

Social Representations of Smolensk, April 10, 2010 in Poland and in Italy

LAURA DRYJANSKA

University of Rome “La Sapienza”, Euro PhD on Social Representations and Communication

The Polish government airplane crash in Smolensk, on April 10, 2010 has shaken up the whole nation. It was an unfamiliar event, communicated by every media and discussed by literally everybody. What were the social representations of it and how did they change over time? This article explores the above questions by presenting the results of research conducted in Poland and in Italy. Poland was directly hit by the event and Italy was also exposed to a large quantity of news about it in a way quite similar to the exposure of other European countries but not as intense and constant as the exposure of Poland. The research is three-dimensional: based on questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with fifty men and women from both Poland and Italy, participant observation of the visible reactions of society on the streets of Warsaw, and the analysis of Polish and Italian daily papers. It applies the theory of Moscovici to a fairly recent event by identifying social representations of what happened and demonstrating the interplay with mass media. The article focuses on the aspect of communication in the development of social representations over time, starting from the very day when the new event took place, for eight consecutive days.

The world was not created once and for all time for each of us individually.

Marcel Proust

What happens when an unfamiliar, new event, which has an influence on an entire nation, occurs unexpectedly? And what if it is not close enough for an average citizen to “go and have a look at it”? Without doubt, it is immediately communicated by television, newspapers, Internet, radio and other media to the entire world pretty much at the same time. Interaction and communication occur, and thus the event is re-constructed on an individual and social level. The social representations of an event are formed with amazing speed. These specific forms of knowledge whose contents show the operation of generative processes and socially marked functions (Jodelet, 1984) are social with respect to what is represented, with regard to their genesis in everyday communication, and in their function (Flick, 1998).

A fairly recent event that has shaken the entire nation of Poland is, in my opinion, an interesting basis to analyze the social representations that emerged with it. On April 10, 2010, the crash of an aging Russian airliner ravaged the top levels of Poland's military, political and church elite, killing the Polish president and dozens of other dignitaries as they travelled to a ceremony commemorating a forest massacre in Katyn where 67 years ago 22,000 Polish officers were killed by Soviet secret police. These news reached Poland and the rest of the world in the morning of the same day, a short time after the airplane crash at the airport of Smolensk.

Such an event, constantly communicated by media and other people, was immediately and continually represented by the society as individual and social representations of it were put in an interactive relation. Thus individuals can be seen as their producers and users, all in one (Moscovici, 1988, p. 233). The new, unfamiliar event involving death was actually a social object elaborated by society in order to guide behavior and communication (Moscovici, 1963). Since “representations are the products of patterns of communication within social groups and across society as a whole” (Duveen, 2007, p. 545), they undergo change and transformation which can be observed in case of the event in Smolensk.

The theoretical framework is based on a developmental approach to the study of social representations proposed by de Rosa, which underlines the integration between constructivist and interactionist perspectives (de Rosa, 1992). De Rosa points out the importance of a

developmental approach especially in the case of children; however, it can also be applied to a situation when the society as a whole develops social representations of a new event from the moment it is faced with the information about it. The overall research question is concerned with the identification of the typology of social representations of the event that took place on April 10, 2010, according to the modalities defined by Moscovici (1988): hegemonic (common representations that are evenly distributed and share the same characteristics throughout the entire population), emancipated (social representations that are the outgrowth of the circulation of knowledge and ideas belonging to subgroups) or polemical (social representations whose elements are distributed among various subgroups of population in such a way that they are intended to be mutually exclusive). The hypothesis is that social representations of April 10, 2010 will be polemical, “determined by the antagonistic relations between the members of society and intended to be mutually exclusive” (Moscovici, 1988). Due to the ambiguity of the event, combined with its high importance for the nation (losing the political elite of society) and a strong emotional component (death of many people), I assume that the representations of it will “embrace ideational and evaluative positions which need to be defended and legitimized, while at the same time securing a position within the symbolic world of a society which can provide the locus of the social identity of the group affiliated around these ideas and values” (Duveen, 2007, p. 548). At first, when the shocking news reaches the society the response will be predominantly emotional and thus quite similar and unified in the society, but as the representations develop over time, significant differences will be observed. It is crucial to note that in this case time means days, each day being an exposure to information through communication and interaction. The two processes in the heart of the theory of social representations, anchoring and objectification (Moscovici, 1984), actually refer to the development of social representations. They are the basis for the hypothesis, because how we anchor, how we choose to name and to categorize an event, is linked to how much information we have about it and from which source. The more information and interaction the more various ways of anchoring and in turn the more diverse social representations shall be formed. In a similar way, objectification, namely saturating an unfamiliar object with reality (such as adding an iconic aspect to it) depends on the time that has passed from the moment the event first “existed” for an individual. Because of the high frequency of mentioning the event in Polish media (practically 24 hours a day in the first day in

the case of television, special Sunday issues of national newspapers and constant news on the radio) and the frequent interaction and inter-individual communication focused on it, according to the hypothesis, there was an expectation of observing an increasing diversity of social representations, eventually resulting in polemical social representations (as identified by Moscovici, 1988).

The representations of the event have been studied in Poland and in Italy, in two different cultures, which were compared on the common basis of how much time has passed from the moment of the event. The time factor is universal and independent, while exposure to information may vary depending on its proximity. For this reason I decided to conduct research not only among Polish subjects, but also among Italian subjects that had access to less information available over a shorter time. Italians were chosen as a nation structured in a similar way to Poland, as there is a regional differentiation within both countries: industrialized Northern Italy and conservative Southern Italy (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1993), and the Polish Western and Northern regions as opposed to Southern and Eastern regions (differentiated by Lewicka, 2005).

It was expected that Italian subjects would demonstrate interest in an event of crucial importance to Poland due to many historical and cultural ties between the countries, evidenced for instance by the fact that both countries' national anthems contain references of the other country. Linked to the developmental approach, the question of proximity to the object of study (Marková & Wilkie, 1987) can be studied by comparing subjects from Poland and from Italy, the latter being more distant from the event and less involved emotionally. It was expected that Italian subjects should demonstrate a similar development of social representations, from hegemonic to polemical within eight days, even though in the Italian case there was less exposure to information. Because of less proximity to the event, the representations were expected to be steadier nevertheless, to evolve less in the course of few days than in the case of Polish subjects. The social representations of April 10, 2010 were studied using a multi-method approach that included questionnaires and structured interviews in Poland and in Italy, participant observations in Warsaw and an analysis of the information about the event in Polish and Italian national newspapers. According to Doise (1986), there is no approach that should be considered 'better' as each one leads to a different level of analysis in research, and therefore I shall present the results of these three levels of research. Each one of them highlights a different aspect: structured

interviews and questionnaires focus on the intrapersonal level, participant observation concerns interpersonal processes and the analysis of newspapers gives an insight on the universal ideological level.

RESEARCH DESIGN

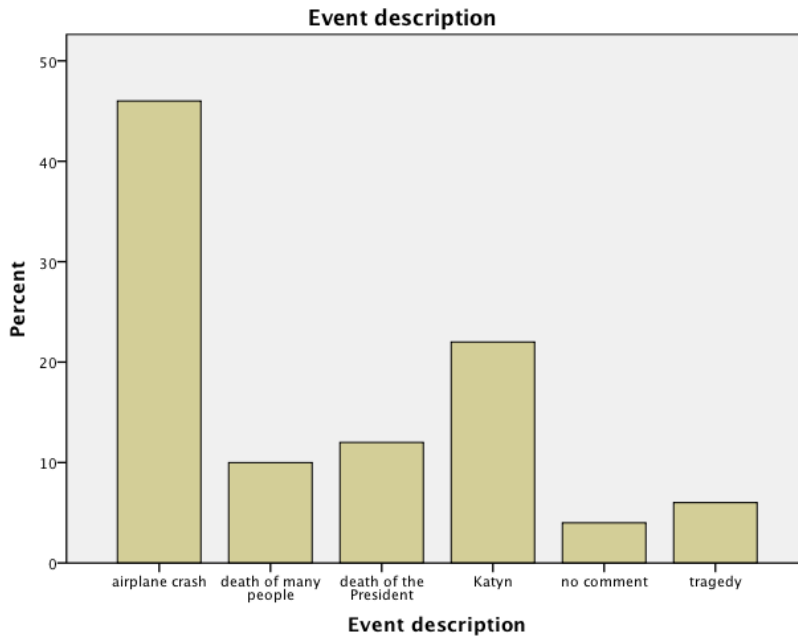
Questionnaires and Structured Interviews

The sample of fifty participants from Poland and from Italy was randomly drawn according to gender, age, education and size of the city/town of their residence, and personally interviewed in the central locations of the capital cities of Warsaw and Rome. I chose to refer to the event simply as “April 10, 2010,” or “the event of April 10, 2010,” both in this article and while conducting research on it with a group of fifty Polish and Italian people, as I was careful not to describe what happened myself, as a researcher, and not to influence my subjects in any way as to what was my vision (Zammuner, 1996). The instrument, a ten-item questionnaire, was constructed in Polish and in Italian, and demographic data was collected for gender, age, education and name of the city/town of residence.

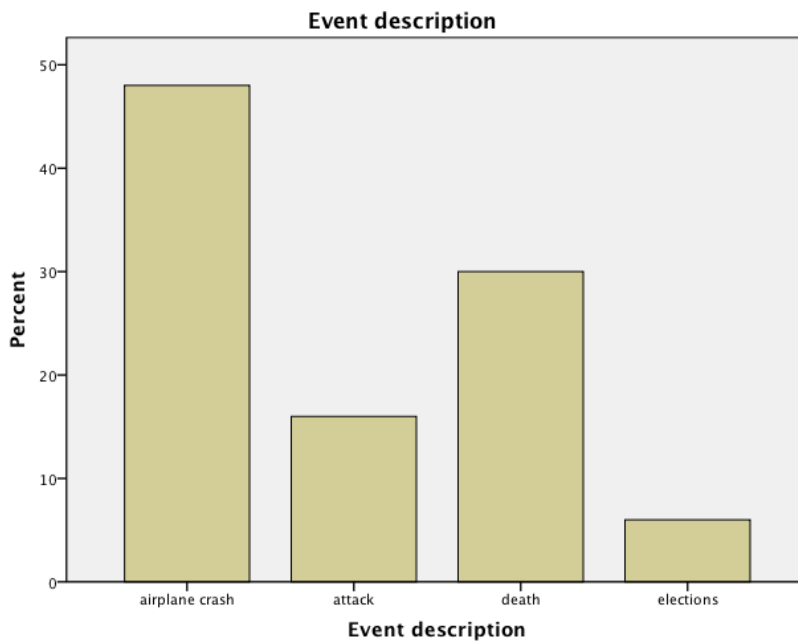
Starting on April 10, 2010, the very day of the event, for eight days the questionnaires were administered to the participants in Poland, in the central area of the city of Warsaw, close to the train station. The same procedure was used in Italy where the subjects were approached for the interview near Termini, the central train station of Rome. The structured interviews took place for eight days in the early evening and each interview lasted approximately half an hour. There were seven interviews conducted on April 10, 2010, then each following day for six days there were six interviews, and on the eighth day again seven participants were interviewed. The aim of the research, as presented to the participants, was to see how Polish/Italian society perceives the event that took place on April 10, 2010. Regarding data analysis, descriptive statistics were used in comparing Polish and Italian responses.

As my first question of the structured interview I always asked each subject about what happened in Smolensk on April 10, 2010. The theoretical ground for this question was aimed at naming and thus anchoring the event. The answers given varied in length. They could be a word, a phrase, a sentence or a paragraph. Then the key phrase was identified for each answer

according to a grid. The identification of the most important phrase among Polish subjects resulted in five response categories, while the Italian subjects' responses were grouped in three categories (Figure 1.1 gives the list of response categories for Polish and Italian subjects).



Polish subjects



Italian subjects

Figure 1.1. Key words used to describe the event among Polish and Italian subjects.

As expected, the responses of Italian subjects were less varied than those of the Polish ones. There were differences in categories as Polish subjects often identified Katyn as a key word in their response which is a fact that points back to the Polish history and relations with Russia. On the contrary, Italian subjects were more oriented towards the future and practical consequences of the event on the international scene, which is demonstrated by their reply “elections” which did not appear among Polish subjects. Also, Italian subjects, who were more distant from the event, anchored it to the attack on the US Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, while Polish subjects did not make this connection when representing the event. Two Polish subjects replied by saying “no comment” when asked about what happened, making it clear that to them it was obvious. No such case was reported among Italian subjects.

There is an interesting relation between the timing (the day on which a person was interviewed) and the prevalent social representations. On the first, second and third days of the interviews, the key phrase was defined by the majority of Polish and Italian subjects as “airplane crash” and “death” (in the Polish case specified by subjects as “death of the president” and “death of many people”) which were the most common phrases also used by the media (as demonstrated by the analysis of titles of articles in newspapers and in Internet press agencies). From the interviews it was clear that the details of the event were still not very familiar to Polish and Italian subjects on the first day, even though they all knew some information about it and thus the representations appeared quite similar. However, it was clear that representations were still emerging and changing. People had many questions and three of the Polish subjects when they were asked about the reason of what happened explicitly stated that they would refrain from making judgments before having more evidence.

In the questionnaire that guided the interview, the second question regarded the immediate reaction (see Figure 1.2), which was mostly identified as a description of emotional states among Polish subjects, but a significant part of the respondents said that they were eager to “find out more” by contacting family and friends, as well as searching for information using the media.

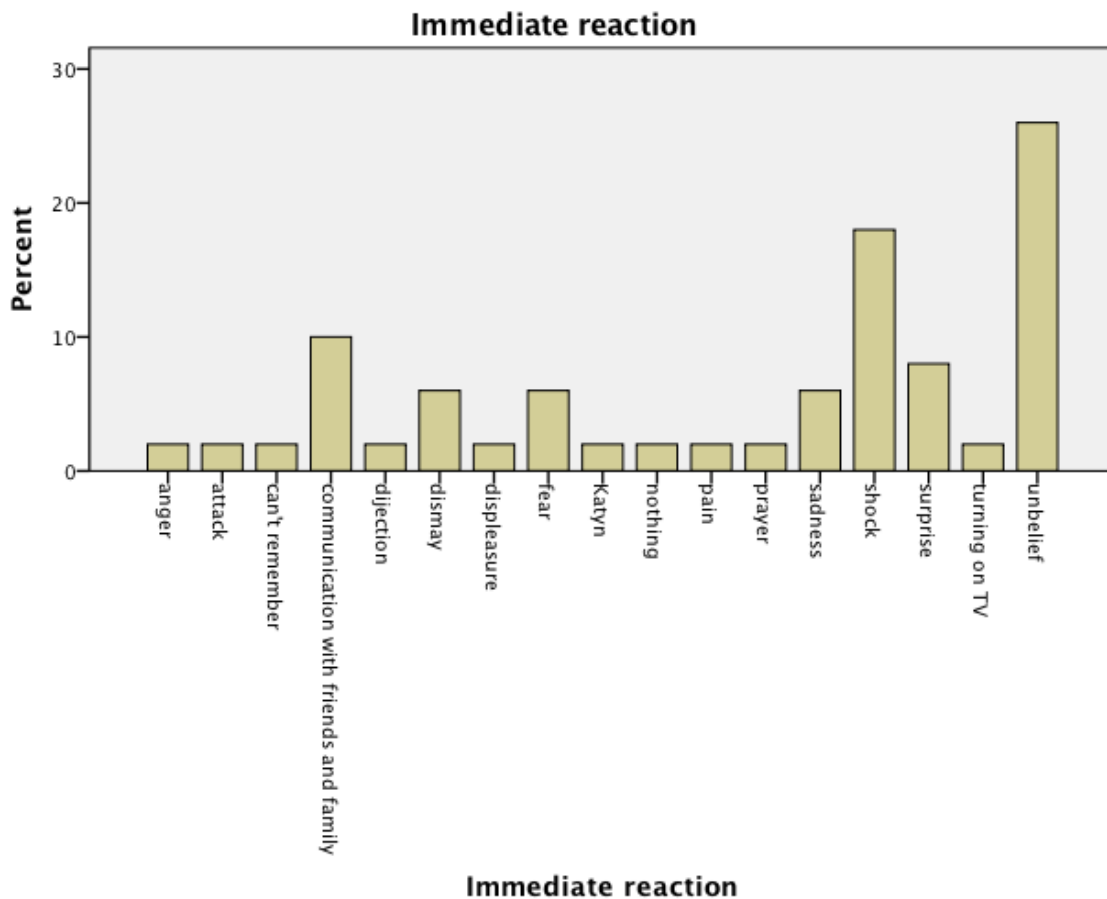


Figure 1.2. The immediate reaction of the Polish subjects to the news of the event.

This is a good example of the effort society makes to familiarize the strange (Mugny & Carugati, 1989) by gaining more knowledge about the object of representation. It illustrated the function of social representations - “to make something unfamiliar, or unfamiliarity itself, familiar” (Moscovici, 1984, p. 24). The emotion of unbelief and shock was less frequent among Italian subjects, who tended to describe their reaction more as surprise and displeasure, compared with the Polish.

Simultaneously with the process of anchoring of the event, the other process that occurred among both Polish and Italian respondents was objectification, which aims to create truths obvious to everyone and independent of any social or psychological determinism (Doise, 1993). To identify the social representations of the event, the respondents were asked to list the first words that come to their minds as a response to the stimulus phrase “April 10, 2010,” in the order

of importance. This technique was inspired with the associative network developed by de Rosa (1992). In relation to objectification, the words listed most frequently – “airplane crash,” “loss,” “president” and “death” - were examples of objectifying the reality by creating obvious truths. I believe that this denotes the intervention of determinism in the transformation of social representations (Doise, 1993) and is a clear example of objectification, contributing to the diversity of the expressions of social representations. The objectification of the event illustrated “the centrality of representational work or the activity of reflection in the genesis of representations as the unfamiliar is familiarized” (Duveen, 2007, p. 549). The abstract, unfamiliar idea of the common and sudden death of government, through communication gained the iconic aspect of the burning remains of the airplane. That concrete picture, transmitted by mass media, became a part of social reality and as such could be collectively evaluated. It is thanks to the objectification of the event that the social representations of it can be compared with other common sense beliefs that shape individual worldviews (Moscovici, 1984).

The above processes can also be seen in the responses to the question “Why it happened?” which are compared in the Figure 1.3 that contains the responses from both Polish and Italian subjects, as there were no major differences between them, in spite of less exposure to information by Italian subjects. Representational processes are “the product of the balance of influence processes at a specific point in time. As this balance changes, so too will the representations sustained by these communicative processes” (Duveen, 2007, p. 552). Even though the subjects represent two cultures, their responses are similar because they are compared at the same point in time when the information communicated, more detailed in Poland and more general in Italy, is nevertheless quite similar. During the very first days people were more likely to say that they did not know the reason or that it was probably the fault of the weather or of an old and defective airplane. However, after a couple of days the fault was much more often attributed to destiny or God’s will, to the Russians, to the pilot or to the President himself pressuring the pilot to land in spite of bad weather.

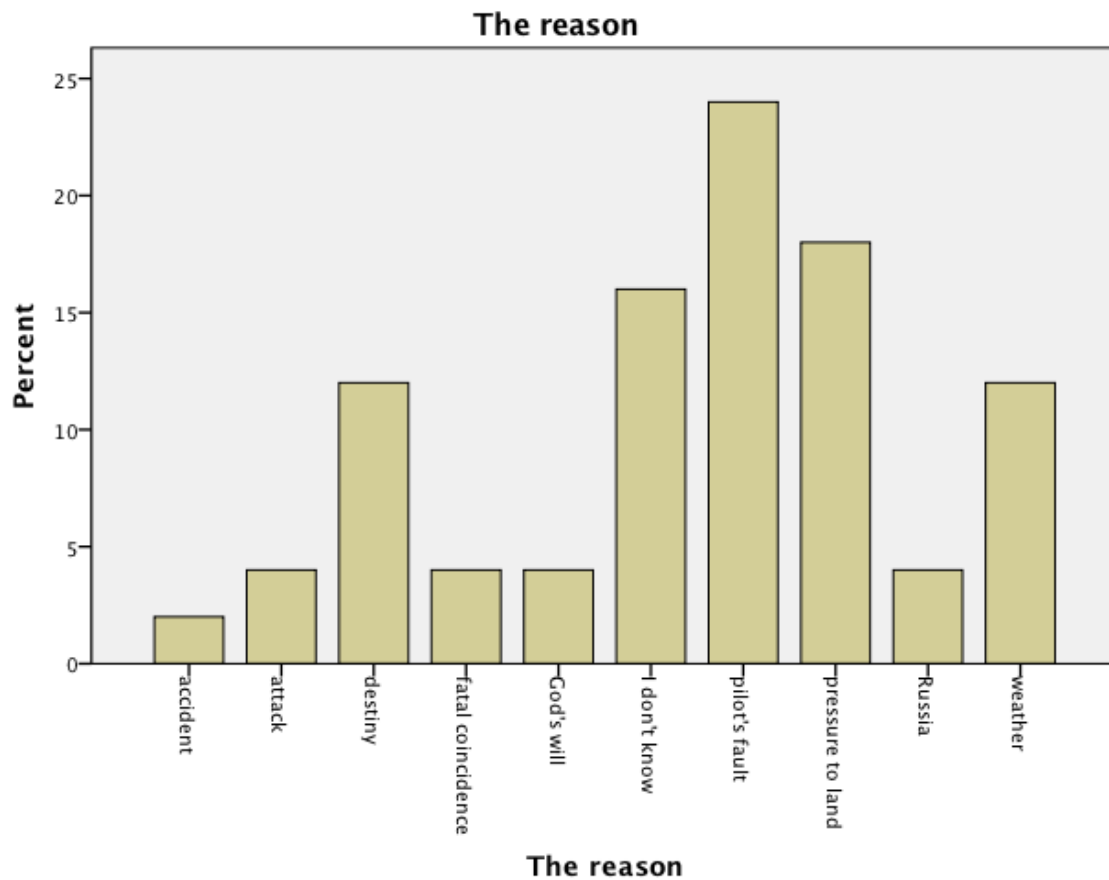


Figure 1.3. The reason for the airplane crash according to both Polish and Italian subjects.

This switching from practical and neutral reasons to the reasons that are aligned with one's political orientation, among both Polish and Italian respondents, illustrates that the social representations work as "social matrices" where a collective can appropriate its own divisions and articulate them around a common normative stake (Gely & Sanchez-Mazas, 2006, p. 391). While at first the unified dimension of the social representations of April 10, 2010 was emphasized more, after some time it was the diverse that was articulated by the respondents from both Poland and Italy (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 The correlations between the date of the interview and the description of the event.

Received date * Event description Crosstabulation

Count

	Event description						Total
	airplane crash	death of many people	death of the President	Katyn	No comment	tragedy	
Received date 4/10/10	3	1	0	0	0	1	5
4/11/10	4	0	0	0	1	1	6
4/12/10	4	2	0	1	0	0	7
4/13/10	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
4/14/10	2	0	1	0	0	0	3
4/15/10	3	0	0	2	0	0	5
4/16/10	3	1	3	2	0	1	10
4/17/10	2	0	2	3	1	0	8
4/18/10	0	1	0	3	0	0	4
Total	23	5	6	11	2	3	50

The content of social representations of the event includes the cause of it, “the blame”, which can be a framework for the construction of identity (Breakwell, 2001). Since the social reality is the product of socially constructed ideologies, prescriptions and meanings, significant events are subject to “the process of intra-cultural refinement and adjustment” (Hewer & Kut, 2010, p. 21). As a result of such process we observe the above diversification of “the blame” according to the social identity of the subjects who already belong to certain groups based on their political convictions and/or religious beliefs. The answers of the subjects also demonstrate that social representations are not static or deterministic but they vary along many dimensions, such as how detailed they are or what is the level of consensus about them.

The last five questions required numerical answers, as they were aimed to try to measure the communication and interaction in relation to the event. The subjects were asked: how many people they contacted face-to-face, how many people they communicated with by phone, SMS, email and/or chat, how much time they spent watching television, reading newspapers and browsing Internet for information. The responses to the questionnaire proved that the Italian subjects spent much less time receiving information from media, and also less time

communicating about it than the Polish subjects. Thus, the Italian subjects talked to an average of 5 persons about the event in a single day, while Polish subjects talked to an average of 12 persons. When it comes to reading newspapers, the Italian subjects dedicated an average of 1.5 hours to it in a single day, while Polish subjects spent 2 hours and 20 minutes (see Table 1.2).

Table 1.2 Communication of Italian and Polish subjects regarding the event.

		Report				
Country		Number of conversations	People contacted	Hours in front of TV	Hours on the Internet	Hours reading newspapers
Italy	Mean	5.1667	3.3889	1.2083	.8444	1.4583
	Std. Deviation	4.00367	6.56317	1.23363	1.57432	3.67148
	Median	4.0000	.0000	.7500	.3750	.0000
	Minimum	1.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
	Maximum	15.00	20.00	4.00	6.00	12.00
	Poland	Mean	12.4688	4.2813	5.4688	1.0734
Std. Deviation		9.74840	4.76705	4.24632	1.48867	3.35695
Median		10.0000	3.0000	3.7500	.5000	1.0000
Minimum		3.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Maximum		50.00	20.00	15.00	5.00	14.00
Total		Mean	9.8400	3.9600	3.9350	.9910
	Std. Deviation	8.84414	5.43218	4.02528	1.50806	3.45453
	Median	7.5000	2.0000	3.0000	.5000	.5000
	Minimum	1.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
	Maximum	50.00	20.00	15.00	6.00	14.00

The significant amount of communication about the event is due to the fact that the social representations of it make communication and interaction possible. On the one hand, the form and content of social representations influences behavior, and on the other hand, since the representations are not deterministic, it is during interactive communication with others that social representations are shaped and modified (Purkhardt, 1993). In such a way, social

representations can consolidate groups by creating an environment for communication, in which a group can function without a threat from within to its social identity.

Participant Observation

The old truth is that actions speak louder than words. For this reason it is interesting to see if the visible actions of society confirm what respondents shared verbally as their reactions. Jodelet (1991) has demonstrated how social representations are manifested in actions and practices, which can be contrary to verbal responses. In Poland, the society as a whole responded to the event and it was practical to observe the physical actions that revealed the social representations of April 10, 2010 on the streets of Warsaw. The participant observation was systematically carried out in the afternoons, in the central part of Warsaw, close to the Presidential Palace. Starting on April 10, 2010 and finishing April 17, 2010, the author spent two hours each afternoon in the place mentioned above. The notes were taken in the field, using thin descriptions, and registering the date, hour, approximate number of participants, the area and the description of visible actions.

How did Poland live the event of April 10, 2010? What were the actions that people took as groups? The immediate reaction that could be observed was the need to interact with others in order to gather more information, as well as to see, hear, and listen to the news. On April 10, 2010 the sound of radio and TV sets that were constantly communicating the news could be heard from the houses and restaurants on the opposite side of the street from the Presidential Palace. The people passing would talk to each other about the airplane crash, and it was observed that twice the strangers were approached in order to ask “if there was any more news”. This behavior reveals the need for familiarization and intergroup communication, which are the functions attributed to social representations (de Rosa, 1992). The need was demonstrated by approaching strangers on the streets, which does not usually happen in Poland.

On April 11, 2010 (Sunday) it was observed that the church next to the Presidential Palace was very crowded, and the presence of more people in front of the Presidential Palace was recorded. There were already candles placed in front of the Presidential Palace, and the participants would stop and place flowers and more candles. There was a presence of boy scouts

for about an hour each, who took care of arranging the flowers and candles. Two thirds of the participants who stopped would not speak and children were instructed to be quiet. The presence of more people in church (which was confirmed with the usher to be in fact more numerous than on regular Sundays throughout the whole day of April 11, 2010) points out the statement of Moscovici (2000), who affirmed that it is in churches where the ideas and beliefs are incarnated. The social representation of death in Poland is closely linked with religion, and the reason why even people who are not usual church goers decide to attend church is because the social representation of death is very persistent and the processes that accompany such a representation do not disappear or fade away. As Breakwell (1993) points out, there is a very clear illustration of this point in the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the resurrection of ethnic and religious identities. The old social representations are as vivid as ever; they may have been lying low for nearly five decades or longer, but they are still there. Similarly, in Poland the old representation of Katyn was accompanied by the action of silence (forced by the Communist regime) and turning on to faith. That representation and action was still there, dormant but present in the conscience of the society, as demonstrated by the answers to the interviews. As observed, on the first day after the event there was a predominant spirit of unity in silence. Obviously, people talked to each other but they were much quieter. This is illustrated by a scene that I witnessed during the observation carried out near the Presidential Palace, where a mother was scolding her children in a whisper, instructing them “not to talk loud on this day”. That could have been prompted by the two minutes of silence officially declared on Sunday. In Warsaw people left their homes in order to go to the historical center to light candles and leave flowers in front the Presidential Palace in Warsaw (see Figure 2.1).



Figure 2.1. The candles and flowers in front of the Presidential Palace (photo by the author).

The candles were sold in front of the Palace. Thus, the abstract forms were being turned into concrete representations such as numerous candles and flowers on the streets in objectification process (von Cranach, 1992). The organization was evident: the plaza was separated to make room for the candles, which were constantly kept lit by the boy scouts who were replacing the finished candles with new ones handed to them by the people. There was a big screen in front of the Presidential Palace that was showing the inside of the Palace where the people were paying tribute to the ashes of the President. All the major television channels had live broadcasts from the place where observation was carried out and there was a provisory hospital for the crowd. The need to communicate was evident through actions: people talked to complete strangers much more than usual, and the whole way from the airport to the Presidential Palace was very crowded when the corpse arrived. From that moment on the line to pay tribute to the President was miles long (see Figure 2.2) which became the material side of the social representation (Moscovici, 1987).



Figure 2.2. The line of people waiting to pay tribute to the President (photo by the author).

At the newspaper kiosks there were photos of the victims, always in black and white, and even some coffee shops displayed similar photos with the candles in front of them.

On the third day of participant observation, I recorded the presence of not only people from Warsaw, but also groups of people coming from abroad and organized groups from schools and organizations. For instance, I registered the presence of a dozen combatants from Italy, from Monte Cassino, and groups of small children taken by their teachers to light the candles. There were Polish people coming from remote towns and cities, as well as from abroad. Actions performed by people were means to objectify the unfamiliar event in Smolensk, thus making concrete the event that first seemed absent and distant. While very few could say that they were in Smolensk when the event took place, through the action of coming from far away to Warsaw and performing a ritual, prescribed action, appropriate in the moment of grief, the objectification

took place in front of the Presidential Palace. Concrete content and form was thus given to the previously ambiguous and disturbing idea (Moscovici, 1984).

However, in the next days the climate on the streets changed. Although the practices of paying tribute and the official national mourning were still very much evident and ongoing, there was no more reverent silence but rather new activities among the crowd, such as consumption of waffles and snacks on the street and discussion of various reasons for the airplane crash. Some people would blame the President and/or the government for putting pressure on the pilot to land; others would say that it was the pilot's fault or a Russian attack. The social representations were changing dynamically, becoming more elaborate, diverse, and heterogeneous, often incorporating historical aspects such as Katyn and the death of the Polish Pope, and stirring strong emotions that could be observed while casually listening to the conversations in cafes close to the Presidential Palace. After all, as Moscovici described it, 'social representations are the outcome of an unceasing babble and a permanent dialogue between individuals' (1984, p. 13).

On the fourth day there were flags of many European nations displayed in front of the Presidential Palace and the live news broadcasts continued. The free newspapers were distributed with increasingly more information regarding the accident, and such information was vividly discussed. There was also a focus on the actions of the government that were to take place in the near future, such as the funeral of the President and his wife, whose ashes had not been identified yet. The messages of solidarity from the world leaders were distributed and discussed in front of the Presidential Palace. I heard that many people would complain about the volcano eruptions that made it impossible to travel by airplane, which demonstrated that the Polish people appreciated the official international condolences.

On the fifth day, Wednesday, it started to rain steadily but the crowd did not diminish and the line was still as long as the day before. The formal solemn parade was headed to the Presidential Palace, and it was formed of the Polish Church leaders, the academic senates of Polish universities and the military. Listening to the comments of the crowds, I realized that many people had permission to leave work early in order to pay tribute and assist the event.

A similar scenario was recorded on the sixth and seventh day of observation, while the eighth day, Saturday, was the last day when the ashes of the President were displayed and the line was even longer than in the previous days. The funeral was on the lips of many people where

participant observation was carried out, and on the spot most opinions were favorable towards burying the President and his wife in the Royal Cathedral in Cracow.

The signs of national mourning, officially declared for a week, were expressed in traditional ways (such as flags at half mast) displayed near the Presidential Palace, and even in private apartments. The people gathered in front of the Presidential Palace were aware of the symbols, as they were pointing them out to each other and discussing them. The young people also discussed some new ways of expressing mourning, such as changing the colorful website of the Public Transport Authority of Warsaw to black and white only, and many other sites. Singers, even foreign ones, would compose songs for Poland, such as the song “Welcome Poland” by a Russian singer, Alexander Dolskij, which started to circulate on the Internet in the following days. I observed the intention of a young man to play the song on his phone in front of the Presidential Palace but he was told not to do it by the crowd around him.

As a participant observer it stood out to me that I could perceive social representations especially when listening to and watching adults with children. By taking notes I tried to record what the adults were pointing out to children as visible signs of the event. I also recorded the presence of journalists (television cameras, live broadcasts, picture taking) on each day of the participant observation. From the second day of observation until the eighth day I saw non-journalists taking photos of the place, both with cell phones and with cameras. Only about fifteen percent of the people who were taking photos would photograph a person with the background of the Presidential Palace. In all the other cases it was the place, the mass of people as a whole, the candles and the flowers that were photographed.

The heterogeneity of social representations is inevitable and the cognitive polyphasia, the state of a “dynamic coexistence of the distinct modalities of knowledge, corresponding to definite relations between man and his environment” (Moscovici, 2008, p. 190) can be evidenced by the different approaches that has been observed, from reverence to more commercial experience and from unity in grief to discord over where to bury the President. Such coexistence of cognitive systems is normal and the observations demonstrate the movement of forms of reflection and their order.

Television and Newspapers Analysis

The crucial role in the elaboration of social representations is evident in the case of April 10, 2010, since the event took place in Russia and very few people saw it personally. It was first transmitted by television, but then in no time the images were available online and the news was spread by radio broadcasters. In Poland, during the entire weekend, mass media were almost continuously transmitting news of the accident, while in Italy it was the number one news of all the news programs and also a topic very present in the newspapers and on the Internet news. However, of all the forms of reconstruction of reality, television has the closest resemblance to ‘primary reality’ (Sommer, 1998) and it was the main source of information for the fifty respondents from both Poland and Italy. On April 10, 2010, an average Polish respondent would spend almost 5 and a half hour watching television news about the airplane crash, while an average Italian respondent spent 1.2 hours, according to the questionnaires mentioned above.

Moscovici’s (2008) study of social representations of psychoanalysis was the first empirical study of social representations and it has employed media analysis, which is dialectically interwoven, since media plays such an important part in the communication of social representations.

The method of collecting data from television was based on identifying the most persistent images (in terms of the priority of the image in the news – the first one in order of showing a certain image – and the time dedicated to it), both in Poland and in Italy when referring to the event on April 10, 2010. On the day of the event the television image that was recorded as the most persistent on the television news in Poland and in Italy was the airport in Smolensk and the smoke above what was left of the airplane (see Figure 3.1).



Figure 3.1. One of the most popular images in media (Reuters).

To this scenario were then added people; first the firemen and soldiers, and then the delegations of the Polish and Russian governments.

The second most persistent image was the shots of Polish politicians who were not onboard the aircraft, and the families of the victims, especially the twin brother of the President. Then television in Poland focused on the response of society to the event, by presenting shots of the candles and the crowd in front of the Presidential Palace. Following in the next days were the images of the leaders of other nations who were publicly expressing their condolences to Poland as a nation. It was the media, both television and in print that launched the slogan “We shall be together”, which was evident in the behavior of people on the streets, the shots of the crowd that gathered when the remnants of the President were brought from Russia, and the streets filled with people who wanted to pay tribute to the President, as evidenced by the participant observation carried out. Many people were interviewed on television, especially older ones who came a long way from all over Poland to the capital city to show their respect.

However, only a few days later that slogan of unity in loss was replaced by an argument that divided Poland, according to the media, over the burial of the President in the national cathedral. There were suddenly many negative opinions of the President broadcast by television. Some would blame him for the accident. Others would see him as a victim of a Russian attack, and on television various opinions were featured. From a theoretical point of view, this change of the images shown by Polish television evidenced the development of social representations of the event from unity to division of society. Polish television was, therefore, an active actor that communicated first more homogenous representations that are shared to some extent by all members of society and signify the social identity (Ben Asher, 2003). The interpretation of the initial more uniform representations on television is precisely the significance of social identity, based on the principle (Tajfel, 1974) that individual citizens of Poland need to keep up their positive image as a nation. The loss of the majority of the leaders of the Polish society has inevitably caused fear and insecurity thus having a negative effect on the self-image of the country. Television, by promoting unity and highlighting international expressions of compassion, was actually the “voice” (Hirschman, 1970) that highlighted the positive aspects of the situation in order to foment the self-image of being Polish. However, after just a few days, when the positive image of Poland was reinforced, the polemical representations came into play.

The interpretation of this change is the switching from the social identity of the nation as a whole into social identity of social groups. It is at this point when subgroups of the nation formed polemical representations in the course of the dispute, for example, over where to bury the President. Opposite “voices” were reflected by television because of the effort of each group to maintain positive identity. Right-wing groups, motivated to see the twin brother of the President as the new President, were interested in the positive image of the leader, while those who were for other candidates would actually blame the President for the accident, because that was more helpful for their positive image.

The social categorization influences the social identity, which in turn influences the social confrontation (Palmonari, 1995), as demonstrated by the most significant images shown by Polish television in eight days, starting on the day of the accident.

In Italy, the procedure for identifying the most significant images shown on television was the same as in Poland. Namely, it consisted of watching evening news and recording the priority (first image shown) and time dedicated to each image related to the event of April 10, 2010. Italian television was first showing the images of the Smolensk airport and the remains of the airplane in the evening news, similar to the main images shown by Polish television. Then, it was showing the Italian Prime Minister officially expressing his condolences to Poland. On the second day after the event, Italian television featured shots of Polish people on the streets expressing their mourning, as well as the Polish immigrants in Rome being interviewed in front of the Polish church. There were also some live transmissions from Warsaw and interviews with passersby in the following days. Throughout the week the news from Poland was gradually shorter in the national news broadcasts, and, for example, the fact that the President was going to be buried in the national cathedral in Cracow was announced without any comment as opposed to how it was discussed in Poland. In the case of the research carried out on television images in Italian news the hypothesis of the development from hegemonic to polemical social representations was therefore not confirmed. The lack of evidence of the existence of polemical social representations on Italian television can be attributed to the fact that society as a whole or the social authorities do not necessarily share them (Ben-Asher, 2003) and, therefore, they are not displayed by television which does not mean that they do not exist.

The above statement is backed up by the analysis of articles concerning the event of April 10, 2010 in the main national newspapers of both Poland and Italy. It will be demonstrated that in both countries' newspapers the development of polemical social representations takes place. The procedure of data collection was based on the analysis of articles concerning the event in the *Gazeta Wyborcza* newspaper in Poland and *Corriere della Sera* newspaper in Italy, for eight consecutive days starting on April 10, 2010. *Gazeta Wyborcza* is the most widely read newspaper in Poland; it is the first one on the list of top daily newspapers in Poland, according to the World Press Trends (World Press Trends, 2007). The nationwide Italian press has two major daily newspapers: *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica*, both of which are published with local sections for each of the major urban areas. *Il Corriere della Sera* is the first one on the list of top daily newspapers in Italy (World Press Trends, 2007). In spite of differences of the total numbers of circulation of *Gazeta Wyborcza* in Poland and *Il Corriere della Sera* in Italy, the average newspaper circulation per 1,000 adults is very similar in Poland and in Italy (World Press Trends, 2007) (see the Figure 3.2 below).

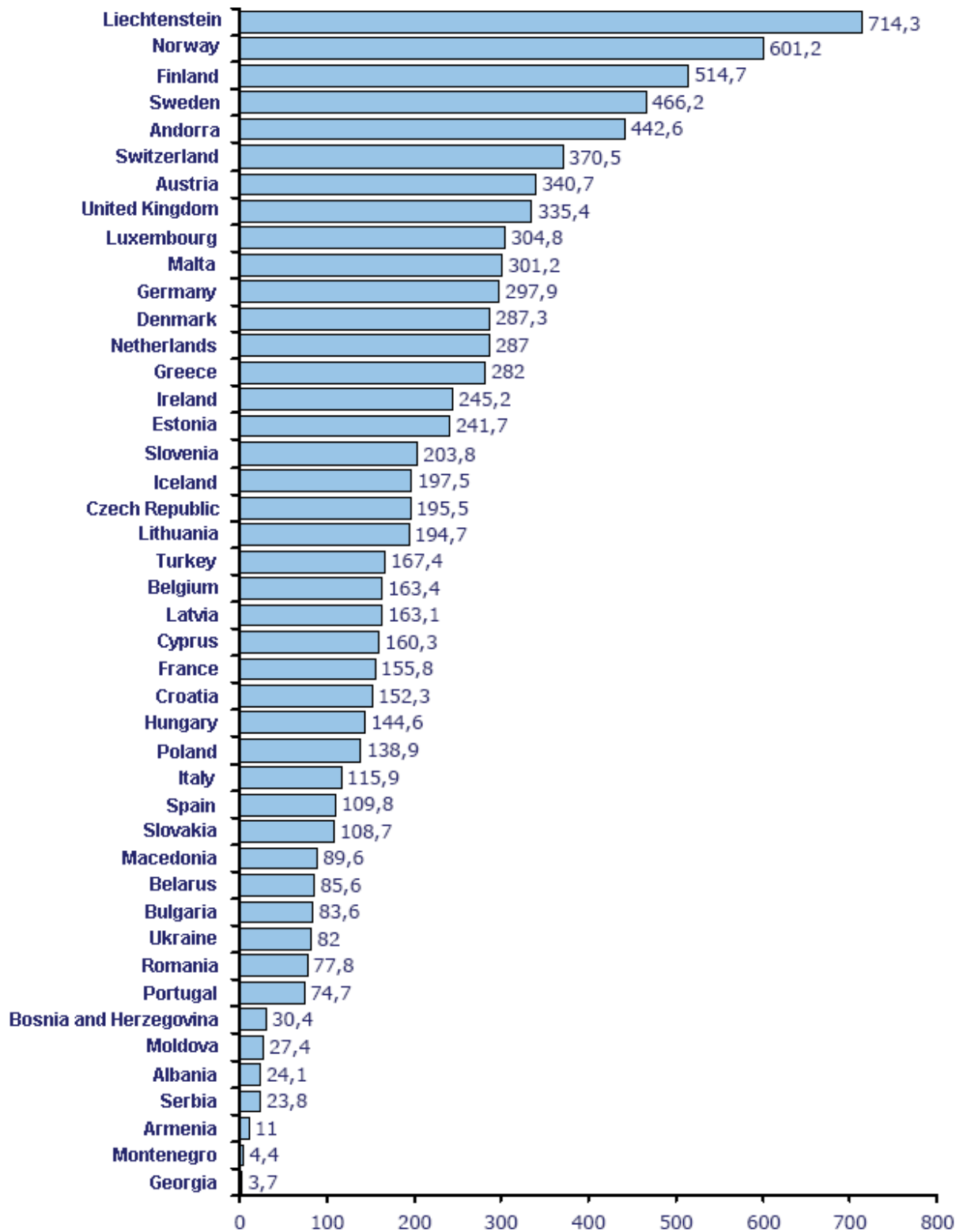


Figure 3.2. Average newspaper circulation in Europe per 1000 adults (number). Source: World Press Trends, 2007.

The first step of the procedure of data analysis was to identify the articles that concerned the event of April 10, 2010. In the Polish newspaper such articles formed 59.12% of all the articles during the eight days when the research was carried out, while for the Italian newspaper the percentage was less than 1%. This confirms that Italian subjects were exposed to less news about the event than the Polish subjects. Except for April 10, 2010, in the Polish newspaper the articles about the event were found on every single day, from April 11 until April 17, 2010, including two special editions on Sundays dedicated entirely to the event. In the Italian case, articles about the event were identified in every single day except for April 16, 2010. Each identified article was then categorized according to the grid developed for that purpose. In Poland, the majority of articles (over twenty percent) were dedicated to the dead – their lives, achievements, family histories, as well as the details of finding the corpses, bringing them back to Poland and burying them. This focus on people is very natural, as death, a universal experience, is a way of anchoring the event. The representation gains an iconic aspect of faces of individuals on a black and white background; most of them already well known from the public sphere (see Figure 3.3 below).



Figure 3.3. The image first used by the newspapers, then posted in various places of Warsaw (photo by the author)

This explains why the expressions of mourning featured in the newspapers were in fact the most discussed topic. It became necessary to categorize mourning as national, expressed by single cities, individuals, institutions, private sector, culture and sports, because otherwise just the category ‘mourning’ would be too wide and ambiguous. In the Polish newspaper, especially the mourning cities, both large and small, were the most frequent topic of the articles about mourning. This demonstrates the local expression of national patriotism, the need to show that not only the main cities, but every single place in Poland participated in the mourning. In Poland, mourning after the dead was seen as an expression of patriotism, as “doing the right thing”. Such objectification of the event was rooted in the theme of suffering, so common to Polish history and identity. Living the pain is a Polish way of collective symbolic coping, as defined by Wagner, Valencia and Elejabarrieta as a situation in which “the new, unfamiliar and therefore disquieting phenomenon calls for a valid interpretation and explanation which can be collectively accepted” (1996, p. 1-2). According to these authors, on the level of mass media symbolic coping is achieved by communication, while on the inter-personal level it is achieved by social discourse. In spite of the different proximity to the event, the Italian newspaper also dedicated the majority of the articles regarding the event (also more than twenty percent) to the theme of mourning Poland. Mourning thus became a media event (Dajan & Katz, 2008) that drew even more people to participate in what they read about in the newspapers. The dead persons were the second most numerous theme of Italian articles, next to the accident details. Overall, there is then a similarity in what the Polish and Italian press featured the most, as demonstrated in Figure 3.4 below.

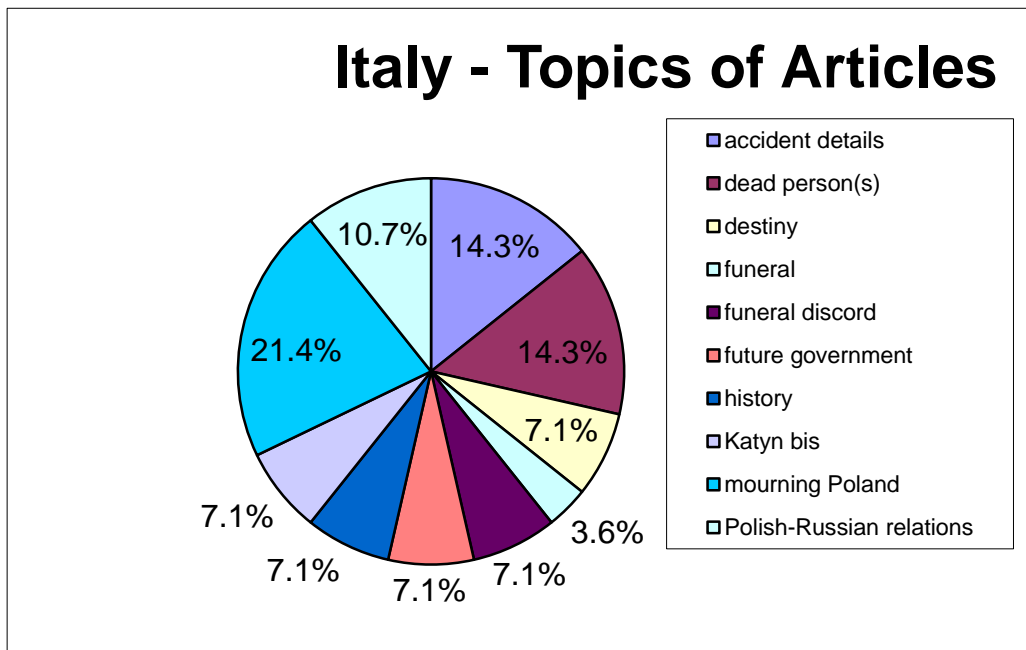
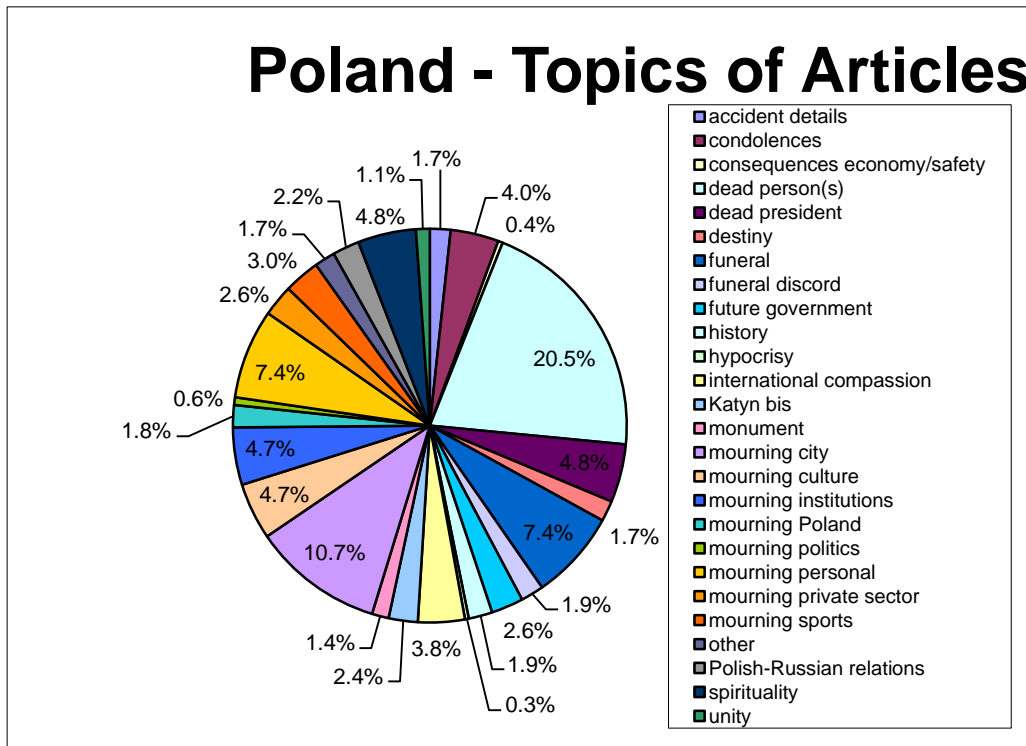
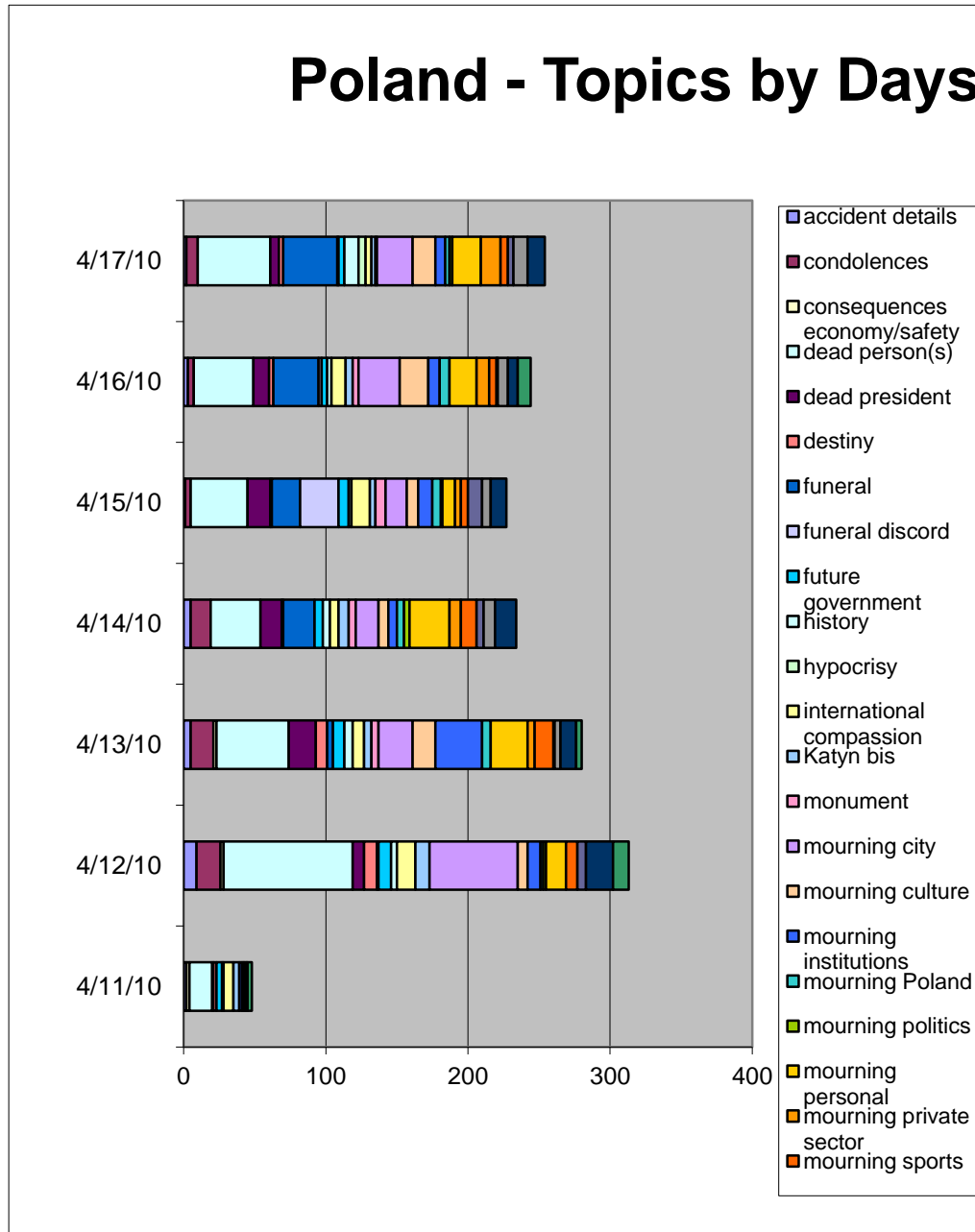


Figure 3.4. The topics of the articles in Polish and Italian newspapers in a week.

In order to follow the dynamics of what was communicated by the newspapers about the event over seven consecutive days after it took place, the articles were divided by days in both Polish and Italian press (see Figure 3.5 below).



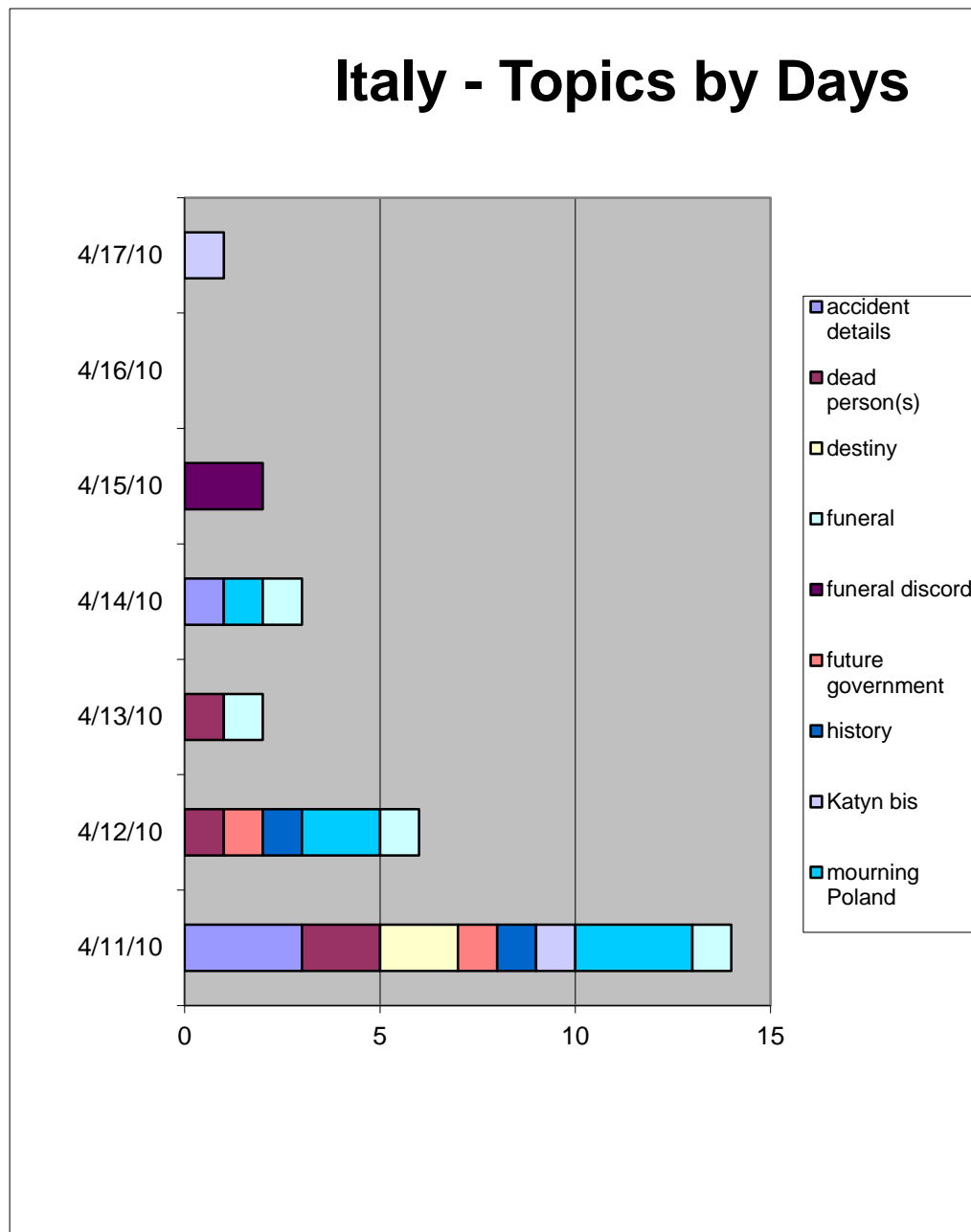


Figure 3.5. The topics of the articles in Polish and Italian newspapers on each day, starting on the day after the event.

Similar tendencies could be observed, as the majority of articles regarding the event were printed in the first regular edition of the newspaper right after the event happened (in the Polish case, where normally there is no Sunday edition, the highest number of articles related to April 10, 2010 showed up in the Monday paper, while in the Italian case it was the Sunday paper that

had the highest number of related articles). The Polish press evidenced the turn from initial representations that called for unity of feelings and a response as mourning after the dead persons, including the President, of whom, at first, nothing negative was said. Such hegemonic representations in the press changed into polemical representations that included the discussion of whether to bury the president in the cathedral in Cracow, and from talking about unity to presenting first voices that focused on hypocrisy. The Italian press followed the pattern and one of the last days featured articles regarding the event in Smolensk. It presented solely the discord over the funeral that took place in Poland. Such development in the press mirrors what has been said by the respondents from both Poland and Italy. It shows similarity in how individuals describe the reality and how the media shows it. The difference can be noted when it comes to Polish-Russian international relations which were not always seen in a positive way by individual respondents (to the point of blaming Russia for the “attack”). However, the press dedicated more than 10% of all articles regarding the event (Italian newspaper) and 35 articles (Polish newspaper) stressing the compassion of the Russian president and describing the sincere compassion of ordinary people in Russia. The articles were accompanied with images of the Russian president embracing the Polish prime minister – a highly suggestive implicit message “buried under the layers of words and images” (Moscovici, 1994, p. 168). When seeing it, people understand such a message either as agreeing with their social representations or as conflicting with it. As Moscovici (1994) notes, this is a normal phenomenon in a real society; therefore, it is not surprising that the research in both Poland and Italy demonstrates this phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

The multi-level methodological approach (consisting of questionnaires, structured interviews, participant observation and analysis of major newspaper articles and television images) was adapted in response to the approach proposed by de Rosa (1990) to polyvalence of levels of dimensional analysis implicit in the definition of social representations. The picture that emerged from the analysis of verbal and written responses to the questionnaires, the observable actions and the media, appeared quite uniform and revealed some similar aspects of how representations were formed and changed over time on each one of these levels.

Polish society as a whole was immersed in the national tragedy, officially communicated and lived through on the streets and in the houses, while Italians were exposed to less information, but nevertheless a similar development of social representations, which eventually resulted in polemical social representations could be seen among representatives from both nations. The time factor was crucial in how people saw and interpreted the event, according to how elaborate was their social representation. According to Duveen, Moscovici envisions “social representations as dynamic structures in which knowledge is constantly being transformed as social groups construct and reconstruct their grasp of the social world and their place within it” (Duveen, 2007, p. 552). Therefore, the theory of social representations is “oriented around the dimension of time as a fundamental parameter of social processes” (Duveen, 2007, p. 552), essential and universal for both Polish and Italian subjects. Interestingly, not only the general aspect of transformation of social representations, but also a particular anchoring in the Polish history of Katyn was common to both nations, though Italian respondents interpreted it less as destiny or God’s will, practically not mentioning these aspects and focusing much more on politics. Also, the division of Poland between those who were for burying the President at the national cathedral and those who were against it could not be observed among Italians, even though it was discussed by the Italian press. The polemical representations were present in both societies, but had a different character. While the Polish ones focused on the President and his image and burial, the Italian ones concerned international relations, especially with Russia.

I think that this last development in the representation of the event served to group it with other representations of politics and the world order in general as the ultimate step to make the unfamiliar familiar, a social representation fully compatible with one’s worldview. As pointed out by Liu (2002), hegemonic social representations can be used to understand how strong consensus allows societies and peoples to move together as one, and enact culture specific solutions to their problems. However, the representations of what happened in Smolensk on April 10, 2010 cannot be described as hegemonic because they are not “extraordinarily stable and resistant to change” closed systems of meaning (Duveen, 2007, p. 548). On the contrary, for many months after the event, following numerous official commemorations, it has remained the focus of reflection and discussion, especially in Poland. Until today, April 10, 2010 can be

classified as a significant phenomenon whose process of familiarization itself becomes visible and open to investigation, also in the light of new information.

The problem of losing the leaders of the nation in the case of Poland required a solution of unity of perspective demonstrated in national mourning. However, the transformation into polemical social representations indicated the social identity rooted in subgroups of the nation. Liu (2002) noted that polemical representations indicate “fault lines” in society where the relationships between groups may become tense, which has actually happened in Poland when the decision was made to bury the President in the royal cathedral. The first basic components of representations of the event, such as “airplane crash”, “death of the president” and “death of the people”, became developed by social agents who speak from different positions and who have different ‘social stakes’ (Mugny & Carugati, 1989). This consideration helps to interpret why the polemical social representations developed – due to the interests of social groups.

In Poland the interests were to either promote the positive image of the President or to diminish it, depending on the favored new candidate for the president. In Italy (and also in Poland), the stakeholders were interested in projecting either a positive image of Polish-Russian relations (highlighting the compassion demonstrated by the Russian leader to the Polish leader) or in a negative image (some of the interviewees described the event as a Russian attack).

It has been noted that “the social representations maintained in the present time of a society are not static but dynamic entities that change in accordance with the changing demands of the present” (Laszlo, Ferenczhalmy & Szalai, 2010, p. 1). This consideration can also apply to a time perspective of days, not only years or generations, since within eight days the guided interview with individuals as well as participant observation and analysis of images and articles demonstrated that the representations evolved and changed in two nations with a different proximity to the event. The dynamics of social representations lead to a new hypothesis that the polemical representations will eventually turn into hegemonic representations as demonstrated in other cases of research on social representations of historical events (Paez, Valenzia, Marquez & Vincze, 2004). In the case discussed in this paper, it would signify a circular relationship between the forms of social representations, from quite homogenous to practically opposite. So far, the process that the representations underwent becoming polemical has only been demonstrated in the above multi-methodological research. The future step of the research, for example undertaken

on the tenth anniversary of April 10, 2010, would be to explore the further development of social representations of the event, focusing on the process of “breakdown of objectifications” (Sammut, 2010) in the new conditions, which would certainly be different than during the first week of the event.

REFERENCES

- Ben-Asher, S. (2003). Hegemonic, emancipated and polemic social representations: parental dialogue regarding Israeli naval commandos training in polluted water. *Papers on Social Representations*, 12, 6.1-6.12.
- Breakwell, G.M. (1993). Social representations and social identity. *Papers on Social Representations*, 2, 198-218.
- Breakwell, G.M. (2001). Social representational constraints upon identity processes. In K. Deaux & G. Philogene (Eds), *Representations of the social* (pp. 271–84). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Cranach, M. von (1992). The multi-level organization of action and knowledge. In M. von Cranach, W. Doise & G. Mugny (Eds), *Social representations and the social bases of knowledge* (pp. 10-22). Lewiston, N.Y.: Hogrofe & Huber Publishers.
- Dajan, D. & Katz, E. (2008). *Wydarzenia medialne. Historia transmitowana na żywo*. Warsaw: Muza SA.
- De Rosa, A.S. (1990). Per un approccio multi-metodo allo studio delle rappresentazioni sociali. *Rassegna di Psicologia*, 3(7), 101-152.
- De Rosa, A.S. (1992). Thematic perspectives and epistemic principles in developmental social cognition and social representation. The meaning of a developmental approach to the investigation of S.R. In M. von Cranach, W. Doise & G. Mugny (Eds), *Social representations and the social bases of knowledge* (pp. 120-143). Lewiston, N.Y.: Hogrofe & Huber Publishers.
- Doise, W. (1986). *Levels of explanation in social psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Doise, W. (1993). Debating social representations. In G. M. Breakwell, & D. V. Canter (Eds), *Empirical approaches to social representations* (pp. 157-170). London: Academic Press/Surrey University Press.
- Duveen (2007). Culture and social representations. In J. Valsiner & A. Rosa (Eds), *The Cambridge handbook of sociocultural psychology* (pp. 543-559). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Flick, U. (1998). *An introduction to qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Gely, R. & Sanchez-Mazas, M. (2006). The philosophical implications of research on the social representations of human rights. *Social Science Information*, 45, 387-410.
- Hewer, C.J. & Kut, M. (2010). Historical legacy, social memory and representations of the past within a Polish community. *Memory Studies*, 3(1), 18-32.
- Hirschman, A.O. (1970). *Exit, voice, and loyalty: responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Jodelet, D. (1984). Representations sociales: phenomenes, concepts et theorie. In S. Moscovici (Ed.), *Psychologie sociale* (pp. 357-379). Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Jodelet, D. (1991). *Madness and social representations*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Laszlo, J., Ferenczhalmay, R., Szalai, K. (2010). Role of agency in social representations of history. *Societal and Political Psychology International Review*, 1, 31-43.
- Lewicka, M. (2005). Ways to make people active: The role of place attachment, cultural capital, and neighbourhood ties. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 25, 381-395.
- Liu, J.H. (2002). A cultural perspective on intergroup relations and social identity. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*. Bellingham: Center for Cross-Cultural Research. Western Washington University. Available from http://www.wvu.edu/culture/contents_complete.htm.
- Marková, I., Wilkie, P. (1987). Representations, concepts and social change: the phenomenon of AIDS. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 17(4), 389-409.
- Moscovici, S. (1963). Attitudes and opinions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 14, 231-260.
- Moscovici, S. (1984). The phenomenon of social representations. In R. M. Farr & S. Moscovici (Eds), *Social representations* (pp. 3-69). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Moscovici, S. (1987). Answers and questions. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 17, 513-519.
- Moscovici, S. (1988). Notes towards a description of social representation. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 18, 211-250.
- Moscovici, S. (1994). Social representations and pragmatic communication. *Social Science Information*, 33, 164-177.
- Moscovici, S. (2000). *Social representations: Explorations in social psychology*. New York: New York University Press.
- Moscovici, S. (2008). *Psychoanalysis: Its image and its public*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Mugny, G. & Carugati, F. (1989). *Social representations of intelligence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Páez, D., Valencia, J. Marques, & J. Vincze, O. (2004, June). *Collective memory and social identity: social sharing of the past and social identity in Spain*. Paper presented at the conference Collective remembering, collective emotions and shared representations of history: Functions and dynamics. Aix-en-Provence.
- Palmonari, A. (1995). *Processi simbolici e dinamiche sociali*. Milano: Il Mulino.
- Purkhardt, C.S. (1993). *Transforming social representations. A social psychology of common sense and science*. London: Routledge.
- Putnam, R.D., Leonardi, R., & Nanetti, R.Y. (1993). *Making democracy work. Civic traditions in modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Sammut, G. (2010). *The Breakdown of Objectifications*. Paper presented at the conference 10th International Conference on Social Representations. Gammarrh, Tunisia, 5-8 June.
- Sommer, C.M. (1998). Social representations and media communications. In U. Flick (Ed.) *Psychology of the social* (pp. 186-195). Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Tajfel, H. (1974). Social identity and intergroup behaviour. *Social Science Information*, 13, 65-93.
- Wagner, W., Valencia, J. & Elejabarrieta, F. (1996). Relevance, discourse and the “hot” stable core of social representations – A structural analysis of word associations. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 35, 331-352.
- World Press Trends 2007. (2007) Paris: World Association of Newspapers/Zenith Optimedia.

Zammuner, V.L. (1996). *Interviste e questionari. Processi psicologici e analisi dei dati*. Rome: Borla.

LAURA DRYJANSKA is completing the final year of the international, multidisciplinary PhD program at La Sapienza University of Rome, the European PhD on Social Representations and Communication, coordinated by prof. Annamaria Silvana de Rosa. The author's research interests include social identity, environmental psychology, tourism and social representations of places. She has conducted an extensive, cross-national research project dedicated to social representations of Warsaw and Rome among first-visitors and expats. Moreover, the author is responsible for monitoring the meta-theoretical analysis of the social representation literature, according to the guidelines of prof. de Rosa, the coordinator of the project.