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Sociocultural Animation in Action: Reflections of a Practitioner From the Perspective of a Quarter of a Century

Animacja społeczno-kulturalna w działaniu.
Refleksja praktyka z perspektywy ćwierćwiecza

ABSTRACT

The article discusses the civilizational context of the development of sociocultural animation and its former determinants, indicating the evolution of its tasks and functions. Animation means a change which takes place in groups and local communities, becoming the nerve center of democracy and civic society. The article ends with a justification of the need for animation in the complex situation that man finds himself in when functioning in today's globalized world.

ABSTRAKT

Artykuł omawia cywilizacyjny kontekst powstania animacji społeczno-kulturalnej i jej dawne uwarunkowania, wskazując na rozwój jej zadań i funkcji. Animacja to dziejąca się zmiana w grupach i społecznościach lokalnych, będąca nerwem demokracji i społeczeństwa obywatelskiego. Artykuł kończy uzasadnienie jej potrzeby w skomplikowanej sytuacji funkcjonowania człowieka w zglobalizowanym świecie.

KEYWORDS

sociocultural animation,
animator, change,
society, culture

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

animacja społeczno-
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zmiana, społeczeństwo,
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Civilizational conditions of man's life

Looking at the history of mankind, it is possible to notice that despite all kinds of difficulty, man has always helped his fellow man. Certainly, the dimension of this aid and people's intentions have varied: the old world was based on the fight against nature, which was a labor-consuming phenomenon, yet the need for cooperation between human beings became indispensable for the good of the whole commonwealth. The target of man's activity changed during the industrial period: former actions carried out against nature were replaced by enterprises of a technical character in the emerging modern civilization. Unfortunately, the next civilizational cycle distinguished (the post-industrial one) turned out to be a worrying one, since the aim of social movements in it—according to Daniel Bell—was encapsulated as “a game between people.”¹

The industrial civilization functioned not only technologically, but also in the mentality of many people, “arranging” their lives, something which has been visible throughout generations. However, the world of people's everyday life was changing slowly, as were the networks of social bonds, interpersonal relations, lines of collaboration and conflicts, as well as religious, cultural and political forms of cooperation. In the process of reflective postmodernity, the institutions of industrial society began to lose their historical foundations step by step, becoming internally contradictory, conflict-generating and dependent on “particularized” individuals. Humans were deprived of their sense of safety, a move characteristic of industrial societies, but also of the standard forms of life typical of that formation.²

In society, which is also subject to historical changes, man is formed in the given socializing-rearing process. Many authors point to the lack

¹ D. Bell, *Kulturowe sprzeczności kapitalizmu*, Warszawa 1998, p. 233.

² In the past, in the life of successive generations, the social stratum, material condition, profession, partner in marriage or political and religious affiliations were customarily connected with one another. Today, this “biographical package” is in the process of disintegration into a few components. For example, on the basis of the place of work or incomes one cannot infer about the place of abode, marital status, political preferences or participation in culture anymore. “New times” have set in, in which the baggage of experience offered by the parents' generation is becoming obsolete or even redundant (see: U. Beck, *Spółczesność* *ryzyka. W drodze do innej nowoczesności*, transl. S. Cieślą, Warszawa 2002).

of balance between the individual and the subject, as well as environment and surroundings—including, in particular, that between the world of humans and the interpersonal relations between them. At the beginning of the 20th century, Max Scheler stated that never before in the history had man been so problematic to himself as at that time. The stormy and unpredictable development of industrial and post-industrial civilization brought about rapid changes in consciousness and the material sphere which shook man's balance. His thinking and acting were not adjusted to the new, extremely high level which he had attained. Man did not bother to understand that, along with the changes, it was vital to reflect on their essence. In the days of persisting temptations and human weaknesses, it is significant to “think rationally, love wisely and work reliably.” To be wisely raised and to rear oneself is an art nowadays, which can and should be learnt—especially given the shortage of unchanging and stable values.

The concept of postmodernity does not value commonwealths or state institutions and the postmodernist culture presents contents greatly absorbing the younger generation who “do not have time” (*instant culture*) to engage in sagacious considerations.³ Human life is running in the reality of the changing world and man's “new” situation which is determined by such constructs as: risk society (U. Beck), society of transformations of values (H. Klages), society of experiences (G. Schulze) or technopoly (N. Postman). The content overlaid by the above-mentioned constructs poses a challenge not only to pedagogues, educators and animators, but first of all to parents, since they are often included in myths and social utopias, creating visions of reality, which exchange whatever is “possible and good for whatever is real and better than the old one.” Contemporary man is becoming a projection and warped identification of his own identity in the world, in which it is difficult to find man (god) among the ruins of humanity.⁴

It is also worth, following Margaret Archer, distinguishing between the dangers which threaten man on the part of the state and

³ See: Z. Melosik, *Kultura popularna i tożsamość młodzieży. W niewoli władzy i wolności*, Kraków 2013.

⁴ T. Frąckowiak, “Funkcje pedagogiki społecznej w społeczeństwie mitu, wolności, demokracji i inteligentnej cywilizacji. Wybrane kwestie,” in: *Edukacja społeczna wobec problemów współczesnego człowieka i społeczeństw*, ed. J. Piekarski, Łódź 2010, p. 52.

its structures, including the advantage of the group or groups holding power over society, where the fetishized division into powers is fictitious and the ruling ones use all means at their disposal, not excluding the judicial power, to “liquidate” citizens who think differently. The last one hundred, or possibly even two hundred, years now have seen the regularity in which society is organizing itself and then the state “sucks out” or “dilutes” humanity.⁵ Thus, fundamental notions which used to bind people together and build social structures is becoming blurred.⁶

The present situation which our civilization finds itself in is multidimensional and complex—perchance this is the reason why ideas are being advanced to prevent the existing and anticipated social problems. In the 1960s, in France, one the “humanized” projects proposed was animation. It came to life in a variety of contexts related to domains such as: theatre, trade (economy), free time, society, sports, religion, culture or pedagogy.⁷

Animation: between a breath and engineering

The word “animation” was (and still is) more often used in languages, not only in the pedagogical one. The meaning of this term should be sought in its etymological sources, that is the Latin word

⁵ Archer defends the thesis which is already outdated today about the existence of the human being who is not reducible merely to social conventions of roles and discourse, one whose ego is anchored in their practical and embodied relations with the surrounding world (see: A. Mrozowicki, “Człowieczeństwo: struktura i sprawstwo w teorii socjologicznej Margaret S. Archer,” in: M. Archer, *Człowieczeństwo: problem sprawstwa*, transl. A. Dziuban, Kraków 2013, p. VIII).

⁶ It is worth drawing attention to such terms as: virtue, good, evil, duty, power, justice, piety (cf. A. MacIntyre, *Dziedzictwo cnoty: Studium z teorii moralności*, transl. A. Chmielewski, Warszawa 1996).

⁷ Detailed information on this can be found, among others, in the following individual sources: M. Kopczyńska, *Animacja społeczno-kulturalna – podstawowe pojęcia i zagadnienia*, Warszawa 1993; P. Besnard, “Problematyka animacji społeczno-kulturalnej,” in: *Rozprawy o wychowaniu*, vol. 2: *Rola i kształcenie nauczycieli, edukacja permanentna, animacja*, eds. M. Debesse, G. Mialaret, transl. Z. Zakrzewska, Warszawa 1988, pp. 341–376; O. Czerniawska, “Animacja społeczno-kulturalna we Francji. Geneza i rozwój,” *Pedagogika Pracy Kulturalno-Oświatowej* 1984, vol. 6, pp. 154–169; Z. Łomny, “Animacja kulturalna – istota i funkcje,” *Kwartalnik Opolski* 1996, no. 1, pp. 3–19; Z. Łomny, “Animacja kulturalna promocją humanistycznego i tożsamościowego wzbogacenia ludzi,” in: *Animacja kulturalna jako problem pedagogiczny*, ed. J. Gajda, Lublin 1994, pp. 52–61.

anima (soul) and *animo* (enliven), as well as those of *salus animarum* (salvation of souls). *Grand Larousse*,⁸ while giving different applications of *animation* in many different domains, reaches back as far as the 14th century, pointing to Raoul de Presles, who used the phrase *souffle vital* (a breath of life)⁹ as a form having a similar meaning.

As Anna Schindler argues, sociocultural animation is developing as a peculiar antidote to the “ailments” of post-industrial society and its culture, as well as against alterations within its structure. The traditional forms of community life are disappearing and, along with them—the stable relations to date between people or frames of reference which determine their sociocultural identities. The second half of the 20th century was a time of the centralistic, omnipotent state with its inseparable system of state control (*statism*) and bureaucratism. Political, economic, cultural and educational “hyper-institutions” and “hyper-organizations” of the authoritative character introduced monopolist practices of regulating life.¹⁰ Therefore the need for sociocultural animation (SCA) appeared in mass societies, when there arose the desire to return to local micro-worlds (private/local motherlands), which had got lost in consequence of organizational-technological changes. This is visible particularly well in civic societies, where spontaneous activity of various groups (social participation and mobilization) is the necessary condition for democracy to exist. Animation itself has become a type of practice directed towards enlivening, stimulating and strengthening the activity of an individual and society. It is applied by workers of state, local government, social or private institutions. This also refers to local activists and leaders who, in their majority, are not affiliated with any institution.¹¹

⁸ See: *Animation*, <<http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/animation/3590>> (access: 12.12.2017).

⁹ *Dieu est le souverain animateur, l'animateur de tous les êtres, Animer c'est mettre la vie, l'âme*. See: R. Toraille, *L'Animation pédagogique*, Paris 1973, p. 25.

¹⁰ A. Schindler, “Czym jest animacja społeczno-kulturalna?” in: *Konteksty animacji społeczno-kulturalnej*, ed. K. Hrycyk, Wrocław 2004, p. 20.

¹¹ See: E. Nycz, “Animacja i animator wobec antynomii wychowania we współczesnym społeczeństwie miejskim,” in: *Konteksty animacji społeczno-kulturalnej*, op. cit., pp. 49–62; A. Schindler, *Czym jest animacja społeczno-kulturalna?* in: *Konteksty animacji społeczno-kulturalnej*, op. cit., pp. 19–36.

The roots of animation are French,¹² yet threads of animation can be found also in Belgium, Canada, England, the United States, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy¹³ and Austria. However uniform the notion of animation is in the understanding of those cultures, the range of animation work has varied in particular countries, ranging from educational work (art), through cultural cooperation, group work (especially among youth) into pedagogical communicative work in spare time.¹⁴ Already the French studies into animation distinguished several research themes, among which its institutional-environmental conditions and actions run for social community (society) held the dominant position. The research reflection on the work of professional and non-professional animators was also of importance here.¹⁵

Since the very beginning, social animation has had an adaptive, integrative and emancipatory character, which was meant to lead to the direct participation of groups and communities in taking decisions pertaining to social, cultural and political matters. As a result of growing experience, particular methods, techniques and means got to be established, which were then applied by animators to activate various groups or environments in the spheres of social life and culture. With time there were organized different forms of training and schools which were designed to prepare for the profession of an animator. The French experience has been used in other European countries (taking into account their local specific character).

The activating methods used in the United States such as: *community action*, *empowerment*, *community development* also have the animative character. They are designed to stimulate various communities to being active while solving different problems and realizing various

¹² See: M. Kopczyńska, *Animacja społeczno-kulturalna – podstawowe pojęcia i zagadnienia*, Warszawa 1993.

¹³ T. Lewicki, “Fenomen animacji. O praktyce i teoriach działalności społecznej, kulturowej i wychowawczej we Włoszech,” *Problemy Opiekuńczo-Wychowawcze* 1993, no. 3, pp. 132–136.

¹⁴ See: E. Dąbrowska, “Animacja kulturalna w Republice Federalnej Niemiec,” *Pedagogika Pracy Kulturalno-Oświatowej* 1984, vol. 6, p. 174.

¹⁵ See: G. Poujol, “Kształcenie animatorów,” in: *Rozprawy o wychowaniu*, vol. 2: *Rola i kształcenie nauczycieli, edukacja permanentna, animacja*, op. cit., pp. 378–418; O. Czerniawska, “Animacja społeczno-kulturalna we Francji. Geneza i rozwój,” op. cit., p. 167; J. Żebrowski, *Zaród i osobowość animatorów kultury*, Gdańsk 1987.

goals established by the community.¹⁶ Changes within communities should be carried out by means of the whole potential of strengths and enterprises undertaken by inhabitants themselves. It is already many years ago when this phenomenon was described in the Polish pedagogical thought, suggesting that social environment should be transformed with the aid from people who belong to a concrete community (“the principle of mutual help”).¹⁷

In Poland, the (pre)animation character can be attributed to the tradition of cooperativeness, mutual help and self-organization (“for us ourselves”).¹⁸ Partially, Helena Radlińska’s principles of social and cultural work (“transformation of social environment with the forces of the very environment itself in the name of an ideal”) were also of the animative character. In a similar fashion, Aleksander Kamiński’s proposal of organizing local communities displayed the same nature of its message.¹⁹ In opposition to cultural-educational work, popularization of culture, culture-related services and creativity, the animative activity assumes that the given environment has its own social, religious and cultural content. Animation is set on intensification of this content, activation of actions based on current patterns, development of the existing interests, stimulation of realization of the existing goals, satisfying the needs which come up in the course of living. In contrast to pedagogy, animation does not basically have its own patterns of conduct, since such models are to be shaped by concrete communities being animated. In a different way from that typical of services, animation does not fulfil given needs, but only encourages individuals or communities to search for solutions themselves. For this reason, animation is not a creative art, but only an activation of creative attitudes in the social, cultural, religious, sports, educational, communications or integrative domains. If this meaning is to be accepted, then an animator solely stimulates or prompts activity, which is a peculiar resultant of the roles of an organizer, instructor,

¹⁶ See: Z.T. Wierzbicki, “Aktywizacja i rozwój społeczności lokalnej w socjologicznej perspektywie,” *Studia Socjologiczne* 1973, no. 1(48), pp. 49–65.

¹⁷ Cf. E. Nycz, “Zasada pomocniczości wobec zagrożeń współczesnego człowieka,” in: *Społeczności lokalne w sytuacji zagrożenia i kataklizmu*, ed. E. Nycz, Opole – Kędzierzyn-Koźle 1998, pp. 48–56.

¹⁸ Cf. L. Dyczewski, “Solidarni swojej społeczności,” in: *Społeczności lokalne w sytuacji zagrożenia i kataklizmu*, op. cit., pp. 41–47.

¹⁹ Original texts on pedagogues, see: *Pedagog społeczny. Teoria i praktyka działalności społecznej*, ed. A. Żukiewicz, Łódź 2017.

adviser, promotor or a leader. Regarding this, an animator is, for instance, an educator who does not boss a student or a group around, but skilfully stimulates their own activity directed towards a concrete target. Animation has located itself around pedagogical ideas²⁰ since the very beginning, ones that are brought down to refining man who has found himself under the pressure of civilizational-commercial mediocrity.²¹

After 1990, Poland saw a visible institutionalization of the animation movement²² and methods of educating animators.²³ In the Polish system of culture-educational work until 1990, the term “animation” had been connected with the theatre and film, not with the type of work with people. The socialist system propagated and perfected a controlled system of people’s and groups’ activity. The citizens’ bottom-up activity was considered suspicious and, practically, impossible without being controlled by special security service officials. For instance, it can be remembered that one of the first methodological texts treating about cooperation of people within a group and the work of an animator who is not an instrument of the authority was censored by the communist regime as it referred to liberties and values which were so uncomfortable in those days but which are readily and commonly called upon nowadays.²⁴

²⁰ Pedagogical conditions of animation: see *Animacja kulturalna jako problem pedagogiczny*, ed. J. Gajda, Lublin 1994; M. Koczyńska, “Normalizacja: między biernym przystosowaniem i zależnością a aktywnym uczestnictwem i autonomią – o jednym z dylematów pedagoga-animatora,” in: *Pedagogika społeczna. Kregi poszukiwań*, ed. A. Przecławski, Warszawa 1996, pp. 89–106; *Dylematy animacji kulturalnej*, eds. J. Gajda, W. Żardecki, Lublin 2001; B. Jedlewska, “Animacja społeczno-kulturalna w nurcie współczesnej pedagogiki kultury,” *Pedagogika Kultury* 2005, vol. 1, pp. 11–188; D. Jankowski, *Pedagogika kultury. Studia i koncepcja*, Kraków 2006.

²¹ Cf. Z. Łomny, *Aktualne i przyszłościowe wyzwania edukacyjno-kulturowe – wybór tekstów*, Opole 2012.

²² See: J. Kargul, *Od upowszechniania kultury do animacji*, Toruń 1997; B. Jedlewska, *Animatorzy kultury wobec wyzwań edukacyjnych*, Lublin 1999; J. Grad, U. Kaczmarek, *Organizacja i upowszechnianie kultury w Polsce. Zmiana modelu*, Poznań 1999; *Animacja kultury. Doświadczenia i przyszłość*, eds. G. Godlewski, I. Kurz, A. Mencwel, M. Wójtowski, Warszawa 2002.

²³ See: *Animacja społeczno-kulturalna wobec przemian cywilizacyjnych. Animacja – animator i jego kształcenie*, ed. K. Hrycyk, Wrocław 2000; *Akademickie kształcenie animatorów i menedżerów kultury w Polsce*, ed. B. Jedlewska, Lublin 2006.

²⁴ Ch. Maccio, H. Bortnowska, “Vademecum animacji,” *Znak* 1985, no. 5(366), pp. 81–112.

The polity transformation in Poland introduced a practical, bottom-up animation current, born by the need to work in groups (especially among young people) and local communities (touched by both positive and negative effects of the transformation).²⁵ Changes in contemporary institutions and environments are conditioned not only by the development of technology and transformations in economy, but also by sociological, cultural, psychological and political issues. People have always striven after something, joined personal efforts with collective ones, realizing defined ideas and values. A natural activity of man is his creative endeavouring to improve and better the elements of reality which are assessed to be unfavourable. The majority of alterations which are undertaken to be made are reflectively and sensibly accepted, but one can also take note of unpredictable and unintended phenomena—they are experiences of individuals and communities entangled in history, which are incessantly called to mind. “Social changes can be induced by consciously planned and deliberately realized human actions, both individual and collective, but can follow unprompted, spontaneously and somehow unawares.”²⁶ Following descriptions of animation-related interactions, it can be concluded that “animation is a change that is happening.”²⁷

For this reason, the method of animation should answer simple questions: Whether or not to do anything? What to do? Who to do it with? How to do it? in the given situation and conditions of the environment. The beginning of animation is to make a diagnosis (assessment of the state of examination on the basis of obtained information) which transforms into action and realization of the project. Research experience points to that the need for animation arises where people need training (adapting), activating, interfering

²⁵ See: *Animacja współpracy środowiskowej*, ed. M. Mendel, Toruń 2002; *Animacja współpracy środowiskowej na wsi*, ed. M. Mendel, Toruń 2005; *Edukacja i animacja społeczna w środowisku lokalnym*, eds. W. Theiss, B. Skrzypczak, Warszawa 2006; *Animacja społeczno-kulturalna w mieście. Uwarunkowania – bariery – korzyści*, eds. E. Nycz, L. Nowacka, Racibórz 2008.

²⁶ K. Matuszek, “Zmiana społeczna,” in: *Słownik społeczny*, ed. B. Szlachta, Kraków 2004, p. 1609.

²⁷ E. Nycz, “Zmiana społeczna. Pomiędzy teoriami a codziennością w animacji,” in: *Kultura, animacja, zmiana społeczna*, eds. K. Nowak-Wolna, E. Nycz, Opole 2013, pp. 187–227.

in their life environment, as well as supporting, assisting, building social partnership and boosting their self-esteem by means games and holidaying.²⁸

Animation should make it possible to carry out changes in the environment through the following:

- effectively gaining knowledge about oneself and others and also about phenomena, problems and the environment;
- development of skills, competences and abilities to make use of the acquired experience, skills and knowledge;
- changes in the attitude towards social problems or ideas;
- changes in the hierarchy of values, following as a result of joining in the life of the group and community (discovering the value of community, solidarity, satisfaction with aiding others);
- changes in the models of culture (from a passive attitude into an active one).²⁹

According to Józef Kargul, changes in the personality of the individual,³⁰ which should appear in the course of animation-related actions, can be presented in the following way:³¹

²⁸ Original field research: E. Nycz, "Rola animacji społeczno-kulturalnej w kształtowaniu aktywności obywatelskiej w kontekście zmian społecznych i kulturowych," in: *Problemy mieszkańców. Dylematy władzy. W poszukiwaniu lokalnego partnerstwa*, ed. E. Nycz, Opole 2006, pp. 52–61; *Podmiotowość i tolerancja w społecznościach lokalnych pogranicza polsko-czeskiego*, eds. J. Kosowska-Rataj, E. Nycz, Opole 2008; E. Nycz, "Działalność animatorów w społecznościach lokalnych," in: *Participácia sociálnych pedagógov a iných pomáhajúcich profesií na prevencii a riešení sociálnopatologických javov u detí, mládeže a dospelých v krajinách V4 – súčasný stav, problémy a priority*, ed. J. Hroncová, Banská Bystrica 2017, pp. 245–251.

²⁹ Modified effects of animation-related influences, according to: J. Kargul, *Od upowszechniania kultury do animacji*, op. cit., pp. 264–265.

³⁰ Here, certain reference to the idea of the so-called modern personality is visible. See: A. Lisińska-Tokarska, E. Nycz, "W poszukiwaniu modelu animatora społeczno-kulturalnego u progu XXI wieku," in: *Animacja społeczno-kulturalna wobec przemian cywilizacyjnych. Animacja – animator i jego kształcenie*, op. cit., pp. 59–66.

³¹ J. Kargul, "Animacja społeczno-kulturalna," in: *Pedagogika społeczna. Człowiek w zmieniającym się świecie*, eds. T. Pilch, I. Lepalczyk, Warszawa 1995, pp. 273–294.

passivity	activity
receptiveness	creativity
isolation	affiliation
egocentrism	sociocentrism
schematicism of action	innovativeness of action
stereotypicality of thinking	generativeness of thinking

Ger van Enckevort drew attention to the fact that a change of man and one in man are deeply rooted in European modernization,³² therefore they became at least an indirect idea to the practice of sociocultural animation through assuming and realizing the following³³:

- building a commonwealth (adaptative function), bonds, forming values and models in newly-established communities;
- broadening participation and self-expression (participative function), building contacts and the sense of belonging, as well as civic co-existence (e.g., the identity of inhabitants, “being settled down for long”, resources which make social capital);
- striving for autonomy, self-determination and personal control over the environment, as well as ruling it. The aim here is emancipation and liberation from oppressive living conditions (the politicization trend ideologized by leftish movements).³⁴ Sometimes animation

³² M.S. Szczepański, “Człowiek nowoczesny – nowoczesny przedsiębiorca. Próba portretu socjologicznego,” in: *Przedsiębiorcy miasta – przedsiębiorczość w mieście*, ed. E. Nycz, Opole – Kędzierzyn-Koźle 1998, pp. 21–36.

³³ See: M. Kopczyńska, *Animacja społeczno-kulturalna – podstawowe pojęcia i zagadnienia*, op. cit., pp. 64–67.

³⁴ The trend launched in the 1970s found its reflection in the so-called Western Cultural Revolution (1968). The collective (democratic) procedures which were pointed to turned out to be illusory in the society of the third wave (A. Toffler), whereas the so-called new individualism became visible as an attitude of active formation of oneself and one’s own identity. In practice, relevant structures of the authority support it, standing against traditionalist realism of a group (see: A. Giddens, *Socjologia*, transl. O. Siara, A. Szulżycka, P. Tomanek, Warszawa 2004, p. 84).

- called “wild” or “anti-establishment” was connected with movements within alternative culture (self-expression”) or sub-cultures;
- connected with the so-called culture democracy which is supposed to be means not the goal of animation-related activities. The aim is not to officially achieve power, but only to expand on social communication, expression, building new mentality, managing or developing the environment. This was tied to the idea of creating a new, better world which legitimizes manipulative clues³⁵ on the part of the media, which justify the direction of the development of civilization.³⁶

Thus, the development, the role and place of animation—including the rise of the profession of an animator—conditioned to a large extent problems and crises the (post)industrial society came to face, also giving rise, at the same time, to various movements and forms of social activity that—through genuine participation in social and cultural life—endeavoured to attain autonomy for both individuals and whole groups. Animation remains in a direct relation with the character of contemporary world—mass, anonymous, alienated—one in which it is a type of practice directed towards enlivening, stimulating, strengthening society’s activity, applied by workers of state, local-government, social or private institutions, as well as by non-formal activists.

Zygmunt Bauman contends, on the other hand, that in the world of post-modernist liberty there is perceivable “playing on individualism.” Individualization is man’s destiny, not a choice, whereas independence and self-sufficiency can prove to be another (civilizational) illusion (see: Z. Bauman, *Płynna nowoczesność*, transl. T. Kunz, Kraków 2006, pp. 53–54).

Individualism is also regarded as a destructive force and an effect of the Western Cultural Revolution. It can be observed that certain supranational non-governmental organizations which took part in the feminist and sexual revolution, fight for the rights of the individual to make free and conscious choices inclined most often towards a drive at egoistic “well-being” of the individual (cf. M.A. Peeters, *Globalizacja zachodniej rewolucji kulturowej*, transl. G. Grygiel, Warszawa 2010, pp. 83–84; *Dyktatura gender*, selected by L. Sosnowski, Kraków 2014).

³⁵ Cf. W. Chudy, *Spółczesność zakłamana. Esej o społeczeństwie i kłamstwie – 1*, Warszawa 2007.

³⁶ The cult of media-based and real consumption produces non-creative people, ones without higher demands or aspirations, not inclined towards altruism, devotion or risk (see: B. Barber, *Dżihad kontra McŚwiat*, transl. H. Jankowska, Warszawa 1997).

The author of the present essay's own research work and activities³⁷ entitle him to make an attempt at formulating an original definition of animation which is seen here as “encouragement, support, stimulation of individuals and groups towards their independent deciding about, designing and realizing actions which they themselves acknowledge to be desired and cooperate towards realization of them in mutual trust.” The notion of animation in this case directs attention towards issues which are of interest socially to commonwealths visible in people's actions within the concrete space and at the concrete moment in time. It is essential, regarding animation, to rely on trust that constitutes a significant bonds-generating element founded on common values.³⁸ In this case, we are one of the elements of the term—social capital,³⁹ which testifies to the fact that animation is a complex sociocultural phenomenon.

The very culture itself or social life do not make the object of animation, but it is man's activity in sociocultural life⁴⁰ that does, and its basic aim should be man's reaching the world of values assumed in advance. It requires attention to be paid to the variety of national-regional animation activities—from new ones (deciding about animation being different and peculiar, like integration/sociocultural mobilization, liberation/emancipation, cultural democracy/civic awareness)—into continuing and applying traditional sociocultural actions (education, rearing, formation, catechization, popularization of culture, organization of local community). Being active and activation, however, are the fundamental goal set for animation, and the character of the desired activity is not established in advance, although it should be determined by the groups being animated. It is precisely what differentiates animation from former types of practice, where the desired activity was—in a certain manner—defined prior

³⁷ See: E. Nycz, “Działalność Towarzystwa Ziemi Kozielskiej w latach 1993–2013 (wybrane zagadnienia),” in: *Szkice Kędzierzyńsko-Kozielskie. XVI*, ed. E. Nycz, Kędzierzyn-Koźle – Opole 2014, pp. 11–38.

³⁸ See: P. Sztompka, *Zaufanie. Fundament społeczeństwa*, Kraków 2007.

³⁹ See: P. Sztompka, *Kapitał społeczny. Teoria przestrzeni międzyludzkich*, Kraków 2016.

⁴⁰ B. Turlejska, “Otoczenie – środowisko – kultura: współczesny wymiar animacji kulturalnej,” in: *Pedagogika społeczna jako dyscyplina akademicka*, eds. E. Marynowicz-Hetka, J. Piekarski, E. Cyrańska, Łódź 1998, pp. 399–400.

to commencing actions. The essence of animation consists in creating the conscious subject (in the relation “ME and YOU” towards “US” and not “ME and THIS” – according to Martin Buber⁴¹)—authentic, active, responsible and wise.

Animators – is that what they are in fact?

The effectiveness of animation depends on the capital (social resources) which communities have at their disposal.⁴² In practice, they can be institutional and organizational forms, as well as human resources (mentality, educational or cultural capital). The above-mentioned elements form the “enforcing pressure” of our behaviour, creating social facts and collective presentations. To moderators of social life, it becomes vital to identify social capital, including: social bonds, social networks, social structures, social communication, values, social norms, cooperation, trust and ultimately—social integration. The sources of local capital which builds the subjectivity (identity) of society, should be perceived in animators’ engagement in the “Ciceronian cultivation” of the local social tissue, and this can be conditioned by regional traditions of commitment to community, experience of civic collaboration or the appearance of local social forces. The conditions called on above can build a local climate which supports modern social economy⁴³ (among others, civic education, projects serving activation and revitalization of socioeconomic backwardness). Nonetheless, a shortage of the above-mentioned resources can be decisive as regards the marginalization of local communities in a broader social system.

Animators’ activity is concurrent with the classical framework of local transformations by means of social forces of the very environment itself. According to Helena Radlińska, if the overt and hidden social forces of a rearing environment are activated, they will become the leading factors in the reconstruction and assimilation of

⁴¹ Paraphrasing the author’s thought, it can also be accepted that “animation is a meeting.” M. Buber, *Ja i Ty. Wybór pism filozoficznych*, transl. J. Doktor, Warszawa 1992, p. 45.

⁴² A. Bartoszek, “Kapitał społeczny – problem aktywizacji zasobów i szansa rozwoju lokalnego,” in: *Animacja społeczno-kulturalna w mieście. Uwarunkowania – bariery – korzyści*, op. cit., pp. 27–42.

⁴³ Cf. *Kapitał społeczny. Ekonomia społeczna*, eds. T. Kazimierczak, M. Rymśza, Warszawa 2007.

values.⁴⁴ According to Jan Żebrowski, an animator is a person who—either in a spontaneous manner or in connection with the performed function—enlivens the social environment, awakens the desire for knowledge, influences the development of various interests, understands and appreciates the weight of teaching and rearing in the life of individuals, and also holds the awareness of his/her own social role. Irrespective of the domain in which an animator is functioning, their work is undoubtedly of the creative nature: their task always consists in animating and stimulating activities in different spheres of life and thus in its development. An animator is a person who, in a discreet manner, inspires others to undertake useful actions and initiatives in all areas of man's activity. The animator's obligations do not entail creation itself, but create the conditions so that others should become creators, leaders or social activists in their own environments.

Father Leon Dyczewski has provided an extended definition of an animator, paying particular attention to the attitude of empathy and pedagogical intention. An animator of culture is someone who complements his knowledge, experience of life and experiences of other people whom he/she develops contacts with; they are people who stimulate interests, show new ideals and models of living, run a dialogue concerning possibilities and ways of reasonable satisfying not only revealed, but also hidden cultural needs. Moreover, they see a new better life clearly—love these visions, yet love people even more and accept them as they are, with the hope that they might grow to be even better. Apart from this, an animator respects each manifestation of good will, the least interest in whatever is new and better, supporting efforts made with the aim to make life better. The method of animator's work is not to order others around, but to set in motion forces that are dormant in them. The value of an animator's work manifests itself not as much in whatever they come up with or do themselves, but in what they are able to extract from people who they work among.⁴⁵

Another researcher, Edouard Limbos, has defined the function of an animator as one prompting the creative attitude, expression and

⁴⁴ A. Olubiński, "Siły społeczne jako centralna kategoria pedagogiki społecznej," in: S. Kawula, *Studia z pedagogiki społecznej*, Olsztyn 1996, pp. 91–104.

⁴⁵ L. Dyczewski, *Kultura polska w procesie przemian*, Lublin 1993, p. 209.

sense of identity.⁴⁶ Those who see and consider the basic function of animation in the spiritual and civilizational dimension, making reference to the personalistic conception, put an emphasis on ethics. They are convinced that animation is primarily about moral and spiritual rebirth in times of crisis.⁴⁷ The need for a moral rebirth of man is indeed a pressing necessity in contemporary times; therefore, the function of the animator is especially important.

The functions of an animator entail—on the psychological and moral planes—their abilities, personal features of character and postulated ethical qualifications. The basic abilities of an animator mean here—according to Limbos—understanding, the most subtle form of which is empathy, as well as inclination not towards reception and recording, but active listening which takes account of all forms of expression, including non-verbal ones.⁴⁸

Confirmation of the need for animation

Wolfgang Brezinka has stated that in Europe today we are having to deal with a crisis of beliefs, conceptions of values, moral attitudes of many individuals, but—simultaneously—with a crisis of social norms and institutions which rely on acceptance, obedience, readiness to serve on the part of citizens. In such sectors of culture as: religion, the *Weltanschauung*, morality, art, lifestyle and rearing, there reign uncertainty and disorder, which take sometimes extreme forms of anarchy and nihilism.⁴⁹ In the diagnosis provided by the above-mentioned pedagogue, I would personally see the justification for animators and the need for sociocultural animation in contemporary society. Animation was to be a “breath of life” for man of new times. However, the vitalizing values located in truth, god and beauty were frequently forgotten. The demiurges of the 20th century

⁴⁶ See: E. Limbos, *L'Animation des groupes de culture et de loisirs. Connaissance du problème et applications pratiques*, Paris 1977, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Z. Łomny, “Animacja kulturalna promocją humanistycznego i tożsamościowego wzbogacenia ludzi,” in: *Animacja kulturalna jako problem pedagogiczny*, op. cit., pp. 55–56.

⁴⁸ E. Limbos, *L'Animation des groupes de culture et de loisirs*, op. cit., pp. 9–11.

⁴⁹ W. Brezinka, *Wychowanie i pedagogika w dobie przemian kulturowych*, transl. J. Kochanowicz, Kraków 2005, pp. 21, 81.

intended to alter man—unfortunately often attempting to carry this out without his knowledge and against his will.

Kazimierz Obuchowski has aptly observed that the time has come to realize that the world will be just the same as people living in it. All attempts at reversing the dependence have failed, that is efforts to prove that while altering people's living conditions, it is possible to create a new, better man. However, it transpired that each attempt to change man, which came from the outside, made him turn against himself and against those who tried to effect the change. In order to be a human being, one needs to constantly be in the process of becoming one,⁵⁰ since it is man himself who is the key to a better world. An important mission for animation then is self-perfection, including self-rearing (self-education), which makes it easier for man to go through the process of becoming one.⁵¹

It is worth asking the following question: In what can one perceive the weightiness of animation in contemporary times? Animation is evolving: its foundations, functions, content are changing; still, people to whom it is addressed are changing, as well. Today—in agreement with my own experience—animation should strengthen the process of solving conflicts in the face of educational, cultural, social and religious changes (challenges). It should still continue to be the method of group work⁵² and environmental actions leading to collective activities. It can become a method to build a network of mutual understanding, necessary in “management” of local life and establishing an order of social understanding between subjects of local worlds. Animation is an authentic element in the lives of many people, especially so as it is that somebody has always helped somebody else and people have always expected aid and kindness from others. In the days of structural individualism and narcissistic drive for experiencing and adoring “oneself” in loneliness, many a human being can be greatly surprised at the necessity of building and the complexion of responsive communitarian community.⁵³

⁵⁰ K. Obuchowski, *Człowiek intencjonalny*, Warszawa 1993, pp. 39–40.

⁵¹ See: E. Balcer, “Potrzeba samowychowania w budowaniu cywilizacji miłości,” *Kwartalnik Naukowy Fides et Ratio* 2015, no. 1(21), pp. 34–40.

⁵² Cf. J. Szmagański, *Przewodzenie małym grupom. Działania grupowe*, Warszawa 1998.

⁵³ See: A. Etzioni, “Wspólnota responsywna: perspektywa komunitariańska,” in: *Komunitarianie. Wybór tekstów*, ed. P. Śpiewak, Warszawa 2002, pp. 181–203.

What has been the power of animation for a long time can be its weak spot in the perspective of “long lasting.” It was Pierre Besnard who already incorporated the problems of animation into situations dominated by ideology and politics, institutional issues, psychology and pedagogy, as well as matters pertaining to sociology and culture.⁵⁴ It is worth remembering that there is not one kind of animation and, accordingly, in the literature of the subject one can find its indicated differentiations. The earliest to define (noticeable) were the following of its types: sociocultural animation, animation of free time, animation of outside-school activities, animation by means of art (culture) and creative-expressive animation. The last of them concentrates, in the psychological way, on the individual person and their place occupied in society (this being an approach of a rather para-scientific character).

Animation on the individual’s level should liberate the creative forces present in human beings and lead to their positive internal transformation. It should also favour courage, prudence, development of creative possibilities in all members of the given group, chiefly because it gives them the chance of conscious acceptance of responsibility. It is through this that man matures the fastest. It needs realizing the fact, though, that many people easily succumb to the temptation of “escape from maturity” (Peter Pan or Thumbelina syndrome). They would rather remain passive and satisfied, managed by others rather than taking responsibility for their own actions. Such people are difficult to keep/retain in a group functioning on the basis of animation.⁵⁵

In closing, it is perhaps worth saying when animation can be considered a success. A few years ago, during my classes in animation, one of my students called Elwira, concluded the discussion by stating (I quote from my memory) that “the deepest reason... the source of animation, the explanation of animation, the aim of animation, the

⁵⁴ P. Besnard, “Problematyka animacji społeczno-kulturalnej,” in: *Rozprawy o wychowaniu*, vol. 2: *Rola i kształcenie nauczycieli, edukacja permanentna, animacja*, op. cit., p. 108.

⁵⁵ Contemporarily, the view predominates that it is not an individual who serves the community, but the latter is a boon which the individual has the right to take advantage of. Man, as an individual, is to decide himself how and why they engage in social life.

method of animation, the characteristic of an animator, the fruit of animation is... LOVE.”

So much... or as much as that? And perhaps we do not know what we are talking about in the postmodernist polyphony of mediocrity and consumption. After all, it can be noted that when consumption is on the rise, the consumer in us is growing larger and then the human in us is shrinking more and more.

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