of teaching. As emphasized by J. Kruk, “an educational process always runs in real space, in specific conditions, which in a significant way determine its character (Kruk 2009: 487). Also R. Meighan observes, with reference to school, that its places

“suggest the possibility and opportunity to teach and to learn” (Meighan 1993: 44). The physical space of a kindergarten is thus related to the quality of education carried out in it.

The place also plays a self-creative role in the life of each entity. Through a place, the human being creates his own identity (Męczkowska 2006: 39). M. Mendel claims that everybody “becomes themselves with the educational ‘support’ of the place (...), since their being dwells in it, it is made possible through it. Educational interaction, deliberately and intentionally mediated through the place which by an attempt of the educator has been properly formed or – left unchanged – simply ‘played’ as educating, is the use of this interrelation” (Mendel 2006: 27). A. Męczkowska, for whom the notions of *place* and *space* are interchangeable, also noted the importance of a place for constructing human identity. As she emphasized – “a place, as a space for experiencing the world, makes a meaningful space for the processes of constructing the identity of entities” (Męczkowska 2006: 39). However, this is not a deterministic relation. This identity concerns mainly relations produced by humans in relation to space. Cultural transformation and the multitude of worlds of experiencing indicate that “human identity is not produced as much in specific places, but rather than in relation to those places” (Ibidem). And although man moves between different places, a larger part of the source place, primary in relation to others (for example, his homeland), always remains in him, which means that he identifies himself with this place and this place builds his identity (Ibidem: 39–40).

The significance of a place for the development of own identity of an entity is presented in a phenomenological approach by P.L. Berger and T. Luckmann. The process of a child’s internalization of the social world concerns not only interactions with persons in the environment, but also an affiliation to the place, things and items. The authors write that “identity acquisition is related to an assignment to a specific place in this world. Along with the subjective absorbance of this identity by the child, (...) the world indicated by this identity is absorbed” (Berger, Luckmann 1983: 207).

The spatial and physical conditions of a kindergarten room determine what type of “educating place” (Mendel 2006: 26, 28) the kindergarten will become. Signs present in its space make it possible or force specific behaviours of a child, providing the bases for the development of the foundations for the child’s own identity.

While referring to the issue of identity, it is worth noting that nowadays, in the age of cultural changes caused by the “postmodernist breakthrough in thinking” (Karkowska, Skalski 2010: 29), the conditions of its development are redefined. In the “liquid modernity” (Bauman 2006), former fundamental and clearly defined principles for constructing identity do not apply. It is not treated as the aim or the limit to be reached and it is not considered in terms of “necessity, irreversibility and essence” (Melosik, Szkudlarek 1998: 58). The identity of the contemporary person is a dynamic and changeable construct. Its character is negotiable and ‘process-able’. As J. Nikitorowicz writes: “it is a continuous task to be completed, renewing due to constant interactions, experiences, unceasing revisions of views and approaches, and an internal and external dialog” (Nikitorowicz 2005: 61). This meaning of identity is closely related to the construction of child

autonomy, strengthening its causation and raising criticism of the surrounding reality (Ibidem). Space and place play here a huge role, particularly since, following the track of Foucault's reflection (1998a: 29), they are involved in the knowledge-authority discourse, inseparably combining mechanisms of cognition and coercion. This knowledge is not emerging without impact of various types, and it is always used for justification of the message sent by the authority. For Foucault, an entity is a "susceptible body", which the authority disciplines and controls through produced knowledge and practices resulting from it (Foucault 1998b: 174).

## Research method

The diagnosis of culturally programmed transformation of the physical space of educational children institutions has been planned as a comparative ethnographic study of space of kindergartens in Poland, Lithuania and England. Selection of the research sample was purposeful and dependent on the availability of gathering research material. In these three countries, theoretically speaking, the same kindergarten education model (preparation for school) is used (Sobotka, 2011, p. 17). Cultural and historical background of this model is significantly different. Poland and Lithuania belong to the so-called "Communist capital bloc", which for many decades meant radically different political situation and the same time the different conditions of acting of educational institutions than in England.

The aim of the research was to examine the contemporary physical cultural environment of kindergartens and what behaviour sources are transmitted through this environment to children. The research was of a cognitive nature, and interpretation of spatial elements was aimed at determining the conditions for the children's activity, for building their self-determination and autonomy, which are the bases for creating their own identity.

Treating elements of space as a product of culture, we directed our interests towards visual ethnography. This method offers the possibility of applying various paths of data collection. The research used photographic documentation obtained through a technique referred to in the literature as *participatory photography*, or more adequately, in our case, as *talking pictures* (Nowotniak 2012, p. 86). The pictures were taken by the kindergarten teachers themselves, who implemented a general topic of the session entitled "Physical space of the kindergarten". The research covered three kindergartens in Poland (in a large city, children aged 3 to 6 years) three in England (one in a large and two in a medium-sized city, children aged 3 to 5,6 years), and three kindergartens in Lithuania (in a large city, children aged 4 to 6 years). Additional data were gathered with the use of interviews carried out on the basis of photos (one for each country), during which kindergarten teachers characterized the spatial elements presented in the pictures. The study was conducted in the first half of 2014.

## **Analysis of the kindergarten's space**

### **The general appearance**

#### *England*

##### Entrance and hall

It is used to encourage the entry to kindergarten, children are welcome here. In two kindergartens we can read on the door – ‘Welcome!’ The teacher in one kindergarten every day stands and greets all incoming calls. In the lobby, there are also places where parents can read the information for them. In one kindergarten there is a shelf for books about children, which parents can borrow. In the second one parents can attach their proposals regarding the classes or nursery decoration to a special tree.

##### Classrooms

Classrooms of English kindergarten are very large, often made up of several rooms. They are wide and open glazed. It is impossible reach visually every place in the room from a general view, because it is divided into many corners, ‘nooks and crannies’, alleys and alcoves. The cabinets are arrayed in different directions, not at the walls, they often form narrow passages. Children can play in them without being seen by the teacher, may remain in seclusion. But there are also places where groups can play together and the tables do not stand in the rows allowing children to play together in groups. Hall, when you look at it vertically, is divided into two parts – the first is the level of children’s activity. Shelves, equipment toys, space for hanging e.g. pictures on the wall are at the level of their vision and growth of children. Above, in the second part, different elements are prepared for children: tables, illustrations, information ornaments. There are also places for teachers and for parents. The general plan gives the impression of a multitude of equipment and components. The classroom is colourful and full of children’s creations. There is no doubt that this space is child-centered. There is no central part such as carpeting and there is not clearly extracted and exposed space such as teacher’s desk. The floor has a various texture, in places to work it is easy to keep the order, in the place for relaxation there are carpets and cushions.

The classrooms are bright, well-lit, indoors is a lot of light. Glazing provides open space, accessibility for everyone. There are many elements hanging on the walls and it is difficult to determine which of them is most important.



English kindergartens

### *Poland and Lithuania*

Separate analyzes of Polish and Lithuanian space nursery were conducted. As a result, it was found that the material environment of these institutions, considered in isolation from the political and social context in which they were generated, are very similar<sup>2</sup>. So here we present their join characteristics, without clear separation description of kindergartens in these countries.

#### Entrance and hall

This is a visit card of both, Polish and Lithuanian, kindergartens. It is used primarily for the presentation and exposition of kindergarten activities. This is a typical place designed for parents. There are some beautiful illustrations and photos of various activities and events, the cutest children's work are hung on the walls. Often we can find objects of tradition there or cabinet with trophies and diplomas that kindergarten won for participating in various competitions, unique single toys for occasional use.

#### Classroom

Halls, both in Polish and Lithuanian kindergarten are also large. There is one classroom for one age group of children. Classrooms are usually with the large windows, they are bright. Despite the size, kindergarten hall can be grasped at a glance and all its parts are easily visible, regardless of the point of observation. Teacher can see every child as well as who and what is playing with. Classrooms are rectangular in shape and clearly separate the front and back associated with the division into two parts: relaxation – with carpeted floors and open children's play areas and educational – with tables and chairs and the teacher's desk. Lockers are arranged along the walls, the tables – straight in a row. One large carpeting is used to play and for common activity, such as reading books with teacher. Its central placement does not provide intimacy.

There is always one main wall in the hall/classroom, usually the teacher's desk, audio-visual equipment, the most important information for children (illustrations of the alpha-

<sup>2</sup> The political contexts, social and cultural impact on the material space of kindergartens hasn't been taken into consideration in this research.



bet, code of conduct, etc.) or expensive aids or toys are located close to it. Especially these toys are rarely used and the children have to ask the teacher for permission to use them. Doors clearly separate hall space from other rooms in the building. No one can unintentionally look from corridor into the hall, and when parents bring their child they usually stand in the doorway. General view of the hall leads to the conclusion that everything here is in the perfect order. Everything is arranged, organized, many elements of the décor just embellishes the classroom and we can see that this space is prepared by the teacher. There are beautiful drawings, charts and computer printouts visible on the walls. There is a very little evidence of child's work.



Polish kindergarten



Lithuanian kindergarten

## Elements of the space

### *England*

In the kindergarten room we can see a lot of elements located in cabinets, shelves, on the walls. These are teaching aids, toys, children's works and relatively little amount of toys which are ready to use, like playground themed kitchen, theatre, shop. Definitely the most of space is occupied by boxes, cases, trays, drawers, containers, bowls, cups, in which there are elements for processing by children. They show clearly that children are the creators here; they work independently and can explore and observe. They can use all these elements, combine them, paint, press, soak, bury in the sand, and wash in water. The pads, drawing materials, shapes cut out of paper, crayons are prepared (often directly sprinkled on the table) and wait for children. Everything is immediately available, saying "Use me." Most importantly, these items are often changed.

As one of the teachers' said in an interview:

For example, coming into the room in the morning I had to prepare a place for children to work: to put some paper, glitter, cereal, pebbles in empty containers, to boil pasta and put it inside (...) It was necessary to insert the paper into the compartments. It had to be thin paper and thick cardboard and coloured one for children's choice. In addition to the containers it should have been some kind of a paper towel tube or box, because children like to tape and

create some models. I had to check that everything is in sufficient quantity, and if not, then I had to add something.

All elements in the corners allow for self-exploration and the children decide themselves how to use them. As another teacher said:

Toys and utensils are located everywhere and there are within reach for children. (...) It is the children's decision what they want to do and what to play with.

The books are stored in coffers, compartments; there are permanent elements of nursery space accessible to children. The corners, full of soft mattresses and pillows, allow easy viewing of books, or listening to them during the teacher's reading. An essential element in the space of each nursery, whose pictures we watched, was an array with markers, in the direct access of children. An important element was also the house where the children can play in complete seclusion. Classrooms in English kindergarten are very rich and varied. Moreover, by looking at the most of the elements it is not obvious whether a part is designed for girls or boys. The both gender can use them.

#### *Poland and Lithuania*

Elements of equipment are very tidy in the Polish kindergarten room. The space is dominated by thematic areas (corners), in which objects have their clear, unambiguous purpose. Strong gender domination is also visible here, for example, the areas for girls are full of dolls and in the corners for boys there are lots of cars. In two Polish and one Lithuanian kindergartens children had the small house/cabin they could play with. As one of the Polish teachers said:

All love to play with it and often quarrel about who might be there.

Some items, which had been placed too high, are not available for children. Similarly, the items are not destroyed which means that children do not have access to them. Permanent element of the room is a desk of kindergarten teacher. It's his/her personal space. Children have limited access to it, and it is a clear sign of the dominance of the teacher in the room. Private teacher's things, like a cup or bag, are on the desk. A pin board with notes, often lockable cabinet with teacher's stuff and a used kettle are close to it. Very often audio-visual equipment is also located here. Although it stands at a height of children, they are not free to approach and use it. It's actually owned by the teacher. In one of the photographed rooms the TV was locked in the cabinet inaccessible to children. In the nursery room children do not have personal belongings. In an interview, one of the teachers said that children can bring to the kindergarten their own toys only one day, on Friday.

In the halls for six year olds, and often even for five year olds layout of equipment is very similar to a classroom. This is evident both in the Polish and Lithuanian nurseries. Teacher's desk is located near blackboard, which additionally increases her/his rank as

a dominant person in dealing with children. Blackboard and what is written on it is the most important, more important than the toys that are located on the back of the room.

All elements in the kindergarten classroom clearly underline the teaching and they were teacher-centered. It can be seen who possess these elements, who is in charge, who is the most important. Perfect order, meticulous decoration of the walls indicate that here the important one is the teacher, who with his height provides, organizes, presents and allows child to do something.

Places are not prepared for children. Empty tables will be the site of action just in time marked by the teacher with the use of objects which she/he authorises. Elements of the space are among the teacher and she/he allows or not to use them. The child can't see some elements, because the teacher hides them in cabinets or in the back and brings when it deems appropriate. Despite the variety and colours of the Polish and Lithuanian kindergartens, classroom is static, and game components can be considered as 'finished', already 'invented' to play with at certain framework.

### **The social nature of space**

#### *England*

English nurseries are friendly to children and their space is a pro-social. Definitely it can be felt that the premises are subordinate to children. A homely atmosphere and small corners provide a sense of security. Children also have free access to any place in the room, they can move freely. They also have access to all the elements of space. In the space there is no sterile order. As in the workshop, everything has its place, but the layout of objects and furniture in the room is not pedantic. Depending on the needs, the children can play in small groups, in a secluded place, or individually. Thanks to divided crannies in the room the children do not have to interfere with each other. In many places, at the table, in the music corners or reading areas they have the opportunity to conduct individual talks with teacher or colleagues, without compromising on the observation of others. The corners for children's free play and movement are also provided. They can also relax on the soft, comfortable cushions. Pastel-coloured walls contribute to cheerful mood of the children.

#### *Poland and Lithuania*

The space in the Polish and Lithuanian nurseries belongs to the teachers and has limitations that could prevent children's socialization. Although it is seemingly colourful and filled with appliances for many children, it is clearly dominated by the teacher. A teacher has own personal space. Climate of the hall is stiffened, official, and everything has a designated place. It is underlined with the particular static system of placing the equipment in a room and the permanent arrangement of the tables. Children in this area are not able to retreat, shelter from view of others. One big rug in the middle of the room forces them to be in the community, constantly side by side with all the children in the group, with no rest or even partial isolation.

Children can't speak individually with the teacher without exposure to the observations of others. They can rarely play individually or in small groups. To take a break from their peers they have to look for another space—for example, the bathroom, where they will be alone, provided that the other children will not be using bathroom at the same time. Comfort of the child in the Polish and Lithuanian kindergartens interferes with the fact that children can't use freely all gathered toys. Many toys in kindergarten classrooms are located too high, and the use of some of them is dependent on the consent of the teacher (expensive toys, new aids). The colours of the walls in Polish nurseries are pastel. However, in the Lithuanian one of the walls is pink, which gives the artificial, infantile character.

### **Autonomy and creativity**

#### *England*

Space and objects in kindergarten favour the formation of a child's autonomy. It is expressed primarily in the availability of all elements of the kindergarten classroom. A child, without asking the teacher for permission, can use any equipment, toys and space. Also, what is extremely important, children have the opportunity to make their own decisions about what they will deal with. There is no priority seats for the teacher, while the child in different locations can act autonomously without intrusive interference of a teacher. In one kindergarten a child has got the opportunity to choose cabinets, in which will be the stored its clothing this day. That is not acceptable in Polish and English kindergartens. The quality of the items in the nursery are shapes the child's creativity. They are not 'ready', 'finished' but they are ready to transform. Often these elements also change. They could be even defined using the term 'garbage.' These are fragments, components for 'treatment', next to which there are always readily available tools that allow children to process them. The child must just think of the use of these elements, must think to expand their functions and try them out. In the kindergarten space hangers with aprons, overalls often can be seen which testifies to the fact that children perform different jobs and this can make them dirty.

It is characteristic that the children do not perform similar works to each other. Everyone creates its own interpretation on the same topic given by the teacher. The decor of the classroom does not matter, but the matter is what they can do in it, what actions they can take. We can say that the space is flexible, provides children the opportunity to freely move around and test environment.

#### *Poland and Lithuania*

In the Polish and Lithuanian kindergartens the space is teacher-centred. There are signs of teacher's dominance in the classroom, the main symbol of it is the teacher's desk. The child is not allowed to decide what they will be dealing with, and must ask the teacher for permission to use various items. Everything has to be arranged as required by the teacher. Children in a very small way participate in the preparation of the decor of the classroom. Mostly children have access to a ready-made toys. Their purpose, method of use is limited, 'programmed': dolls are for cuddles and carrying in a cart, and cars are for driving on the

carpet, on which the streets are drawn. That purpose is easy to identify by children, so they are playing with what defines the objects. Individual art works of children which can be seen on the walls of kindergarten classrooms are mostly the same, made with the same technique and actually difficult to tell them apart.

## Summary

The research demonstrated great differences in the organization and equipment of the kindergarten classroom space in England and in the so-called post-communist countries of Poland and Lithuania. These differences concern the general layout of the kindergarten classroom, the quality of elements, the social character of space and the direction of the child identity being released. Kindergarten classrooms in Poland and in Lithuania are very similar to one another, schematic, usually with a rectangular layout, with clearly separated relaxing and educating areas. Classroom's decorations are made for show and most elements are made by the teachers. There is a lot of equipment in the rooms, but they are characterized by stability and invariability. The furnishing of play areas demonstrates gender stereotypization.

In English kindergartens, the space is divided into small areas for individual or small group activities of children. The equipment with items of various types is very rich. Their characteristic feature is "processability". The elements prompt children to play, to experiment and to act.

The space of Polish and Lithuanian kindergarten is sociofugal. Teacher's domination limits children activities to a significant extent. Furnishing indicates the imposition of stiffly determined social roles. Children work, play and rest always under the teacher's supervision. They have limited opportunity to make their own decisions: they are to play according to the intended use of the toy, according to teacher's instruction, or using those elements and equipment that the teacher makes available to them. Therefore, children autonomy is clearly limited.

In English kindergartens, space has a clearly sociopetal character. Children can stay together in small groups, or play on their own, in isolation. They can choose their own activity and the teacher does not constantly supervise their activities.

The analysis of space in English kindergartens and in kindergartens in Poland and Lithuania demonstrates child and adult models assumed in education in those countries. Children in English kindergartens are treated as autonomous persons, endowed with many skills and abilities. They are granted the right to decide with what, when and with whom they may act. Thus, they are perceived as independent and creative persons, able to independently experience and explore the surrounding reality. Teachers trust the children's competences and pay attention to their activities and products. They are not afraid of the unpredictability of children's behaviour, and their main task is to create interesting cognitive, non-schematic, not-stereotypical situations with high potential for promoting development.

On the other hand, children in Poland and Lithuania are treated as dependent persons, who must be managed. It is assumed that their abilities will develop only through their activity carried out under the supervision of an adult. Teachers have no confidence in child competences; they precisely determine all activities and strictly define patterns of desirable behaviours. Their superior function is to control children's activity and to ensure constant supervision, since it is supported by the space of the kindergarten classroom. If we refer here to Foucault's reflection on the effect of institution, it can be claimed that the space of the kindergarten classroom is a particular panoptikon. A child is observed like a prisoner: "it can be seen, but it does not see; it is an object of information and not the subject of communication" (Foucault 1998a: 195). The space of kindergarten depersonalizes a child through the possibility of keeping incessant control over its behaviour.

## Conclusion

The kindergarten is a socially created space which has been assigned specific functions and a given meaning (Jałowiecki, Szczepański 2006: 316). This is space in which the child spends long hours every day, being subjected to its socialization effect. Kindergarten space is not neutral. "Places in which something happens are not clean. We are surrounded in them by rules and system, where space itself and certain codes make some practices possible and others impossible" (I. Wentzel-Winther 2006: 14). In this context, a discussion on the creative potential of the kindergarten space seems worthwhile.

The qualitative analyses, we used, do not authorize us to formulate generalizations. Certainly, to deepen and broaden the legitimacy of applications it should be studies social and cultural changes in individual countries consider their dynamics and direction and relationship with the education and upbringing of children. It also should be considered the selection of representative surveyed institutions in every countries. Although our qualitative analyses may be used to demonstrate certain tendencies in organizing the material environment for children at the stage of pre-school education.

A fundamental conclusion drawn from the analysis of the gathered research material is that the space layout in English kindergartens favours child autonomy and self-determination, i.e. features required for the development of mature identity in the future, while in post-communist countries it induces/predisposes towards a preference for features appropriate for foreclosure and uniform identity. Those features are needed for efficient functioning under conditions of authoritative power, and do not correspond to the contemporary social reality in those countries.

A 'foreclosure identity' means a strong attachment to an authority and unreflective acceptance of opinions and judgment propagated by those authorities. It manifests itself in involvement in activities of a totalitarian character, recourse into something that is known, and the lack of readiness to verify one's own views. An entity representing this type of identity is characterized by conservatism, a tendency to subordinate and distrust in contacts with cultural diversity. The space of Polish and Lithuanian kindergartens favours

the development of such a type of identity, since the quality and the layout of elements placed in this space block child autonomy by rewarding submissiveness and amenability with the teacher's domination stiffens rules for playing social roles and restricts activation of the causative nature of children. This space also prompts the development of a unified identity. By rewarding similar tasks and behaviours, achieved with the use of the same elements and aimed at obtaining identical effects, children are accustomed to being average, mediocre, submissive and well-behaved. Children in kindergarten are to act and think in a similar way, ideally at the same pace, using identical material resources. Therefore, the question should be posed how they will face up to changeable, variable conditions of acting in the reality outside of the kindergarten.

Cultural changes of recent decades, linked also with Polish and Lithuanian accession to the European Union, have almost removed old totalitarian inclinations in the activities of educational institutions from the social consciousness. However, as research showed interior decor and furnishings in Poland and Lithuania provide an expression of conservative tendencies to gain control over children and to persistently correct their imperfections, which means backward and not forward-looking culture, towards preparing children for conscious and creative social participation.

It seems, therefore, that in spite of the social changes and program declarations regarding the development of children, they are still educated in semiotic transmission of the physical space of the old regime. Compared to the old days, this physical space is only superficially changed, slightly powdered by colours and light, decorated with modern gadgets as toys or plastic utensils. Its hidden meanings, however, remain without substantial changes. Characteristically, this happens in both post-communist countries, which may indicate deeply established mental habits concerning the conditions of raising children in the community. Implementation of arrangement solution of space used in countries with well-established democracies such as England, it seems to be more difficult to realize. For this reason, it would be worthwhile to take further, broad, multi-faceted analysis of the physical space of institutions educate children in order to better identify the nature of these difficulties.

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