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## Observations on Finland in Polish travelogues in the interwar period

*Entire Finland works for the future* (Dębicki 1926: 57).<sup>1</sup>  
*It impresses with order and neatness, taste and reason,  
civilisation's dignity of its own, work and purpose of this work,  
care for health, education and comfort of the inhabitants* (ibidem: 46).  
*There is no lavishness and sumptuousness, yes it is modest but  
at the same time it is comfortable and prosperous. We do not see  
luxury here: we do not see extravagant vehicles or lavish costumes  
– but we do not see poverty or rascality here* (Węckowicz & Osiecimski 1925: 46).

On December 6, 1917 Finland gained its independence. This historic event became a key point of discussion and interest amongst intellectuals in the interwar period and a topic covered by many publications,<sup>2</sup> in the region in particular.<sup>3</sup> Finland was not only a newly formed country in Europe, but was also developing at an incredible rate.

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<sup>1</sup> Dębicki wrote it in 1909, 8 years before the declaration of Finland's independence. All the translations from Polish to English are mine.

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that prior to 1917, there were already various earlier publications about Finland, which had been, at that time, annexed by the Russian Empire since 1809 (before that the Grand Duchy of Finland formed part of the Kingdom of Sweden).

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, West Europeans (except Germans) were paying less attention to this new state. W.R. Mead, in his article "Perceptions of Finland" (1987) states, that the "strategic concern of Britain and France in the Baltic area gradually diminished. For a short while following the First World War, Lord Balfour was able to speak of 'protecting the nascent nationalities with the help of our fleet'. Thereafter, 'Baltoscandia' was left to its own devices (...). In the most scintillating essay written on Finland during the inter-war years, Georges Duhamel reverted to the themes of remoteness and winter. It was indicative of the image held of Finland that an incipient interwar tourist trade should advertise its principal attraction as being 'off the map'" (Mead 1987: 8). Therefore, French or British travelogues referring to Finland in that period are rare.

Of course Finland's independence did not go unnoticed in Poland and by means of this article we want to present some Polish, mainly literary (and touristic) descriptions of this country during the interwar period. Both countries shared history and many social and political similarities (Poland regained its independence on 11/11/1918), both were rural and bordering with dangerous Eastern neighbour – Russia.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, Poland and Finland were in quite good communication (cf. Pullat 1997 for many aspects).

Not surprisingly, Polish-Finnish cultural contacts in the interwar period became quite intensive. Scientific, artistic and sports exchanges occurred frequently, during which groups of Polish students were hosted by Finnish students, and then the Finns visited Poland in return (cf. Piotrowski 1977: 18–19, Czechowski 2009: 251–289.). In 1928 the Polish-Finnish Society was established in Warsaw (and its Finnish counterpart in Helsinki), which stimulated bilateral cultural and academic exchanges (cf. Michalski 1937). There was also the *Polish-Finnish-Estonian Magazine* (in Polish: *Przegląd Polsko-Fińsko-Estoński*), published between 1936 and 1938.

There was a political interest too. Józef Ziabicki, who worked in the Polish delegation in Helsinki in 1918, described various aspects of a possible strategic agreement between the two countries. He especially focused on the threat from the common eastern neighbour whose Bolshevik communists craved imperialist aspirations. Ziabicki looked at Finland and Poland as “natural political allies” and saw the possibilities of Polish-Finnish cooperation in protecting small nations within the Baltic Sea. He also emphasised mutual friendliness between Poles and Finns:

We can counterbalance our shrewdness, sensitivity and national enthusiasm for the exceptional strength of character, perseverance, persistence, that characterise Finns. While we admire the excellent culture, Finland managed to create its school system, municipal economy, cooperativeness, etc. in such adverse conditions; we care about the respect of the nations inhabiting those territories; the friendship with Poles, especially with political emigrants, awakens delight for our patriotism and noble viewpoints in the Finnish society. This contrast of characters creates an emotional basis of mutual Polish-Finnish fondness and liking. (Ziabicki 1919: 12)

Indeed, Poland attempted to create a kind of Baltic union, and the so-called “Warsaw Accord” was signed on 17 March 1922 by Poland, Finland,

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<sup>4</sup> Indeed Osmo Jussila (1987: 85) observes that even earlier “there has been tendency to seek parallels between Finland and Poland”, as the both countries were under the same Russian yoke (although their degree of autonomy was not exactly the same in the 19<sup>th</sup> c.; moreover Poland was divided between three states: Russia, Germany and Austria). See also Wasilewski (1925: VI, VIII), who mentions his publications on Polish-Finnish parallels at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> c. He also reminds that, on the initiative of the Finnish Party of Active Resistance, representatives of revolutionary and opposition organisations gathered in 1904 in Paris, where Poles and Finns together, for the first time, debated their plans of subsequent fights for freedom. In 1919, Wasilewski led the Polish delegation for the first Baltic Conference. Cf. also Ernits (1937).

Estonia and Latvia.<sup>5</sup> However, this convention failed, because the Finnish Parliament did not ratify it: probably because Finland did not want to increase tensions with its Soviet neighbour, but also due to strong German influences in Finland and anti-Polish propaganda. The latter cause is also very often mentioned in Polish writings of that time, e.g. Wasilewski (1925: 158–159), cf. also Kornat (2017).<sup>6</sup> Also Srokowski (1926) notes that, unlike in the Baltic States, the Finns treat Germans almost as the “only friends” (mainly thanks to the role they played at the time of forming of free Finland, when they helped to expel the Bolsheviks)<sup>7</sup>. He writes:

The attitude towards Germany and the attitude of Germany to Russia again determine the Finnish line of Russian policy. In some way, Berlin guarantees security for Finns in the face of Moscow, instead asking for indifferent attitude towards Poland and all East-Baltic federations, which, above all, clash with interests of Bolsheviks, who are German friends. Today there also is a question of the deterioration of our relations with Germany and Russia, despite the already held 12 “Baltic” conferences, and always with the participation of Finland. It triggers the automatic retreat towards the lines of adequately deep reserves, especially when we also fall out of favour of the Great Britain for which Helsingfors has a lot of respect. (ibidem: 50– 51)

Srokowski also adds that Finland still has to reckon with Sweden, which bases its policy on Germany’s position. And “Stockholm looks at Finland as a Scandinavian anti-Russian bulwark and has many indulgences for it” (ibidem: 52). That is why Sweden and Finland need each other.

Despite that political convolutedness, the curiosity of Polish writers about this new state<sup>8</sup> made them travel and describe it, mainly from the second half of the 1920’, when tensions around the Baltic Sea dissipated to a point. Most of their accounts were firstly published in periodicals.<sup>9</sup> For our review of impressions from those Polish travels around Finland in the aforementioned period, we chose the memories of several writers of that time:

- Stanisław Srokowski (1872–1950) – geographer, diplomat, activist, founder of the Baltic Institute (1926), which mainly covered Poland and its links to other Baltic states. He travelled to Finland in December 1926,

<sup>5</sup> Lithuania objected to it because of a sharp conflict with Poland in the matter of the Vilnius region.

<sup>6</sup> G. Meiksins, who describes sarcastically the role of Poland in the formation of Baltic policy in the interwar period as “tragicomic” (Meiksins 1943: 75), writes at this point like this: “Since the Germans were violently opposed to Poland at that time, because of Danzig and the Polish Corridor, the Finnish clients of the Reichswehr were instructed to defeat the Polish combination” (Meiksins 1943: 77–78).

<sup>7</sup> However Germany as a source of cultural and political ideas had positive reception in Finland even earlier (cf. Paasivirta 1989: 261, Klinge 1993: 201 and onwards).

<sup>8</sup> Some Finnish writers were interested in newly-independent Poland too, e.g. Veikko Antero Koskenniemi dedicated his poem *Runo Vapaalle Puolalle* (Poem for free Poland) in 1918, and Eino Leino dedicated two poems: *Suomi ja Puola* (Finland and Poland) and *Vive la Pologne!* in 1920.

<sup>9</sup> See a quite exhaustive list in Haltsonen (1952).

▪ Maria (in orthography of the time: Marja) Dąbrowska (1889–1965), novelist and essayist, she travelled to Finland in July 1927 with a trip organized by the Polish Society of Workers' Universities,

▪ Edmund Zalewski (1883–1962) – activist and politician. He participated in the same trip as M. Dąbrowska, but in his account he concentrated his description on the Finnish cooperativeness,

▪ Jan Rostafiński (1882–1966) – professor of agriculture. He travelled to Finland for professional reasons, and then described the Finnish farming methods, but he left also a touristic account of his trips.

▪ Kazimiera Hłakowiczówna (1892–1983) – poet, writer and translator. She travelled to Finland twice: in 1917 for her recuperation, and 1937 for an official literary travel.

▪ Wojciech Walczak (1916–1984), as a young geographer (later professor at the Jagiellonian University), he made a trip with his colleagues in 1938.

In our overview, we skip earlier travelogues,<sup>10</sup> even though those were published at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. in quite interesting moments of the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1905, e.g. those by Ludwik Włodek (1869–1922), journalist and diplomat, who visited Finland in 1906<sup>11</sup>; Zdzisław Dębicki (1871–1931), poet and columnist, who travelled to Finland in 1907 and 1909 (however his descriptions were published not until 1926); or Julian Talko-Hryniewicz (1850–1936), who travelled to Finland in 1916, but his account was published only in 1920. To summarise those authors admire Finland and its inhabitants, particularly their dignity (even their looks) and high culture, particularly in comparison with Russians.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Before the 19<sup>th</sup> c., knowledge about Finland was very limited in Poland, and Polish trips were rare and rather casual (see Chodubski 1997: 308–312). Chodubski (ibidem: 312) states that only in the first half of that century Polish tourist trips to Finland began. Cf. also Later-Chodyłowa 1997.

<sup>11</sup> He came to Helsinki on 02.08.1906, the day when an anti-tsarist mutiny in Russian garrison (the so-called “Sveaborg rebellion”, which broke on 30.07) was suppressed. Włodek’s account is written as a kind of novel, with dialogues, and it also contains an interview with Leo Mechelin, head of the Finnish government in that time. The book also has a chapter with ponderations on Finnish politics, written later, in April 1907 in Warsaw.

<sup>12</sup> In a few Polish accounts there also are deliberations on the fate of the Finns in their own autonomous country and on the Russian territory. They are like two different cultures of the same nation. E.g. Dębicki writes, that nowhere else did he notice such a contrast in people of the same nationality under two administrations. The Finn on the Russian side is pushed “to the lowest level of humanity”, while the Finn on the Finnish side is raised “to the heights of the noblest citizenship” (Dębicki 1926: 33). The Finn on the Russian side is contemptuously called *czuchna* and is an epitome of dirt, sloppiness, debauchery, drunkenness: “Czuchna from the vicinity of St. Petersburg is also a slave of the Russian who does not hesitate to face him as a master” (ibidem), whereas the Finn on the Finnish side is free and equal to his fellow citizens, and has reached a high level of culture and civilisation (here Dębicki admires not only the Finnish infrastructure and education system, but also coeducational schools and the eligibility of women to parliament). Dębicki writes that the Finnish Finn is first and foremost “enlightened”: “he leads

The Poles also are impressed by the Finnish civilisation and fast development of the country's infrastructure (waterworks, electricity, telephones) as well as system of education and equal rights for women. They all emphasise high standards of cleanliness. All the Poles are welcomed by Finns very warmly.<sup>13</sup>

We do not quote either purely information publications, e.g. the book on Baltic states by W. Studnicki<sup>14</sup> (1924), or the book on Finland by L. Wasilewski (1925),<sup>15</sup> which is a kind of handbook (history, economy, society and cultural development, politics).<sup>16</sup> We do not take into consideration either accounts of Polish professional travels to Finland, e.g. the brochure by R. Węckowicz and St. Osiecimski (1925), who wrote about Finnish farming and cooperativeness (after their visit in July 1925 between Helsinki, Tampere, Seinäjoki and Turku): we can find here mainly statistics and pure data (e.g. about a central cooperative society *Valio*).

### Stanisław Srokowski in December 1926

Srokowski made a three-week trip to Latvia, Estonia and Finland in December 1926. He wanted to see the post-war economic and spiritual life there, as well as the moods prevailing in the Baltic states (Srokowski 1927: 3). His description of Finland is quite brief: only on pages 44–59. He sailed

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up to the light, reads books and newspapers, is interested in live political matters and has a sense of his rights, as, at the same time, he has a sense of his civic duties" (Dębicki 1926: 36). That is why everything is developing in the Grand Duchy of Finland, and on the other side of the border, under the influence of Russian culture, everything has become stagnant and decomposed: "a drama of the final fall, without a trace of faith in rebirth" (Dębicki 1926: 38). Also Dąbrowska reminds the reader that up until recently Finland was regarded as one of the conquered tribes that had vanished and disappeared under Russian rule, without any civilisation of their own, and that the native Finns in Russia were contemptuously called *Czuchoncy* (Dąbrowska 1929: 87). The name *Čukhna/Čukhonets* (Rus. *чухна/чухня / чухонец*) still has an obscure etymology (deriving from Slavic *Čud* 'Finn' with a popular diminutive Slavic suffix *-ch(n)*; cf. Šafařík 1837: § 14.8 and *tšuudi/suutaa* in SSA), but it is very probable that for Russian people this name could have easy pejorative associations with Russian dialectal verb *чухнуть* 'to go musty' (< Proto-Slavic *\*čuxnŋti* 'to sniff; to stink', cf. ESS: 130–131); or with noun *чуха/чушка* 'piglet' (moreover in today's Russian slang there is a word *чухан* 'dirty pig, swine').

<sup>13</sup> Not only in official meetings, but also in contacts with everymen, e.g. when in 1907, Dębicki travelled in Finnish train, a Finn tries to talk to him, but finally they can speak only German. When Dębicki says him, that he is Pole, the Finn puts his hand on Dębicki's shoulder and says enthusiastically: "Brother" (Dębicki 1926: 26).

<sup>14</sup> Earlier, in 1909, Studnicki published another book on Finland (*Finlandja i sprawa finlandzka*), dealing with its problematic cohabitation with the Russian authorities.

<sup>15</sup> Wasilewski was brought up in St. Petersburg, so he had contacts with the local Finnic populations on the outskirts. However he visited the very Finnish autonomous country only in his adulthood, after 1905 (cf. Wasilewski 1925: VI–VII, Ernits 1937).

<sup>16</sup> Ernits (1937) and Piotrowski (1977) regard this book as the most valuable among all the Polish publications describing Finland in the interwar period.

to Helsinki from Tallinn by ship because the Baltic Sea was not frozen yet, although it was mid-December. During his travel, he makes mainly geographic and geological remarks (*ibidem*: 44–46).

When he arrives to Helsinki, he admires the city, built elegantly and comfortably despite the ubiquitous hard granite rocks. As for his impressions about the capital of Finland, it has an “interesting and pulsating image, prosperous and happy, though hardworking and tough” (*ibidem*: 48). Srokowski admires the life of Finns and the development of their country, he writes: “Finnish people are devoted to such intense scientific and cultural work in general that they keep pace with the first-class Western civilisations. (...) The universal preference of this nation for education is also worth admiration” (*ibidem*: 56). Srokowski puts forward the assumption that this attitude is supported by the climate (dark and long winter), and poverty of the country. At the end, he notes that Finland is a country of high prices, which may discourage foreigners from coming. The second factor of difficulty in travelling around this country is also inhabitants’ poor knowledge of languages other than Finnish and Swedish.

### **Two glances at Finland during the same trip in July 1927: M. Dąbrowska and E. Zalewski**

In July 1927, a Polish group of 64 intellectuals set off to Latvia, Estonia and Finland. The trip was organised by the Polish Society of Workers’ Universities and managed by MP Kazimierz Czapiński. We have two accounts of it: a more literary one by Maria Dąbrowska (1929), and a more statistical one by Edmund Zalewski (1928).

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, all of them were first invited by Hjalmar Procopé<sup>17</sup> to a tea party to the Embassy of Finland in Warsaw. There also were a few important Polish politicians: senator Stanisław Posner and MP Ignacy Daszyński. Next the group went to the main railway station. The train, except normal coaches, also had special carriages for the Marshal Piłsudski and the Polish Government, going to Vilnius to attend the coronation of the picture of Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn.<sup>18</sup>

After spending some time in Latvia and Estonia, they sailed from Tallinn to Helsinki to explore, what Dąbrowska believed at that time, a fabulous country, but upon arrival in the capital of Finland, the reality did not live up to Dąbrowska’s expectations. She imagined the country as being fabulously “built of white marble” and very developed. She however saw Finland green but drab. She also was surprised that some places in the capital

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<sup>17</sup> Hjalmar Johan Fredrik Procopé (1889–1954), ambassador of Finland in Poland 1926–1927, important diplomat, also as Minister of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>18</sup> In Lith. *Aušros Vartų Dievo Motina*, in Polish: *Matka Boska Ostrobramska*. The coronation of this miraculous painting took place on 2 July 1927.

city still did not have a proper sewage system in place (p. 71). For the first two days, Dąbrowska felt that this country had “cheated” her, that she could not find a way in. She noticed only negative aspects of Finland’s life. For example, she did not like that Finns, more often than not, kept their windows closed, even though she was told this was to protect houses from flies, dust and cloth moths. Dąbrowska was also frustrated with Finns’ sluggishness. At one point, she noted that when someone was talking to Finns about something cheerful, they “smiled only after an hour,” and when someone asked a question, they did not “respond until the next day”<sup>19</sup>. She also found that Helsinki, built entirely of grey, heavy and uniform granite, overwhelmed her. She did not like darkred houses, “similar to barracks” (p. 73) in the countryside, or the language that separated her from the natives and increased the sense of alienation.

Only from time to time, nature’s little treasures (e.g. colour of the sea, beauty of an island) aroused her fondness for this place. However:

The heart felt the spasm of uniting with something so far unknown, and very marvellous – and suddenly it was dying again. There was no spell that would fix this state. I could not find the right trace to reach Finland – it appeared to me from afar for a moment and disappeared. (p. 73)

And finally, one day, quite by chance, the door to Finland was miraculously opened by a Finn. That day, the entire Polish group was travelling by train on a trip to *Hemmellinna* (i.e. Fin. *Hämeenlinna*). That man sat in the same carriage. Dąbrowska writes that his appearance was “honest and bucolic – typical for Finns from Karelia” (p. 73). “He was seated motionlessly and seriously, as befits a Finn, he showed no desire to change his poise until the end of the journey” (p. 74). However, seeing cheerfulness of the Polish group, the Finn gradually succumbed to this mood and finally dared to ask if this group was from Poland, because he had heard from a friend that Poles were taking the same train. Encouraged by the friendliness of the group, he began telling them about himself: he used to be a dancer in a theatre, but then he was so thin that the people hardly noticed him. Now that he was chubbier, he was writing dramas and librettos for operettas. His name was Väinö (Dąbrowska transcribes it as *Vainö*). He also explained the secrets of the Finnish character:

They are marked by that they last for a long time in one disposition. If they sit down and rest their heads on their hands to meditate, they can sit like that for two days. If they are having fun, they lose consciousness. And when they get angry – (...) they will not stop until blood is spilt. (pp. 74–75)

When the group reached Jukola station Väinö explained that Finland’s most famous musician, Jean Sibelius, lived there. As the Poles were ac-

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<sup>19</sup> With regard to this slowness, she was surprised that the Finns gave birth to the famous fast runner Paavo Nurmi. Indeed, in the 1920s he was famous, winning gold medals at the Olympics in Antwerp (1920), Paris (1924) and later in Amsterdam (1928).

quainted with his music, they admired the place where the maestro lived:<sup>20</sup> “in the greenery of birches and spruces”. Dąbrowska notes: “A wave of warm understanding permeates our hearts” (p. 75). Later on, the Poles ask Väinö to sing some Finnish songs, but he is more inclined to sing couplets from his operettas: “He is singing them with solemnity, selflessly, with the desire to arouse delight” (p. 75). And although the performance is not impressive, the Poles listen to it happily and applaud with delight. They all feel so good in their own company that Väinö is “enchanted, in love, seduced.” He suddenly decides that he will carry on with the Polish group, explaining: “I will always have my wife, he says, but today only I have all of you” (pp. 75–76). Väinö then got off at his station only for a moment to pass packages for his wife and children, whom he was visiting for the summer. He also bought a ticket for further journey and, “happy, frightened, ecstatic”, he returned to the compartment. In Hämeenlinna, he accompanied the Poles all day and he gave them details on various subjects. Väinö sang too. On the way back they talked about his wife (so the Poles sent a postcard to her: in their message, written in German they apologised for taking Väinö on the trip and thanked her for her husband’s company) and his daughters. And Väinö showed poems he got from them some years before, when he was in hospital. He read them aloud: firstly in Finnish and then attempted in German. Dąbrowska was enchanted and wrote:

I listened to these inept words, I looked at our new Finnish friend, but I did not see his face, in an ecstatic smile, or his gentle pale forehead. I saw a naked and pulsating human heart, the heart that is the same everywhere. That heart suddenly opened Finland to my eyes. The value, the beauty, and the specificity of this country were now easily seen and appreciated, and the initial, exhausting indifference turned into an inexplicable, tender closeness, which showed me everything in proper and charming light (p. 77).

As time went on, Dąbrowska is more and more enthusiastic, and writes: “The greatest charm of Finland is its transparency and wonderful, one would say, monumental, uniformity of climate and landscape. Not monotony, just transparency and uniformity” (p. 78). A similar statement will be repeated: “Uniformity, transparency and austere simplicity, which are the hallmark of the climate and landscape of Finland, also characterise, as I managed to see, the local people, their homes and their tools” (p. 84). As for the shape of this land, she notes that the two landscape components dominate: swamp and rock. She states that rock is the foundation of Finland. The swamp, by contrast, “gives this brightly beautiful country a stigma of sweetly poisonous melancholy and boundless nostalgia” (p. 79).<sup>21</sup> Dąbrow-

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<sup>20</sup> Sibelius’s house, so-called *Ainola* (from his wife’s first name: Aino) was located a bit further, on the shores of Lake Tuusula in Järvenpää. So rather, it’s about the Jokela station than Jukola.

<sup>21</sup> Here she also adds that Finland’s name *Suomi* derives from Finnish *suo* ‘marsh/swamp’. The same statement can be found in the writings of other Polish authors, as it



ska also pays attention to a dominant smell of coniferous forest: “the resinous aroma of spruces and pines permeated everything” (p. 80).

At some point, Dałbrowska begins to use the Finnish name *Helsinki* instead of the Swedish *Helsingfors*, explaining: “since I became open to the charm of Finland, I am not saying Helsingfors, but Helsinki, because this Finnish name sounds more affectionate than the Swedish one” (p. 80).<sup>22</sup>

Later in the book, Dałbrowska describes a day trip to the *Hogland* island (Fin. *Suursaari*, Rus. *ГОГЛАНД*<sup>23</sup>). The group sailed out of the port on board of *Eläköön* (‘viva, long live’), a yacht owned by the President of the Republic of Finland. They owed such a privilege to the fact that the then government was moderately socialist, and also thanks to the Prime Minister Väinö Tanner (his tenure 1926–1927), who often accompanied them, and was also on this trip. Another notable person who joined the group was Tytus Filipowicz, the then ambassador of Poland in Finland, and his wife (Wanda née Krahelska). In the description of this short trip, Dałbrowska pays attention primarily to the rich colours of the sea.

However, it is not only the nature that impresses Dałbrowska. Looking at the architecture of Helsinki, she emphasises its main component, which is granite: “the beauty of Helsingfors is hard, even nostalgic – one could say that it is bare – but in this unembellished nakedness there is some audacious directness, reliability and solidity that strongly appeals to our feelings” (p. 84). Similarly, red houses in the country side, which initially she did not like, because they resembled “boxes or barracks”, now evoke in her a desire to even stay in one of them for longer. She is delighted that “there is not a bit of pretentiousness in them” (p. 84), because their functionality is most important. She also realises that their traditional red colour is practical in winter, when everything is white. And now she writes:

On the periphery of the world, where that land stretches between the sea and the deserted North, Finnish culture could grow without interruption, even in the absence of independence. There one acted calmly, without stopping, not being subjected to hurricane cataclysms so damaging to other countries, which were thrown more at the crossroads.

The factor that created the civilisation of Finland was also the Swedes. We can call it a happy coincidence that Finns were conquered by the Swedes before they met Russia. (p. 86).

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was very popular at that time. However nowadays, this theory is considered as a result of the folk etymology and is not recognized by modern linguists (see *Suomi* in SSA).

<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, she does not inflect this Finnish name, although today it is inflected, just like similar feminine nouns in plural diminutives. Indeed, the ending of *Helsinki* sounds like the diminutive form of feminine plural nouns in Polish (e.g. Nominative sing. *malina* ‘raspberry’ > dimin. *malinka* ‘small raspberry’ > Nominative plur. *malinki* ‘small raspberries’).

<sup>23</sup> This rocky island is located in the Gulf of Finland about 40 km from the Finnish city of Kotka, halfway between Helsinki and St. Petersburg. Before the Second World War, it was a popular holiday destination with a restaurant and a casino, the remains of which can still be seen today. In 1944, the island was taken over by the Soviet Union.

Indeed, the Swedish presence did not allow Russian expansion into the Finnish land, but it was ever-present in the occupied Finland's territories for a long time (from the 12<sup>th</sup> c.), and it did not allow a free development of the indigenous Finnish culture, which only survived in the countryside. At the time when Dąbrowska was visiting Finland, it had only been 10 years since Finland gained its independence and the uninterrupted development of Finnishness. For those reasons, Dąbrowska understands that it cannot be based on a rich past, but she admires that this civilisation is now rapidly developing: "it spreads wide, penetrates all corners of life, reaches all layers and gives its benefits to everybody. All the striving of this civilisation is characterised by a specific finitude and by consistently bringing everything to its limits" (p. 88). Also by adopting this approach, Dąbrowska explains the suppression of communism in the bloody civil war in 1918, as well as the equality of women<sup>24</sup> – here, Dąbrowska also notices the Finnish consistency: in that period, in the government of the abovementioned V. Tanner, the first woman minister Miina Sillanpää (1866–1952), was appointed the Minister of Labour. Earlier in life, she experienced the hardships of a worker and a servant.

Dąbrowska, very sensitive to the cooperativeness, also emphasises the achievements of Finland in this field. She writes that Finland has brought it "to extraordinary development, today it is in second place after England in this respect" (p. 89).<sup>25</sup> She also emphasises other Finnish customs: e.g. the fact that "sport is a necessary addition to urban life" (*ibid.*). She also admires the Finnish cleanliness, and the closed windows, which surprised her so much in the beginning: "Finns hide their interiors neatly, truly charming" (p. 89). Finally, she stresses the ability of Finns "to build, organise and subsist against and in defiance of all reality" (p. 90). It was this ability that

allowed them to make the majority of the population relatively prosperous and to achieve a high level of social organisation of life, all with a poor quality of soil, with a harsh climate, and with only two resources – water and wood – and only one ally: earlier mentioned isolation, giving them an opportunity to patiently make all kinds of attempts. (p. 90)

And she adds: "The fierce force that commands a Finnish man to go so far and firmly in the direction he has chosen does not make him doctrinaire or intolerant at all" (*ibid.*). And she continues: "The innate calm and habits of the already deeply rooted democratic culture of cohabitation make Finns

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<sup>24</sup> Finland was the first country that gave women full equality in 1906 (New Zealand in 1893 was the first to granted the women the right to vote, but not to be voted), and the world's first women were elected to the Finnish Parliament in the 1907. Also the percentage of women among university graduates since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. was high, and much higher than in Poland (Haavio-Mannila & Sokółowska 1978: 191, 214).

<sup>25</sup> Earlier, in 1913, Dąbrowska published a book, where she delightedly described the achievements of Finland in the field of cooperative societies. However, in this book she used information taken from other sources. And it was not until 1927 that Dąbrowska visited Finland for the first time.

perfectly capable of enduring or facing contradictions, which are present in every society, with sweet tolerance” (pp. 90–91).

As a writer, Dąbrowska was also interested in Finnish literature, but language was a barrier. Fortunately, Wanda Filipowiczowa gave her two songs (*runos*) of *Kalevala* translated into Polish by her sister<sup>26</sup> and a novel (“peasant epic”) *Seven Brothers* by Aleksis Kivi in the French translation by Jean-Louis Perret. She also mentions the famous nineteenth-century Finnish poets: Runeberg and Topelius, who wrote in Swedish, and that is why some people considered them as Swedish writers. She reminds that Runeberg in the Polish encyclopaedia by Orgelbrand<sup>27</sup> was still called one of the “favourite Swedish poets” (p. 94). However, Dąbrowska knows that it was these romantic poets who were “the driving force” of the Finnish nation: “They are, in a sense, its spiritual creators, they made it aware of its separateness, its value and its tasks” (ibid.).

In addition to literature, she also admires Finnish art in the Ateneum gallery and states: „Everything is painted with a visible desire for honest, solid work” (p. 95). She also appreciates the talent of the famous Akseli Gallen-Kallela, who among others illustrated the *Kalevala* and who wished to monumentally “capture the landscape of Finland and its present, just as he immortalised its mythical past” (ibid.). She has a different opinion on modern painters: Hugo Simberg, Juho Rissanen, Tyko Sallinen, Marcus Collin who “are not afraid to depict monstrosity, ugliness, deformation in the subject, line and colour. A cosmic fear lurks in their paintings” (p. 96). However, although almost all of these paintings show human misery, they arouse “a violent sense of the value of life, they intensify in us love and strength to endure life.” She also does not forget about folk art, after visiting exhibits at the Ateneum gallery and in the ethnographic museum. She reminds that famous Finnish knives are derived from folk art and are beautifully decorated. She adds that those that bear the word “Kauhava”<sup>28</sup> are regarded as very good. She also admires woven carpets and blankets, similar in the production technique to the oriental ones.

Finland gained Dąbrowska’s admiration, and the penultimate day of their stay sealed this feeling when the group visited a Finnish envoy whose name was Mukari, near Hämeenlinna. The greatest impression was made on Dąbrowska when Finnish songs were sung, the first of them began: *Yksin istun ja lauleskelen aikan on niin ikävä*<sup>29</sup>. “The more the songs were

<sup>26</sup> It is about Maria Kraheńska-Tolwińska, who, at the beginning of the 1920s, was a cultural attaché at the Polish embassy in Helsinki. In the years 1925 and 1927 her translations of two *runos* of the *Kalevala* were published in Polish periodicals.

<sup>27</sup> *Encyklopedia Powszechna* (Universal Encyclopaedia) published by Samuel Orgelbrand in 1859–1868 was the first modern Polish encyclopaedia.

<sup>28</sup> So far, knives produced in the small town of Kauhava in southern Ostrobothnia are considered the best. Each June sees the Kauhava International Knife Festival.

<sup>29</sup> The song *Rannalla-istuja neito* (A maiden sitting on the shore). Its first verse is: *Yksin istun ja lauleskelen, aikan' on niin ikävä, vesi seisoo ja linnut laulaa eikä tuuli-*

pathetic, the more they intensified the closeness of all people and the feeling of the allure of life, coming with powerful waves, like a violent recovery after illness” (p. 102). At the end, Dąbrowska calls Finland “the easternmost and northernmost post of European civilisation. And this is a post that represents this civilisation in an excellent and leading way” (p. 104). She also expresses the desire to return to this country in the winter.

Edmund Zalewski, who was on the same trip as Dąbrowska, focused almost exclusively on the co-operative societies in Finland. The author gives a lot of data and numbers, almost like meticulous statistician, and there are not many personal impressions (although the subtitle of the publication promised it). At the end of the book there is a bibliography, so Zalewski wrote this account with help of detailed information from these sources. However, despite the fact that dry facts prevail in this publication, we can see Zalewski’s great admiration for this country, both for its rapid development, as well as for its culture and customs. Some situations surprise him:

Real democracy is reflected here in everyday life at every step. Vaino Tanner, the chairman of the ministers, then replacing the president of the Republic, walked with our trip, like everyman, without any police and military assistance. This fact surprised all of us, accustomed to unnecessary ceremonies, which we are witnessing so often in our country. (Zalewski 1928: 10)

The author admires the education of Finland: it is available everywhere and for everyone, even for those who do not have the life of intellectuals: “Education in the workers’ spheres and professional knowledge in the agricultural spheres make it a country of high social and economic culture” (Zalewski 1928: 11). He also admires the mechanising of life, electrification of the whole country, and ... full prohibition. Focusing on the cooperativeness, he repeats that Finland is called an “exemplary country of cooperation” – this name was previously used by M. Dąbrowska in the title of her brochure from 1913, and Zalewski also refers to this publication. He writes a lot about the association *Pellerwo* (about which Dąbrowska also wrote earlier), but even more about the largest Finnish cooperative *Elanto*, because:

Visiting the organisation “Elanto” and central organisations, for the foreigner – a Pole, the vitality of the cooperative societies is very comforting and restores his faith. In Finland, this current, even for a superficial researcher and an average observer, is already a striking example of the excellence of forms of the social economy – the cooperative one. (...) The enthusiasm and energy of work are characteristic of Finnish cooperatives. Seemingly they may be too cold, but their work done in the continuity of cultural development, as well as constant momentum, increasing year by year, in creating and expanding cooperative institutions, testify to hot hearts, capable of loving great social ideas. In the name of these ideas they have a great social ambition that, in recent years, puts their country more and more on the forefront of European culture and its future! (Zalewski 1928: 36, 40)

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*kaan vedätä* (2x)! (I’m sitting and singing alone, time is so boring, water doesn’t ripple and there’s no breath of wind (2x)!).

Finally, it is worth noting that the trip in Zalewski's account seems very factual and intense: they visited a lot of cooperatives, factories, enterprises, farms, shops or schools. However, we will not find such information in Dąbrowska's text, because, as a writer, she would rather intuitively show the external beauty of the country and the inner beauty of the Finns.

**Short accounts in the magazine *Przegląd Polsko-Fińsko-Estoński*  
by Jan Rostafiński and Kazimiera Hlakowiczówna (1937)**

In the above-named magazine dealing with Polish-Finnish-Estonian relations, there are not only articles referring a multidisciplinary cooperations between the three countries, but also personal accounts and impressions from touristic trips in Finland.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> issue of the magazine, Jan Rostafiński describes his visit in Finland. Although the exact date is not mentioned in his text, it is sure, that it occurred recently. Moreover, certainly Rostafiński travelled in Finland many times, because already in 1928 he published a brochure on farming methods in Finland. Also in this short article, written in 1937, he gives many agricultural and botanical details (as a professional bias). He also gives some geographical information. However, the most interesting is what he writes about the Finns and their life. He remarks: "Finn, his home and the city are characterized by purity and truthfulness, and the fact that theft is unknown in this country. There are no beggars. Everyone works and is honest in trade" (Rostafiński 1937: 8). He writes that in the beautiful weather, the city of Helsinki is like Côte d'azur. He reminds that on April 1, ice cream sales begin on the streets, even if it is still cold. Although he admires the Finnish nature as a "monotony of beauty", he likes the architecture of Helsinki and the open-air museum in Seurasaari. He also recommends to see Imatra's waterfalls and the city of Vyborg. Then quickly on boats through the lakes to Tampere, Oulu, Kemi, Rovaniemi and further north. He only complains about mosquitoes. He reaches Ivalo and Inari. There, he admires Lappish and Finnish knives (Fin. *puukko*). Next, to Pitkäjärvi (where one can try rafting through the waterfalls) and Petsamo (city full of legends), and finally Kirkenes as well as Boris Gleb (Rus. Борисоглебский, Finn. *Köngäs*) and back. Moreover, he talks about the Laplanders: those who are settled and those who are traditionally itinerant. He also is delighted to fish. Finally, he describes the colour associations of the Finnish flag with the elements of the country's life (white and blue).

Kazimiera Hlakowiczówna has been in Finland in two periods: still under Russian rule (she was in a Finnish sanatorium "in the second year of the Great War", until the revolutionary year 1917<sup>30</sup>), and in winter 1937, i.e. 20

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<sup>30</sup> During the World War I, she worked as a nurse assistant in the Russian Army. In this Finnish sanatorium, she was not only nurse, but also she was convalescing after

years later, in independent Finland. That is why she has an interesting comparison of two Finnish realities, and she writes her article freshly on her return from her second stay (her text is included in the jubilee issue of the magazine, on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Finland's independence). She begins her story with her first impression at the first contact with Finland: noticing the contrast between a "dirty and stuck, drunken grandeur of St. Petersburg and the Finnish Railway Station, where everything was done quietly, efficiently, with some exquisite care" (Hlakowiczówna 1937: 33). At the same time, she characterizes Finns as "calm, diligent, accurate" – she even wonders how such people could be subject of "historically irresponsible Russian power" (ibidem: 34). When in the winter of 1937 (after a long journey from Tallinn on ice-bound Baltic Sea) she comes to Finland, which is now free, the country seems her even more beautiful, although she stays there only 5 days. Her guide in Helsinki is Miss PhD. Hallstén-Kallia<sup>31</sup>, representing University Women.<sup>32</sup> They visit e.g. bookshops, where Hlakowiczówna admires beautifully published, though cheap books. Miss Hallstén-Kallia gave her several books for children, in which the background of forest and water prevails (unlike a tradition of children's books in Poland). Then they go to the Parliament, where a lady MP, feminist, welcomes them. Hlakowiczówna also admires the building itself, its "immense elegance, expensive simplicity of interiors, using very valuable materials" (ibid.: 35). Then they go to the office of the most famous Finnish voluntary auxiliary paramilitary organisation for women "Lotta Svärd". Hlakowiczówna also meets: the leader of the Finnish Centre of PEN International,<sup>33</sup> the director of the Finnish National Theatre,<sup>34</sup> the writer Aino Kallas<sup>35</sup> and the poet V.A. Koskenniemi<sup>36</sup>. At the Art Museum, she admires its collections, and she was particularly impressed by an Akseli Gallen-Kallela's painting "Lemminkäinen's Mother" (Fin. *Lemminkäisen äiti*).<sup>37</sup> She wonders how much there is a Finnish and Swedish inspiration in these collected works. At the same time, she notes that it is even difficult to call the inhabitants of this country: *Finn* or *Finlandczyk* (Finlander)? The first

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being suffered from a bad case of dysentery. When October Revolution broke out, she already was in St. Petersburg.

<sup>31</sup> Armi Hallstén-Kallia (1897–1956). Since 1937, she has been elected leader of *Suomen Naisyhdistys*, which was a Finnish women's rights organisation.

<sup>32</sup> In Finnish: *Suomen Akateemisten Naisten Liitto*, in Swedish: *Finlands Kvinnliga Akademikers Förbund ry*.

<sup>33</sup> She does not give his name, so we can assume that it is about Otto Manninen, or F.E. Sillanpää.

<sup>34</sup> It was certainly Eino Kalima (1882–1972), Theatre's director 1917–1950.

<sup>35</sup> Daughter of Julius Krohn, folk poetry researcher, and sister of Kaarle Krohn, folklorist.

<sup>36</sup> Veikko Antero Koskenniemi (1885–1962), writer, poet, journalist. He had affection for Poland. In 1918, he published a poem *Runo vapaalle Puolalle* ('Poem for free Poland').

<sup>37</sup> The painting illustrates a passage from the Kalevala, in which Lemminkäinen's mother, keeping her hand on her dead son's heart, is waiting for a bee from the god Ukko and hoping to bring her son to life again.

term would exclude Swedish-speaking population of Finland, and the second one, though it seems to be neutral, is considered offensive and invented by the Russians.<sup>38</sup> She also states that the degree of nationalism in contemporary society is very high. Hlakowiczówna also visits Turku and its royal castle, which surprises her with the view of museum furniture, similar to the decor of most Warsaw apartments. And as far as Finnish houses are concerned, she likes their good quality, simplicity and cleanliness. At the end of her article, she writes: “A high standard of living is very striking in Finland, the taste of beautiful things, and for example the taste of poetry, not found anywhere else” (ibid.: 37). Although this stay in Finland in 1937 was short, Hlakowiczówna felt “a warm liking for this country” (ibid.: 35) and expressed her willingness to visit it again.

In the same jubilee issue of the *Przegląd Polsko-Fińsko-Estoński* from 1937 there also is an account of Henryk Bezeg, member of the administration of the Polish Army, chief of the Polish Riflemen’s Association (Pol. *Związek Strzelecki*) in the 1930’. He came to Finland in order to visit voluntary paramilitary organisations (Fin. *Suojeluskunta*). Among information he gives, his personal remarks are rare. The same issue of the magazine also contains a short text by Jadwiga Kunińska (a law student, her mother was a Finn), who gives only a brief overview of Helsinki, devoid of impressions.

### Wojciech Walczak in 1938

In 1956, Wojciech Walczak, professor of geography at the Jagiellonian University, received a proposition to describe his trip to Scandinavia, made 18 years earlier. At that time, a group of 27 young Polish geographers took a train from Kraków to go to Tallinn, and from there by ship to Helsinki, then onwards to the North. When they arrived in Helsinki, they were welcomed by a Polish press attaché Xawery Glinka and a Finnish Slavist Sulo Haltsonen, who spoke Polish fluently (he also had studied at the Jagiellonian University) and was their guide during their stay in the capital of Finland. It is worth noting that it was probably the first Polish university trip to Finland, so several Finnish press photographers were waiting their arrival, and the same day in the evening, newspapers’ headlines screamed: in Finnish *Suomi kiinnostaa puolalaisia geologeja* (in *Helsingin Sanomat*), and in Swedish *Finlands natur givande anse[r] polska studenter* (in *Hufvudstadsbladet*). The Poles visited Helsinki and its outskirts; they were surprised not only by the development of the country, but also by some cultural differences, e.g. drinking milk to every food or drinking many cups of (weak) coffee a day, as well as the position of women, who also worked at “traditionally” men’s stations (e.g. as tram drivers). Then they travelled to

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<sup>38</sup> Also Dąbrowska, in her text, uses interchangeably the names *Finnowie* (‘Finns’) and *Finlandczycy* (‘Finlanders’) in plural. The form *Finlandczyk* is no longer in use in Polish.

the East (Imatra, Viipuri, Savonlinna), and North (Kuopio, Oulu, Rovaniemi, Ivalo, Petsamo), later to Norway (Kirkenes, Nordkapp, Tromsø, Narvik), eventually to Stockholm, where they took a ship to go back to Poland. Their Finnish guide from Helsinki to the Norwegian border in Kolttaköngäs was Kalevi Kostia, young assistant lecturer at the University of Helsinki. The trip was rich, and, in general, Walczak's book goes into detail (with many geological or geographical notes and black-and-white photographs). It is not possible to quote all the impressions and adventures of Walczak's group.

### Shared impressions and viewpoints

At the end, we can say, that in all the Polish above-mentioned accounts, Finland is regarded as a country of honest, modest, hard-working and helpful people, having a high level of culture and a very good education (well-prepared schools, with many facilities to students and to the people from outside the university: they can also learn at many open and free courses). The Polish travellers also are impressed by equality in Finnish society (while e.g. in Poland the social strata still maintained clear divisions), as well as by equal rights of men and women.<sup>39</sup> They admire a very developed civilisation and advanced modernisation. Many of them underline that the streets are well-ordered and very clean, and inside the houses are arranged with a good taste, simplicity and comfort.

The only shortcoming for foreigners seemed to be a lack of knowledge of foreign languages among Finns: apart from Finnish and Swedish, one could communicate only a little in German, while no one knew Russian and did not want to know (unlike in Latvia and Estonia).

Finally it is worth going back to the account of Dębicki from 1909, because, although it comes from the subordinate period of Finland, it shed much light on the later shape of the independent country. Among his impressions, Dębicki emphasizes a kind of solidarity among the Finns:

if Finland has today the culture it has, if it constantly enriches it with new achievements, if the local population is a closely-knit society, able to go together, work persistently and in disciplinary fashion, it is largely the result of respect for the law that lies in every citizen. (Dębicki 1926: 56).

In other words, every Finn is growing in an atmosphere of respect for the law, "aware of all his obligations to his homeland, nation and every fellow citizen" (ibidem). "It is only through this prism that one can understand why hands are intertwined here so easily for a joint work which, despite obstacles from outside, leads the nation towards rebirth" (ibidem: 57).

And one day in Kaivopuisto park, Dębicki met a Russian officer who said that he came here because only in Finland one can give a rest to the soul...

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<sup>39</sup> Already in 1909, when Dębicki assisted in a session of the Finnish Parliament, he admired 19 women being deputies.



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### Résumé

Regards sur la Finlande dans les récits de voyage polonais durant l'entre-deux-guerres

L'article montre des impressions de quelques écrivains polonais dans leurs descriptions de la Finlande indépendante (depuis 1917) durant l'entre-deux-guerres: Stanisław Srokowski, Maria Dąbrowska, Edmund Zalewski, Jan Rostafiński, Kazimiera Hłakowiczówna et Wojciech Walczak.

### Abstract

Observations on Finland in Polish travelogues in the interwar period

The article presents some impressions of Polish writers in their travel accounts of the independent Finland (since 1917) in the interwar period: Stanisław Srokowski, Maria Dąbrowska, Edmund Zalewski, Jan Rostafiński, Kazimiera Hłakowiczówna and Wojciech Walczak.

### Streszczenie

Spostrzeżenia na temat Finlandii w polskich relacjach podróżniczych w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym

Artykuł przedstawia wrażenia polskich pisarzy z podróży po Finlandii (niepodległej od 1917 r.) w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym. Pisarze ci to: Stanisław Srokowski, Maria Dąbrowska, Edmund Zalewski, Jan Rostafiński, Kazimiera Hłakowiczówna i Wojciech Walczak.

