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Family as a basic social unit responsible for children's participation in culture

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1. Introduction

Over the past few years, there are more and more discussions about the crisis of the family. People working in the care and upbringing always highlight the importance of this subject. In particular, much attention is paid to the functions of the contemporary family. According to the Stanisław Kawula, functions, such as “reproductive, economic, cultural, emotional and educational should be perceived as the key indicators of the quality of life of our society as a whole, the ways of life of its individual layers and environments (different types of villages, small towns and larger), and also within specific categories of families in terms of their structure”.

In the time of flowering of different forms of mass media, particularly noteworthy is the quality and level of the realization of the cultural functions by the family. Kawula points out that this functions together with caring and educational function “has a strong influence on the development and growth of the life aspirations of children, their educational success and failure, the choice of career and educational pathways, and finally sets the conditions for their professional start”. Thus, you can say that the family educates children to society through intended and unintended educational activities. Mechanisms, such as identification and imitation, the mechanism of social control, as well as the stimulation of the child to the active participation in the widely understood culture.

Issues related to culture have a lot of components, hence the variety of definitions that describe the concept of culture. On the basis on the literature we can divide the definition of culture into many groups. Antonina Kloskowska

draws attention to:

- Genetic definitions that emphasize the sources of culture.
- Definitions based on history, in which culture is used to define the concepts of inheritance, tradition and heritage. These definitions treat culture as the collective achievements of human groups.
- Definitions based on psychology, in which “the emphasis is put on learning and imitation as the key processes responsible for the assimilation of culture, its role in meeting the needs of individuals and finally, enabling the adaptation to the conditions of existence”.
- Normative definitions that emphasize the subordination of human to commonly accepted norms, values, formulas or models.

Culture, in her opinion, should be treated as “a kind of the subordination of the individual’s life, on the way he or she acts which is not specified directly in the genetic structure, but instead, is shaped by the historical experience of human groups”. It is worth noticing that Jan Szczepański also perceives culture as “the totality of the products of human activity, tangible and intangible values and accepted practices, objective and accepted in any collectivities, transferred to other collectivities and transmitted to future generations”.

Larry Samovar and Richard Porter define culture as “learned language, values, beliefs, traditions and customs shared by groups of people” Stanislaw Kawula stresses the fact that “culture (including its various aspects) is a property of a particular human community, a particular way thinking and behaviour of its members”.

The definition implies that culture shapes the people but also people affect its shape. This means, among other things, that the existence in a given culture affects mental processes and functioning of individuals, but individuals who function in a given group can also change its culture through its own activities, participation in the environment and the educational processes.

Stanislaw Mika on the basis on various studies discussed also the issue of the impact of the culture on the behaviour and mental processes of humans. In his view, culture influences the mental sphere through:

- the development of the linguistic patterns and categories among its participants,
- (For example, the same word can be interpreted differently by representatives belonging to various cultures),
- the shaping the way in which the individuals perceive the world, as well as their own self-image,
- the changes in the processes of memory and thinking,
- (for example, while playing and memorizing texts from other cultures, an individual will transform and understand them in accordance with the elements

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- of their culture - Bartlett's test),
- the intellectual processes,
 - (for example, belonging to a given culture causes changes on an intellectual level - according to the principle the more time you spend with someone the more you become like them),
 - the formation of certain attitudes and values, etc.

Maria Żebrowska also pointed out the influence of cultural factors on the mental development of children and young people while analyzing the impact of educational processes, in other words, the social nature of children's games, science and education through work values.

Żebrowska understood education as "the way we organize child's activities (his or her plays and learning), which promotes the development of cognitive processes, habits, skills, interests and abilities, and comprehensive personal development".

Models, methods and forms of education prepared by the family are to a large extent conditioned by social factors. If the family apply to specific, clear and well established principles of the preferred values, the negative external influences are always limited (Świdorska, 2012). However, it sometimes happens that the social environment influences the types of education adopted by the parents. In such a situation, it shapes and changes them, affecting not only the methods used by parents who are responsible for education but also the level of tolerance, discipline and the child's level of participation in culture.

Antonina Kloskowska describes participation in culture as "a reception of basic resources and transfers present in the relationships and dependencies between various elements which constitute every social structure". According to Wojnar the development of appropriate participation of children and young people in culture would not be possible without effective educational activities.

Such actions should be initiated at home, and then developed at various stages of school education. However, schools due to various factors do not always fulfill this task. Increasing bureaucratization of school life, the omnipresent chase for good results, too high level of parents' decisiveness in school, the lack of "fashion" for high culture, and sometimes the need to start cultural education of pupils from the very bases are responsible for the fact that schools seem not to be interested in developing the skills of appropriate participation in culture or deal with it only half-heartedly, with no links between the various stages of school education.

Thus, it is obvious that only families can teach children the appropriate participation in the culture. Unfortunately, the above-mentioned task is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve due to the ongoing crisis in the Polish family. It is getting even more difficult because of the process of globalization, which prefers cultural pluralism, the lack of any authority and common changes in the traditional hierarchies of values and finally, the lack of difference between low

culture (mass) and high culture (elite).

In a global society participation in culture means the same as:

- An easy access to culture

This phenomenon is positive, because on the one hand, it enables children and young people to get acquainted with achievements of culture. On the other hand, a wide range of media is responsible for making contacts with culture in an indirect way - through TV, DVD, radio and the Internet.

- Creation of the universal hierarchy of values

Without dividing into the canons existing in a given society, in a particular culture.

- Treatment of culture only as entertainment

From this perspective, participation in the culture means the selection of only those contents which are pleasant, easy and nice and do not encourage us to deeper thoughts.

- Treatment of culture as an object of consumption

This may cause a situation in which “the consciousness of the recipient (or rather the consumer) of art and popular culture today is shaped by the belief skillful trade and advertising specialists who believe that the aesthetic taste is not worse than the representatives of the so-called intellectual elites’ taste” (Szkółut, 1999: 155).

The changes at the global level have impact on the quality of the social environment and consequently the quality of family functioning, while imposing on the family specific tasks in preparation for participation in culture.

In my opinion those tasks include:

- the familiarization of children and youth with cultural heritage,
- the ability to function in the world dominated by the media,
- the teaching of how to receive culture,
- the creation of the aesthetic taste,
- the training of how to make use out of culture.

Thus, it seems that the parent’s role is to show the culture in its various forms - from traditional culture, characteristic for Polish region, through culture that we can call nationwide to the European and world culture. It also means familiarization with various forms of culture - from mass culture - the most popular at present to the high culture, which requires proper preparation of the child to its perception.

It is advisable for the child to get know the culture not only through the media and audiovisual sources but also through direct participation in the “real time”. Most beautifully recorded disc cannot be treated as the substitution for the direct participation in the concert.

The ability to deal with education in the media means that the child should

be through the ability to “filter” information coming from the media, being prepared for the proper reception of the culture. In terms of preparation for the participation in culture, this means the ability of proper reception of the cultural content without focusing the attention on advertising and PR coating which promote artists and products or culture of a given region of the country.

Teaching culture is the same as acquiring skills necessary for the proper acquisition of popular entertainment, relaxing and having fun, but it also (and in fact, in particular) means the encouragement to explore new forms and contents of the art, the proper response to them and attempts to interpret culture in an appropriate way. We should not forget at that point about the ability to start a dialogue between the creator and the recipient of the work. All these things will affect the interest in high culture and undertaking ambitious steps related to various cultural activities.

The development of the competence for the proper participation in the culture we must not forget about the role of aesthetic taste. The family should teach the child to distinguish valuable and culturally important achievements from widely promoted products whose value is determined by the level of sales and the number of reviews. Children should also know that things which are said to be good may in fact, not be good or that what is foreign achievements do not have to be better than ours (from another culture or the culture which is dominant). The role of parents is to educate the child in accordance with its values and principles in order to encourage the child to distinguish what can be treated as an art and what is simply kitsch.

Participation of children and young people in culture also means the ability to use it. Parents should ensure that their child, as a young man or woman is able to use the available cultural resources, develop their knowledge of the culture through their active participation in it. He or she should also be familiar with galleries, concert halls and theaters, where they can learn about the culture.

It follows that the role of families in preparing children to participate in culture is undeniable. However, we should try to answer the question whether Polish families really prepare their children to the participation in culture. Research carried out by me in 2012 shows only an outline of the phenomenon. To answer the question completely, we have to conduct a much larger study involving a larger population.

2. Research questions

Assuming that the goal of my research is to pre-determine the influence of family on children’s participation in the creation of culture, I have formulated the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the family shapes the attitudes to culture?
2. What factors do the contemporary parents take into consideration while shaping

children's ability to participate in the culture?

3. What factors determine the level of family cultural participation of children?

3. Method of research

The study used the method of a diagnostic survey. I chose the categorized interview as a technique. This technique helped me to organize collected data and at the same time, to have direct contact with patients, and thus, a more detailed analysis of certain topics of our conversation. Five questions were closed, two of them were half-closed ones and one opened.

4. Research Group

To obtain material for research, I asked full-time students of the Academy of Social Sciences in Lodz for permission to participate in research in January 2012. The study embraced a group of 20 randomly selected students of education. In this group, there were 16 women and 4 men aged 20-25 years. All of them are residents of the city. The study population is not representative, therefore, it would be based on only a general picture of the phenomenon.

5. The results

I treated the level of understanding as the starting point for further research concerning the respondents' participation in cultural activities. So I asked them to choose among three statements which were in accordance with their views. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The concept of participation in culture according to the students' opinion

How do you understand the term 'participation in culture'?	Number of respondents
a / the ability to receive new and trendy cultural content	1
b / the active part in the large number of cultural events	1
c / the ability to select particular cultural phenomena	18

Source: own research, 2012.

The above table shows that the students' knowledge about the concept of participation in culture is at a satisfactory level since only two people have chosen to treat the formulation of this concept in a limited way. I was also interested in the extent to which a child, who took part in my research shaped his or her attitudes toward culture due to the family's influence. All responses are listed in

Table 2.

Table 2. Influence of family on the formation of attitudes towards the culture in the opinion of the students

Do you think / you that parents have shaped you / your attitude to culture?	Number of respondents
a) definitely yes	4
b) rather yes	8
c) rather no	8
d) definitely no	-

Source: own research, 2012.

These responses confirm the essential role of families in the process of teaching children to participate in culture. 12 of 20 people surveyed identified their parents as people who have influenced their current attitude towards culture. I asked for additional clarification those respondents who have chosen the answer “rather no”. It turned out that in their case, the peer group has shaped their attitudes toward culture then their parents. Two children said that their local environment.

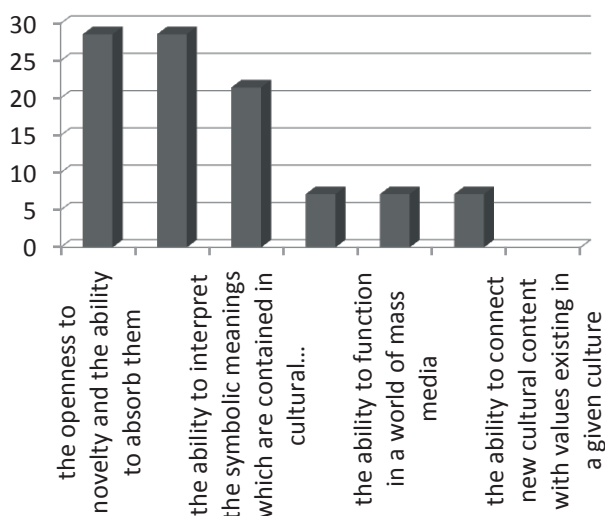
However, those of respondents who have chosen the question “rather yes” should be asked another question: What specific actions are undertaken by your parents to shape your attitude towards culture? Based on experiences from their own families, the surveyed students mentioned openness to new things and ability to absorb them most often (28,57%) and the ability to function in a world of mass media (28,57%). The detailed responses are presented in Table 3 and graphically in Figure 1.

Table 3. Elements for which parents pay attention while shaping the attitudes of students towards culture.

What were your parents interested in while shaping preparing you to participate in the culture?	Responses	
	number of responses	%
a / the openness to novelty and the ability to absorb them	16	28,57
b/ the ability to receive cultural content	4	7,14
c / the ability to interpret the symbolic meanings which are contained in cultural communications	12	21,44
d/ on showing different aspects of culture	4	7,14
e / the ability to function in a world of mass media	16	28,57
f / for the participation in the so-called. high culture (eg theater, gallery, opera, etc.)	4	7,14
g / the ability to connect new cultural content with values existing in a given culture	-	-
h / Other (specify)	-	-
TOTAL	56	100%

Source: own research, 2012.

Figure 1. Elements that the parents pay attention while shaping the attitudes of



students towards culture.

A well functioning family should teach children how to act properly on the basis of its own value system, its own experiences and beliefs, but also on the basis of a system functioning in the surrounding reality (the preferred environment in which family members exist). I was also interested in elements which determine specific actions taken by the parents. So I asked respondents what condition were responsible for the development of cultural participation in families in which they grew up. Responses are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Family determinants of children's cultural participation according to the students.

What factors influence your / your family in shaping children's cultural participation?	responses	
	number of responses	%
a/ parents' social background	20	33,33
b/ financial conditions of the family	16	26,67
c / social and professional affiliation of parents	12	20,00
d / the amount of free time	8	13,33
e / place of residence	4	6,67
t/ other (specify)	-	-
TOTAL	60	100%

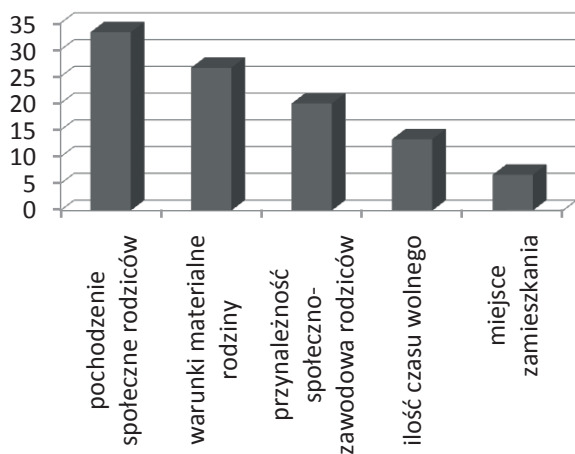
Source: own research, 2012.

As is shown above, a social background of their parents plays the most important role in the level of preparation for participation in the culture. All students who participated in the research chose this answer. The conditions of the family (the answer that has chosen 16 of the 20 people involved in the study) occupied the second position. For me, the result is quite surprising, since the material conditions of parents should not be a factor determining so strongly attitudes to the culture. The lack of financial resources can obviously reduce the possibility of the participation in culture (especially the high culture), but not that much. Moreover, we should take into consideration the fact that most cultural events are public and as such they do not require large financial outlays. At the same time, you have to take into account the fact that the students do not come from rural areas where access to culture may be more limited and where the cost of participations includes the travel costs.

The least frequent answer relates to the place of residence (4 answers) and the amount of time off (8 replies). The location of these factors (usually referred in the literature as dominant) appeared at the end. Thus, the fact seems to be interesting

because it informs us about the changes occurring in contemporary Polish society. However, the development of this hypothesis requires more detailed-studies. The above-mentioned results are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Family determinants of children's cultural participation according to



the students.

Source: own research, 2012.

In the last phase of the study, I asked the respondents to provide elements of cultural participation, which, as a parent he or she would like to develop in their children. The question was open. At the beginning, the received replies were to be grouped according to the children's individual skills necessary for the proper participation in the culture. Respondents, however, focused only on three areas of participation:

cultural – dealing with different forms and cultural content (46,15% of responses), getting to know the culture associated with their own families, the region and country (30,77%) and the ability to evaluate the cultural content (23,08%).

The detailed summary of responses is presented in Table 5 and Figure 3.

Table 5. Elements of participation in culture to which the respondents would pay attention while being a parent.

On what factors would you pay attention while developing your children's skills for the proper participation in the culture?	Responses	
	number of responses	%
a / the contacts with different cultural content	8	15,39
b / to explore different forms of culture	16	30,76
c / to get to know the history of the family	4	7,69
d / to teach them to differentiate values (good - bad, beautiful - kitsch)	4	7,69
e / to learn about the history of the neighborhood	8	15,39
f / the knowledge about important people	4	7,69
g / the ability to select specific cultural content	8	15,39
TOTAL	52	100%

Source: own research, 2012.

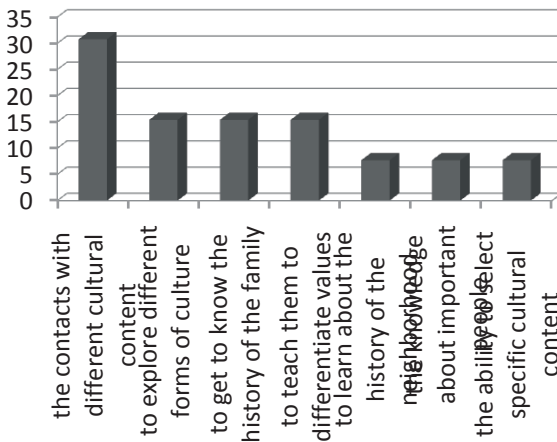


Figure 3. Elements of participation in culture to which the respondents would pay

attention while being a parent.

5. Conclusion

The significant family's impact on the formation of attitudes towards culture is apparent even while researching a small number of respondents. In a study conducted by me, more than half of students (12 of 20 people involved) has chosen that answer. However, it should not be treated as a good result. 8 replies, "rather than" highlights the lack family's impact on shaping attitudes toward culture. It informs us about the decrease in the effectiveness of educational and cultural patterns transmitted to children by their parents. Families are rarely supported by the external educational institutions. The support usually appears when the family has some serious problems. On the basis of my own experience, I can say that the role of parents in the pedagogical processes existing in our schools (especially middle schools and high schools) is in many cases, fictitious and usually realized during short meetings organized by teachers or schools. Unfortunately, nobody there usually talks to parents about the culture in a broader sense. The school rarely develops the children's skills to youth participation in culture. Cultural activities in the average Polish schools are limited to the realm of personal culture, occasional going to the cinema or theater and special events. I am convinced that a third of Polish high school student has never been in a large gallery, theater or opera.

It is obvious that parents do not have the same education. They do not have the same level of educational culture and that they do not educate their children in the same way. Therefore, schools and other educational and culture institutions are to support families in the processes of education, including education to the proper participation in the culture. I think that the school level reflects the cultural level and the level of youth participation in high culture. Furthermore, I took part in the party before final exams in the secondary school which was similar to ordinary disco party deprived of any high culture background. Finally, a student in the final class of high school does not know how to behave at the theatrical performance, or how to dress appropriately for the theater, because he has never been there.

The absence of cultural and educational organizations' support is responsible for impoverishment of the cultural life of Polish families. This phenomenon is also evident in the results of research carried out by me. The participation in high culture, familiarization of children with various aspects of culture or the ability to receive cultural content appeared only in 21,42% of the responses concerning elements which were taken by the parents into account while preparing children to participate in the culture. None of the surveyed students mentioned the

ability to combine the current value in a culture with its new (contemporary) content. Research shows that parents focus their attention mainly on education skills concerning new cultural phenomena and the ability to deal with a world dominated by media (57,14%).

The study also shows that the level and quality of participation of children and young people in culture is also affected by social factors, particularly those which relate to socio-professional affiliation and social background of their parents. They appeared in 53.33% of the answers. Thus, the origin of parents and their professional status is responsible for the formation of specific values and attitudes, including attitudes towards the culture represented by family members. However, the choice of certain forms of cultural activity is determined not only by the place of residence, or amount of free time (20% of responses), but also by the conditions of the family (26,67%). This phenomenon is largely understandable, since it is difficult to expect from people with low socio-professional level of activity to participate in culture. I think that this is not the rule. There are in fact families that, despite the low professional status and the resulting financial constraints take some attempt to introduce children to culture and its different forms. In my opinion, the educational and cultural institutions' appropriate stimulation and support for families would undoubtedly strengthen these efforts.

Well planned activities, in particular the actions of a systemic nature (activating different institutions) could help to encourage children and adolescents to take part in various cultural activities. The good news is that young people who will soon set up their family declare their willingness to familiarize children with the knowledge of their own region, family and cultural heritage of Polish (30,77% of all answers). Their attitude, despite pervasive media will stimulate the further development of the Polish culture.

Rodzina jako kreator uczestnictwa dzieci w kulturze

Streszczenie

Artykuł porusza zagadnienie roli rodziny w kształtowaniu i rozwijaniu uczestnictwa dzieci w życiu kulturalnym. Autorka przedstawia w nim szerokie ujęcie definicji kultury, jak również jej wpływ na rozwój procesów psychicznych, przedstawia także elementy składające się na uczestnictwo w kulturze oraz kompetencje, które w tym zakresie powinny posiadać dzieci. Artykuł zawiera także wyniki badań, których celem było wstępne określenie wpływu rodziny na kreowanie uczestnictwa dzieci w kulturze.

Słowa kluczowe: kultura, uczestnictwo w kulturze.

Keywords: participation in culture, culture.

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