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THE *HYGGE* PHENOMENON.
BETWEEN A LIFESTYLE AND NATIONALISM¹

hygge – to create a pleasant and cosy atmosphere
hyggelig – pleasant and cosy²

Polish post offices have recently started to turn into places where a variety of different items can be purchased: anyone who goes there to send a letter, can also buy sweets, board games, an umbrella, as well as books. Signs on bookcases advertise them as “bestsellers”, suggesting that the Polish Post distributes only quality, sought-after literature. In June 2017, in one of post offices in Warsaw, *The Danish Way of Parenting* was displayed on one of such “bestseller” bookcases.³ It was laid out on one of the upper shelves, along *Dekalog księdza Jana Kaczkowskiego* (The Decalogue of Father Jan Kaczkowski) and various patriotic readings, i.e. books dealing with the Katyń Massacre or the Warsaw Uprising, located on a shelf above whodunits and popular crocheting and cooking companions. Were we to evaluate this observation based on criteria from the days when a book was regarded in Poland with respect, and readership was popularised by professional booksellers, selling books at the post office would have to be regarded as discrediting. But in the post-modern world it shows, among other things, that the Danish *hygge* penetrated the media discourse and the imagination of consumer readers. The recipients of mass communication are surrounded with the all-pervasive mantra: the Danish are the happiest people in the world. Alexander and Sandahl’s book on the “bestseller” bookcase appears to best sum up the sudden and popular fashion of copying the Danish way of achieving happiness using simple means,

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² “Politikens Nudansk Ordbog”, Politikens Ordbøger, København 2010, 21. udgave.

³ In writing this article I was using the Polish translation of the book. The title of the translation was modified in such a way to appeal to the assumed interests of the buyers. More importantly, the main title, *Hygge*, was added in the edition sold at the post office; it was absent from the 1st edition I am in possession of. See: Jessica Alexander, Iben Sandahl, *Duński przepis na szczęście. Najskuteczniejsza filozofia wychowania*, trans. Elżbieta Kowalewska and Jolanta Sawicka, Warsaw: Muza 2016.

which has swept the Polish Internet, press, television, and even bookstores in the second half of 2016 and early 2017. Karolina Sulej, a journalist of *Wysokie Obcasy* (High Heels – a weekly section of the *Gazeta Wyborcza* daily) declared *hygge* to be one of the “cultural smash hits of 2016”, along with *The Young Pope* TV series, and the expansion of pop-feminism.⁴

There are two matters the employees of the Warsaw post office were most likely unaware of when they were placing the book on the top shelf. Firstly, placing *hygge* next to an interview with a Catholic priest suffering from a brain tumour, who almost until the end of his life heroically dedicated himself to the work at the hospice he established, was most definitely *uhyggelig*, that is it clashed with the preferred understanding of the Protestant Danish as to what constitutes a pleasant moment in one’s life. Secondly, *hygge* is not without links to matters of greater magnitude: nationalism. Placing the book on a subject broadly known and used on a daily basis by the Danish side by side with books that bear the emblem of the Polish Underground State, one of historical symbols most broadly recognised in Poland, reminds us that the international career of *hygge* may be regarded as a grand display of Danish patriotism. That is also the thesis of this article: the Danish society is fiercely patriotic, the Danish culture is homogenous and well integrated, and the concept of *hygge* is one of the most important tools used to bind the nation together culturally. As Hans Hauge writes in an essay published as a part of the *Tænkepauser* (Pauses to ponder) series, dedicated to the key words of modern Danish discourses:

Nationalism in Denmark holds fast. In that respect, we are similar to Americans, although completely different from the Swedes. What further distinguishes us from others: we are happier than most other nations. We occupy top places in the rankings of democratic values. We have a vast trust in our state. In Denmark, liberalism and nationalism are linked. We are content with the welfare state, which we understand as being there to solve our problems, so that we no longer have to worry about them. The Danish are no supporters of a multicultural society.⁵

Hygge’s fame did not come to Poland directly from Denmark, thanks to our political and cultural proximity and location on the coasts of the Baltic Sea, but rather from Western Europe. This attests to the superficiality of the Polish-Danish cultural relations; that, however, is a subject for a separate study.⁶ What is important here, is that the publisher of the *Collins English Dictionary* included *hygge* on the list of 10 key words of 2016, along such neologisms, as “Brexit” and “Trumpism”.⁷

⁴ Karolina Sulej, “Kulturalne hity 2016”, *Wysokie Obcasy*, weekly supplement to *Gazeta Wyborcza* 2016, 17th December.

⁵ Hans Hauge, *Danmark*, Aarhus: Universitetsforlag 2013, p. 53.

⁶ I have discussed the complex matter of the so-called Baltic neighbourhood in another article: Włodzimierz Karol Pessel, “Our Neighbours’ Neighbours. Scandinavia and Baltic Central Europe”, *Herito. Heritage, Culture & The Present* 2015, nr 20. If there is anything the Polish media culture created that has a viral force of influence which would be as broadly noticed in Denmark as *hygge* was in Poland, it would certainly be the TV and Internet advertising campaign of the Allegro auction website. “If you are ever to watch a Polish commercial in your life, make it this one,” advised *Jyllands Posten* daily. See: <http://jyllands-posten.dk/international/ECE9209048/hvis-du-kun-skal-se-en-polsk-julereklame-i-dit-liv-skal-det-vaere-denne-her> (accessed 8.12.2016).

⁷ Jacob Stolworthy, “Collins Dictionary’s 10 Words of The Year. From ‘Brexit’ and ‘snowflake generation’ to ‘JOMO’”, *The Independent* 2006, 3rd November.

The Spectator declared on their website that: “The appetite to be Danish has never before been so developed, except among Danes”.⁸ Such a strong tendency would not be ignored by *ASZdziennik*, a Polish website satirising news outlets, established by journalist Rafał Madajczak. Using its characteristic brand of parody, it confirmed the process of the tabloidisation, a gradual reduction of the idea of a particular culture to an exotic-sounding buzzword or a meme. In the era of globalisation, it can be manipulated by viral marketing, either for the benefit of the Kingdom of Denmark, by initiating a positive media buzz as a part of the so-called cultural diplomacy, or in the particular economic interest of publishers of guidebooks for happiness-seekers.⁹ “Inventor of *Hygge* Shocked: Poles Tell Him Where to Shove His Candles and Blankets,” wrote Madajczak, parodying the sensationalist language typical of tabloid media.¹⁰ It ought to be clarified, that the “inventor of *Hygge*” in this case was Meik Wiking, the author of *The Little Book of Hygge*. From the body of works on the subject which were published over the recent years, this book is the most popular, both in Poland and around the world. In Poland, the book written by Wiking, who introduces himself as the head of the Happiness Research Institute, was advertised not only on billboards around Warsaw and in newsletters of chain bookshops, but also by the Rossmann chain of chemist’s stores, which offered a wide choice of scented candles, supposedly increasing happiness.¹¹

If cultural concepts would be included in the category of celebrities, *hygge* would immediately become the people’s choice. The camera loves the handsome head of the Happiness Research Institute, and he bears a surname so fitting to promoting *hygge*, that one might wonder whether he is not some avatar, craftily created by an advertising agency. To translate the famous *bon mot* by Wiesław Godzic: *hygge* is famous for being famous.¹² I doubt if anyone but the scholars of Scandinavian culture are aware of the of the hardships of studying the socio-cultural context that is key to understanding this phenomenon. The handsome Mr. Wiking will soon be forgotten, the editors of popular dictionaries will select a new word

⁸ Dot Worthworth, “*Hygge*. The Most Annoying Word of The Year”, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2016/11/hygge-the-most-annoying-word-of-the-year/#> (accessed 10.12.2016).

⁹ The importance of auto-presentation in Denmark and the modern practices of “nation branding” in Scandinavia has been covered by *Den Jyske Historiker*, which dedicated an entire issue (nr 126, December 2010) to the subject.

¹⁰ Published 29th November 2016: <http://aszdziennik.pl/118943,dramat-tworcy-hygge-przyjechal-do-polski-uslyszal-gdzie-moze-sobie-wsadzic-swoje-swieczki-i-kocyki> (accessed 10.12.2016).

¹¹ Meik Wiking, *Hygge. Klucz do szczęścia*, trans. Elżbieta Frątczak-Nowotny, Warsaw: Czarna Owca 2016. At least two other handbooks translated into Polish could be put on the book shelf at the post office: *Hygge. The Danish Art of Happiness* and *The Book of Hygge. The Danish Art of Living Well* (Marie Tourell Sødeberg, *Hygge. Duńska sztuka szczęścia*, trans. Olga Siara, Kraków: Insignis Media 2016; Louisa Thomsen Britts, *Księga hygge. Jak zwolnić, kochać i żyć szczęśliwie*, trans. Joanna Sugiero, Gliwice: Sensus 2017.) Two other sociological and journalistic works could also be added: *The Year of Living Danishly. Uncovering The Secrets of The World’s Happiest Country* and *How to Be Danish*. (Helen Russel, *Życie po duńsku. Rok w najszczęśliwszym kraju na świecie*, trans. Grzegorz Ciecieląg, Krakow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego 2017; Patrick Kingsley, *Duńczycy. Patent na szczęście*, trans. Joanna Gładysiek, Warsaw: Czarna Owca 2017.) The fact that *hygge* is being promoted by the publishing house of the Jagellonian University shows how the line between science and mediatisation or even the sphere of so-called post-truth, based on emotions and loose impressions, is becoming blurred.

¹² Cf. Wiesław Godzic, *Znani z tego, że są znani. Celebryci w kulturze tabloidów*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne 2007.

of the year, but *hygge* will remain a part of the Danish culture. I will not delve into the matter of foreigners' proper pronunciation and their defiance in undertaking the effort; its "celebrity" status is also thanks to its status as a linguistic oddity. A combination of a Y pronounced in a fashion entirely alien to English speakers and of a double hard G establishes a phonetic obstacle, collision with which may be painful.¹³

Hygge can be verbalised and described as an ideal type, in accordance with the theoretical guidelines of Max Weber, at the same time with a full spectrum of empirical types corresponding to it. The emphasis on cosiness has for a long time characterised Danish everyday life. *Hygge* is first and foremost put in practice, but at the same time the Danish employ it in the sphere of cultural rhetoric for the purpose of self-identification. The best measure of how strongly *hygge* is rooted in the Danish culture, sometimes to the point of lack of awareness or self-criticism, is the public service announcement campaign produced by the state-funded Visit Denmark agency, which was released in 2009 and criticised as sexist.¹⁴ Denmark was lauded in that viral ad as a perfect tourist destination by a blonde student of acting. Ditte Arnth performed the role of a Danish woman, using the Internet to find the father of her baby; August was conceived when she decided to demonstrate to an anonymous tourist from abroad what the meaning of Danish *hygge*, which resulted in a one-night-stand between the two. As it happens, other Nordic societies have also developed strong and distinct stereotypes about themselves, which have recognisable language incarnations: Swedes' *lagom*, Finns' *sisu*, and Icelanders' *þetta reddast*. It is no wonder therefore, that as a side effect of the Nordic integration, of the existence of the North (*Norden* in Scandinavian languages) as a cohesive region, a certain dialectic of similarity and heterogeneity developed; the regional similarities and the fellowship of egalitarian and progressive societies must be highlighted, but local differences are stressed with the use of stereotypes.

In respect to the origin of the cultural practices of the Danish, the international publicity received by their "happiness formula" proves to be displaced in time, more specifically delayed, by well over a hundred years. In an interview the *Na Temat* website conducted with Meik Wiking, it is stated that *hygge* is "a concept older than 200 years".¹⁵ If it is not simply a result of interference in communication caused by the Polish journalist interviewing Wiking in a third language, English, then we would encounter an essential error in the matter of the subject, or at least a major inaccuracy. Is it possible that the Danish way of life has something to do with the Treaty of Kiel of 1814, and the "divorce" with Norway enforced on the Kingdom of Denmark after a centuries-long union? Were the Danish lighting candles to display their frustration over the dissolution of the Oldenburg Monarchy?

¹³ A teacher of Danish with a calling, Michael Hardenfeldt, believes that perfect mastering of Danish phonetics by a Pole who started to learn the language after secondary school is practically impossible: <http://www.hardenfelt.com/Dunski/Jak%20uczyc%20sie%20dunskiego.htm> (accessed 10.05.2017).

¹⁴ Link to the article offering a derivative rationalisation of the "viral scandal": "VisitDenmark: 'Karen' er sød og værdig", *Politiken* 2009, 13th September.

¹⁵ *Metoda hygge, czyli bądź szczęśliwy jak Duńczyk. Proste rady, które wymiennie wpływają na życie. Jest też o Facebooku*. Interview conducted by Karolina Błaszkiwicz, 26th November 2016. See: <http://natemat.pl/194819,hygge-czyli-badz-szczesliwy-jak-dunczyk-rzecz-o-swieczkach-kocach-a-nawet-i-manifestacjach> (accessed 20.12.2017).

The “200 years” count may in fact refer to the word itself. An even more thought-provoking statement is made by Louisa Thomsen Britts: “The Danish, who are among the happiest nations in the world, have been practicing *hygge* for hundreds of years” (emphasis – WKP).¹⁶ The historical dictionary of the Danish language states that *hygge* is a word of Norwegian origin.¹⁷ It has been borrowed at the end of the 18th century.¹⁸ Rather than the Viking origin, promoted by the media (Old Norse *hyggja* meant thinking or deriving pleasure from something) better interpretations are offered by later, modern meaning of the word: protection, care (particularly of children), as well as the feeling of security and boundless trust (“tillidsfuld følelse af fred(elig)hed; tryghed”). But *hygge* as a cultural construct and an everyday practice was not shaped until a hundred years later, at the turn of the 19th and the 20th century. For it is a product of the middle class, and more specifically, of the formation process of an egalitarian society. It is why the advantageous aspect of Tourell Søderberg’s book, which is primarily filled with wide, empty margins, are the reproductions of Danish paintings from late 19th century. Viggo Johansen’s *Merry Christmas* (1891) depicts *julehygge*, a bourgeois family dancing around the Christmas tree, whereas *Hip Hip Hooray!* (1888) by Peder Severin Krøyer shows a toast being raised at the table during a family garden party (*hyggemiddag*).¹⁹

One of the important reasons for which the first lectures Georg Brandes gave on the main literary movements of the 19th century (entitled *Emigrantlitteraturen* and delivered in 1871) were met with a cool reception at the Copenhagen University, was the way he exposed the preferences of his compatriots in the spirit of naturalism. Brandes declared, that the overblown importance ascribed to family life, home, and homely atmosphere (*hyggeligheden*) is a common Danish phenomenon, and a simple consequence of the country’s location in a climatic zone which forces people to seek artificial warmth (*grumme simpel, grumme lav klimatisk Nødvendighed*).²⁰ As Jørn Bendix pointed out, such an assessment made

¹⁶ Louisa Thomsen Britts, *Księga hygge*, p. 11.

¹⁷ *Ordbog over det danske Sprog 1700–1950*. The digitalised version of the dictionary is accessible on a website ran by the Danish Language and Literature Society: ordnet.dk.

¹⁸ Interestingly, Norwegian culture has not produced a self-stereotype with a particular name for it. The Norwegians make up for it with the expression *typisk norsk*, typically Norwegian, which is a staple of the Norwegian language teaching curriculum as much as a map of *civilisation francophon* is an obligatory feature of French language textbooks. Cf. Agata Bochyńska, “W stronę antropologii społecznej Norwegii. Norma ‘likhet’ wobec problemów współczesności: imigracja, westernalizacja i masakra na wyspie Utøya”, *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2012, nr 1. If, however, we are to treat the adjective *koselig* (*koseleg*), which is the equivalent of the English *cosy*, as an equivalent of the Danish *hygge*, we would immediately need to point out the denied, but stronger relationship between the Norwegian and Danish cultures, than the Norwegians after 1814 would be comfortable to admit. I am not going to touch on the issue of *Jantelov*, the rule deprecating everyone and everything that transgresses the societal norm of what is average. *Jantelov* is the negative equivalent of the positive idea of auto-presentation. It is used by the Danish, Swedes adopted it as their own self-stereotype, similarly to the Norwegians. In fact, its origins are in literary fiction, authored by a “Norwegianised” Danish writer: Aksel Sandemose, *En flygtning krydser sit spor. Espen Arnakkes kommentarer til Janteloven*, på dansk ved Anne Munk-Madsen, København: Schönberg 2010 (7th edition, 3rd printing), pp. 76–80.

¹⁹ Marie Tourell Søderberg, *Hygge*, pp. 19 and 68.

²⁰ Georg Brandes, *Emigrantlitteraturen. Forelæsninger holdte ved Kjøbenhavns Universitet i Efteraarshalvaaret 1871*, Kjøbenhavn: Gyldendalske Boghandel 1872, p. 151.

by Brandes could not have been left without punishment at the dawn of *klunketiden* in Denmark.²¹ The word literally means “time of tassels”. Bendix was referring to an association clear to the Danish. *Klunketiden* bears for them connotations with *Klunkehjemmet*, today a branch of the National Museum, and in the 1890s, the home of industrialist Rudolph Christensen, located at Frederiksholms Kanal 18. Not only the tassels on the drapes and the plush upholstery of the chairs, but also the clear division of the apartment into a representative area, used for hosting guests, and a family area, with a separate room dedicated for the purpose of *familiehygge*, demonstrate clearly what Brandes, a free-thinker and critic of bourgeois culture, was turning against.²² Furthermore, finding the historical moment in which the concept of *hygge* was nearing completion, can be assisted by a famous poem of Jeppe Aakjær *Historiens sang* (The Song of History).²³ Carl Nielsen composed a melody to the words of the poem, and the song (entitled *Som dybest brønd gi'r altid klare vand*) was published in a collection of songs for school-children (*Højskolens bog*). The text of the poet from Jutland contains the following powerful apostrophe: *Du pusling-land, som hygger dig i smug, mens hele verden brænder om din vugge* – You baby-country, you are comfortable in your shelter, while by your crib the whole world burns. Aakjær wrote these words in 1916. We can, therefore, assume that during World War One, the need for cosiness were already so deeply rooted in the culture, that under the poet’s pen they could transform into a source of metaphor describing the national attitude and mentality. Aakjær at the same time addressed the concept of *hygge* and the complex of a small state, which haunted the Danish since their resounding military defeat of 1864 (*småstats-mentalitet*).

Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren write about the 19th century Swedish concept of home in a similar fashion: “The bourgeois sitting rooms strike one with affluence, softness, and cosiness, abundant cushions, pouffes, and plaids meant to provide comfort, as well as soothing half-light. [...] A warm and pleasant homely atmosphere pervades...” With the increased pace in which fundamental societal differences were emerging in Denmark as well as the neighbouring Nordic countries, the shelter of one’s home served the middle class as a sort of a shield.²⁴ If we bear in mind the decor of *Klunkehjemmet*, this idea conceived by Swedish researchers can also be transplanted on the ground of the Danish society. On the one hand, the strive for cosiness in interpersonal interactions played a significant part in determining class division, and on the other, from its very inception, it served to minimalise the consequences of said division; as Jeppe Trolle Linnet puts it, it served to provide shelters from what contravenes or impairs social equality.²⁵ Which is why Trolle Linnet chose to tackle one selected aspect of Danish happiness: the origins of

²¹ Jørn Bendix, “Jagten på det særligt danske”, *Information* 2004, 8 September.

²² Virtual tour of *Klunkehjemmet*: <http://natmus.dk/museerne/klunkehjemmet/rundvisning-og-besoeg> (accessed 12.07.2017). Furnishings’ analysis: Grażyna Szelańska, “Mieszkanie w stylu wiktorjańskim w Kopenhadze końca XIX wieku”, *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej* 1997, vol. 1.

²³ Jeppe Aakjær, *Digte 1908–1918*, København: Gyldendalske Boghandel 1918–19, p. 161.

²⁴ Jonas Frykman, Orvar Löfgren, *Narodziny człowieka kulturalnego. Kształtowanie się klasy średniej w Szwecji XIX i XX wieku*, trans. Grzegorz Sokół, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Antyk, Marek Derewiecki 2007, p. 134.

²⁵ Jeppe Trolle Linnet, “Money Can’t Buy Me Hygge. Danish Middle-Class Consumption, Egalitarianism, and the Sanctity of Inner Space”, *Social Analysis* 2011, vol. 55, issue 2, p. 22.

a positive perception of mediocrity. The systematically self-researching dominant type of societal ambition moulding the consumer culture has matured. It happened over a decade ago, when *hygge* was a word of a rather limited, Scandinavian coverage. Modern research into Danish consumer behaviour have shown that the concepts of “social classes” and “economic divisions” are problematic for the Danish, who feel most comfortable “hanging between the high and the low”.²⁶ After all, the state of *hygge* is achieved through thrift and frugality. Although the media splendour threatens to commodify the Danish “happiness formula”, it does not have a commercial or sybaritical character. It does not entail purchasing very expensive goods. Besides, the model achievement of Danish design, such as PH or Le Klint lamps, praised by Meik Wiking in his book, will not be a burden to a family budget, at least that of an average Scandinavian family.

The name Jenkins is not often mentioned in the context of *hygge*, although in the literature of the subject, with an increasing body of work discussing the exceptionality of the Danish, it has come to a conflict in which scholarly authorities try to out-bid one another. The British anthropologist is not usually mentioned as a specialist on Danish happiness. The self-important Meik Weiking poses an expert on the subject. Marie Tourell Söderberg refers to the opinions of Trolle Linnet. Helen Russell invokes Christian Bjørnskov of the Tubor Research Centre for Globalisation and Firms at the University of Aarhus, which is looking for the relationship between happiness and economy. Whereas Richard Jenkins is an author of a very important and current study on the Danish culture and its axiological sphere, which contains numerous original observation. Referring to the concept of defamiliarisation, promoted by Waldemar Kuligowski, it can be said that Jenkins both demystifies the Danish model of thinking, and reveals the cultural habits the Danish.²⁷ After conducting on-site research in the town of Skive, Jenkins came to the conviction that *hygge* “is double-headed”.²⁸ First it shows its universal and approachable head. And it is that aspect of *hygge*, as I came to believe myself, which is the subject of redundant literature on the Danish way to happiness: the Danish can be emulated and it is worthwhile doing so. Helen Russel concluded *The Year of Living Danish* with a list of practical advice as to how can we emulate the Danish in our everyday lives. The second advice – the first one is to “trust (more)” – says “Remember the simple pleasures in life – light a candle, make yourself a cup of coffee, eat some pastries. See? You’re feeling better already”.²⁹ But once we penetrate through the layer of triviality and trivia (e.g. the fact that the 30 million pigs the Danish breed is five-fold their population) and obtain a deeper understanding of Danish culture, the concept of cosiness reveals its exclusionary significance. In the latter case, *hygge* appears as a rationed access to full participation in culture. Danish pastries can be baked anywhere, but in Denmark authentic *hygge* is exclusively for the Danish. The homogeneity of the culture manifests through *hygge*. Associating the Danish with a “social ethos of closeness,

²⁶ Ibidem, pp. 24–25.

²⁷ Waldemar Kuligowski, *Defamiliarizatorzy. Źródła i zróżnicowanie antropologii współczesności*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM 2016, p. 48. A chapter is dedicated to the researchers of Nordic countries’ cultures: “*Antropologi hemma – Skandynawia*”.

²⁸ Richard Jenkins, *Being Danish. Paradoxes of Identity in Everyday Life*, København: Museum Tusulanum Press 2011, p. 253.

²⁹ Helen Russell, *Życie po duńsku*, p. 301.

warmth, relaxation, informality and egalitarian mutuality”³⁰ supports the notion, that in some aspects *hygge* works as a tool of societal coercion.³¹ Russel makes a relevant observation, that the hermetic profile of Danish culture corresponds to their unique relationship towards urban areas. The sight of empty streets after business hours, with the exception of the metropolitan Copenhagen and the Strøget promenade, and the glimmer of candles from behind the windows, is to be read as a message, which says that *hygge* is to be celebrated in the shelter of one’s home, in dedicated private spaces. “The Danish are ‘closed’ (lukkede),” admits Hans Hauge, a lecturer at the Aarhus University’s School of Communication and Culture.³² Whereas numerous Danish, who visit their country’s museums and tourist sites of interest during holidays, are in fact savouring their own culture. The Danish middle class may be able to afford exotic holidays in warmer countries, but the Danish consciously choose their own *Hyggeland*.³³

In her interview for the *Polityka* weekly, Sylwia Schab rightly mentions the song *Svantes lykkelige dag* (Svante’s happy day) written by an acclaimed poet Benny Andersen, the poetic climax of which is the verse *om lidt er kaffen klar* – the coffee is almost ready. Indeed, it is possibly the shortest summary of the *hygge*-appreciative approach of the Danish towards life. Such was the way it was presented to the author of this article during summer school, where he learned the words of this perennial hit as performed by Povl Dissing. We ought to remember, however, that Svante, the protagonist of the poetic cycle from which the lyrics of the song come, *Svantes viser*, is Swedish by birth. Although he was raised in Denmark, he was rather reluctant to take root in the Danish atmosphere of happiness, “rather frustrated by the pressure to be Danish”.³⁴ We ought to add, that one of the fundamental achievements of social democrat’s social engineering

³⁰ Richard Jenkins, *Being Danish*, p. 41.

³¹ It may seem puzzling, that among the teenagers who were surveyed by the British anthropologist, *hygge* was not given as the essence of Danishness (ibidem, pp. 211–212). It was only the 11th most often provided answer, receiving less than a half of the percentage points the local food culture did: 28 compared to 60 per cent. This is in no way, however, detrimental to how fundamental the concept is for the Danish culture. Its power is not in declarations, but in daily bearing. This is the more evident if we consider that the Danish teenagers clearly treated *hygge* as correlative with other obvious practices, including those related to food and alcohol consumption. Which is entirely in accordance with the linguistically shaped image of the world, in which *hygge* is also a prefix added to words describing various activities: *hyggensnak* – small talk, *hyggemad* – good food, *hyggetur* – a pleasant excursion etc. A similar conclusion can be reached after looking at the results of the *Danmarkskanon* (Denmark Canon) from late 2016. In the national plebiscite, in which 2,000 citizens actively participated, 10 key values that shaped the contemporary Danish society were selected. *Hygge* was “only” 11th, although one spot ahead of The Christian Heritage, which did not make it into this decalogue; the three top positions were occupied by the Welfare Society, Freedom, and Trust. See <https://www.danmarkskanon.dk> (accessed 8.01.2017). A minor, although important fact from the perspective of thinking about Danish nationalism, is that the plebiscite was organised by the Minister of Culture, Bertel Haader, who has been nominated to serve as he consul general in Flensburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany, beginning 1 October 2017. The town is located on the Danish-German frontier, a historically disputed territory which is a sensitive spot for the Danish identity, although nowadays it provides a model of good neighbourship and co-operation between states. More on the subject i.a. in: Jørgen Kühl, *The “Schleswig Experience”. The National Minorities in the Danish-German Border Area*, Aabenraa: Institut for Grænseregionsforskning 1998.

³² Hans Hauge, *Danmark*, p. 50.

³³ Cf. Jeppe Trolle Linnet, *Money Can’t Buy Me Hygge*, p. 26.

³⁴ Benny Andersen, *Verdensborger i Danmark og andre digte om danskere*, Valby: Borgen 1995, p. 45.

in Sweden was the dismantling of “Swedishness”.³⁵ In the era of Olof Palme, the concept of *svenskheten* was rejected by both academics and politicians as oppressive, regressive, and leading to social inequality and xenophobia. Therefore, Svante had to primarily face the presence of culture, and one that the happy participants of which intensively experience their Danishness (*danskhed*).

The Happiness Research Institute in Copenhagen’s Frederiksberg municipality actually exists and officially is an independent think-tank supporting itself by providing paid advisory services to local and state government, and corporations. Although the all-too-obvious personal charm of coach Wiking may make researchers conducting critical studies wary, the members of the group of experts he heads are professional academic researchers with documented achievements: Bent Greve and Christian Bjørnskov.³⁶ It is impossible to attribute to the Institute any immediate political entanglements. The civil society is very strong in Denmark. However, think-tanks have a tendency to become political in the philosophical sense in spite of their freedom of acting and their declared independence from the policy of the government. The briefest definition of politics I would offer in this context, would be the constant struggle between various visions and models of “good life” on the public forum.

In the 20th century, the Danish have become accustomed to having a very good image internationally: a small great society. They participated in the “White Buses” operation, which in the autumn of 1943 saved 7,000 Jews from the Holocaust, by evacuating them to Sweden. Next to their humanitarian achievements, we can immediately put forward their socio-economic successes: the level of the society’s prosperity, the political stability, and the *flexicurity* model of employment. However, since the 2005 international scandal caused by the publication of caricatures challenging the religious taboos of Islam in the *Jyllands-Posten* daily, the image of Denmark has become tarnished and in need of fixing. The losses would need to be recuperated through creative public relations policy. The ongoing migration crisis has further contributed to the poor image of Denmark.³⁷ Løkke Rasmussen’s coalition government, in Denmark itself considered one of the most economically liberal in history, and thereby not in line with the foreign image of the Scandinavian political model, has received publicity for a bill meant to allow the police to confiscate gold and jewellery from the refugees and immigrants, or for the idea by Inger Støjberg, the Minister of Integration, to publish special government announcements in the advertisement sections of Lebanese newspapers, meant to discourage potential economic immigrants from coming to Denmark. At the same time, according to the vision of “Nortopia”,³⁸ no Scandinavian government can have a programme other than one that is progressive and left-leaning. Dispatching *hygge* to foreign nations may give the impression that everything is as it always was, and that nothing is rotten in the state of Denmark. Denmark is *hyggelig*, the

³⁵ See Jan Ch. Karlsson, “Finns svenskheten? En granskning av teorier om svenskt folklyne, svensk folkkaraktär och svensk mentalitet”, *Sociologisk Forskning* 1994, vol. 31, nr 1.

³⁶ Bent Greve, *Et lykkeligt land? Hvad skal der til og kan velfærdssamfundet bidrage?*, Frederiksberg: Nyt fra Samfundsvidenskaberne 2010; Christian Bjørnskov, *Lykke*, Aarhus: Universitetsforlag 2015.

³⁷ See Włodzimierz Pessel, “Niezagubieni na autostradzie. Uchodźcy i pamięć altruistyczna”, *Widok. Teorie i praktyki kultury wizualnej* 2016, nr 14.

³⁸ Cf. Bernd Henningsen, “The End of Nortopia? Rightwing Populism and the Challenges to the Freedom of Press”, <http://magma.fi/post/2012/8/1/the-end-of-nortopia> (accessed 12.06.2017).

Danish are the happiest society in the world, all their, universally small, trouble melt like candle stearin or fade away like the scent of freshly made coffee. The motivational strength to ensure *hygge*'s worldwide recognition stems from the culture and tradition, not from current politics, although it is occurring in a political context that has significantly changed over the past several centuries. The happy Danish are lucky that *hygge*, primarily thanks to the mechanisms of mediatisation, has unexpectedly become a subject of politics.

Hans Hauge points towards the tensions between the local and the global, and between tradition and cosmopolitanism, which in the 21st century have surfaced in the Danish culture. The economical elites and the technocratic circles are beginning to favour the opinion that a stop needs to be put to singling out what is truly Danish (*særegent dansk*). It is said, that Danishness (*danskhed*) is on the retreat, that a bright future lies in stripping the Danish of nationalistic feelings. That the customs of the "old" middle class, such as religion and the fundamental influence of Protestantism on the national identity, ought to be erased.³⁹ In this respect Denmark would become similar to Sweden, and *hygge* would be nothing else but an equivalent of the American "cozie" or the German *Gemütlichkeit*. However most Danish people, as Hauge reports from the surveys conducted by Gallup, still support the protection of traditional Danish values, and reject the idea of replacing the national with the transnational. It is also a mark of the key historical exclusion, of the self-imposed isolation of a small state after the defeat at Dybbøl, or, in other words, an effect of the policy of making up for the marginalisation in the international politics with internal politics, still seen 200 years later. The (territorially) small country, as Ove K. Pedersen explains, ultimately gave birth to a powerful welfare state, and that is the Danish society's victory.⁴⁰

What for the Danish is under particular protection, is trust (*tillid*), the Danish gold, as this informal institution and the pillar of the welfare state is described by Gert Tinggaard Svendsen. The researcher strongly stresses that the countries in which lost wallets most often return to their rightful owners with all their contents are Denmark and Norway.⁴¹ Happiness without the trust capital, the trust between people, and the trust of the citizens towards public institutions, without honesty and the transparency of the public sphere seen in the categories of common good, would be unthinkable. Trust and *hygge* are like two sides of one coin. The previously quoted poem by Aakjær is therefore tapping into the archetype of the Danish image of comfort: a crib separated from the worldly commotion. The English word "trust" most likely stems from the Old Norse *traust*, which means comforting, consoling, calming of a crying child (*trøst* in modern Danish).⁴² Their trust makes the Danish "masters in achieving happiness".⁴³ Which is also why the society's and

³⁹ An important study on the issue: Uffe Østergaard, *Hvorfor er danskerne danske? Om reformationen og nationaliteten*, København: Eksistens 2017.

⁴⁰ Ove K. Pedersen, *Nederlagets tid. Krige og velfærdstat*, in: *Læren af 1864. Krig, politik og stat i Danmark i 150 år*, ed. Lars Bangert Struwe, Mikel Vedby Rasmussen, Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag 2014, p. 19.

⁴¹ Gert Tinggaard Svendsen, *Tillid*, Aarhus: Universitetsforlag 2012, p. 29.

⁴² Jeppe Trolle Linnert, *Money Can't Buy Me Hygge*, p. 37.

⁴³ Gert Tinggaard Svendsen, *Tillid*, p. 30. Cf. Bent Greve, *Hvorfor er Danmark et af verdens lykkeligste lande?*, Viden.dk, 28 April 2011, <http://videnskab.dk/kultur-samfund/hvorfor-er-danmark-et-af-verdens-lykkeligste-lande> (accessed 12.07.2017).

community's support is so easily transplanted from the level of larger structures into the sphere of family and child-rearing. Caring for simplicity and pleasantly spending the time together is, as Alexander and Sandahl assure, strengthens the family bonds as strongly as allowing external support of the environment.⁴⁴ The feeling of security and community allows the Danish to trivialise many real, everyday factors, which would seem to counteract this ontological security. Just to name the frequent rain, the chilling wind, or the penchant for taking copious amounts of antidepressant drugs, which the Danish call *lykkepiller*, literally happiness pills.

The recent extraction of *hygge* from the frames of the local pattern of culture and transforming it into a cosmopolitan lifestyle model may be considered a part of the post-modern supplanting of identity by frequently changing ways of life, but in the end, it serves to legitimise the achievements of modern Danish culture: a country the Danish want to know, the Denmark for the middle class. The globalisation of the set of Danish cultural habits still benefits the national society. Meik Wiking is programmed by his own culture to a greater degree than he himself realises, when he affirms it to the outsiders by promoting Danish "brands". Such a strengthened society will not sink into a crisis when it hears of a change in statistics. The fact that the 2017 Happiness Research Institute's report, according to which the Danish are no longer the first in the ranking of the happiest nations in the world, is not a sign of accepting defeat.⁴⁵ Currently, the happiest in the world are the Norwegians, with the Icelanders occupying the third place, Finns the fifth place, and the Swedes only on the tenth position. As early as in January 2017, happiness encompassed Finland. According to *The Times*, *hygge* is on the retreat from *sisu*.⁴⁶ At the same time, IKEA began its offensive. Patterned after the Danish success in exporting *hygge*, it developed a three-year plan of "Live Lagom", meant to promote a more sustainable life at home.⁴⁷ This is a direct reference to the Swedish self-stereotype of *lagom*: just the right amount. Everything basically stays in the great Nordic family.

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⁴⁴ Jessica Alexander, Iben Sandahl, *Duński przepis na szczęście*, pp. 176–178.

⁴⁵ *World Happiness Report*, ed. John Helliwell, Richard Layard, Jeffrey Sachs, New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network 2017, p. 20.

⁴⁶ Sam Leith, "Goodbye *hygge*. Hello *sisu*. The New Scandi Trends", *The Times* 2017, 21 January.

⁴⁷ The "Live LAGOM" catalogue: <http://onlinecatalogue.ikea.com/GB/en/Live-Lagom-2017/pages/1> (accessed 12.07.2017).

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THE *HYGGE* PHENOMENON. BETWEEN A LIFESTYLE AND NATIONALISM

Summary

The article comments on the amazing enthusiasm generated by the now popularised concept of “hygge” from Denmark. The so-called Danish secrets to happiness have been brought into vogue in Poland as well as other countries worldwide. The author tries to show that the reach of this concept is much broader than – the area of trendy lifestyles or competition from Nordic neighbourhood, for instance Swedish idea “lagom”. Namely, patriotism and its cultural practises in the everyday life lie at the root of all Danish inclination for comfort and cosiness.

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