

# SEMINARE

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## “Being with” or Salesian Assistance in the Digital Age „Być przy”, czyli salezjańska asystencja wychowawcza w epoce cyfrowej

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**Abstract:** St. John Bosco demonstrated his teaching method most clearly in a letter from Rome in 1884, in which he established the loving presence of the educator as the foundation of Salesian pedagogy. In the long and varied pedagogical practice of the Salesians, the so-called assistance played an essential role in the visibility of a specific educational model. In a modern society of individualism, assistance is often understood as control. In this context, the emphasis on freedom of conscience makes it particularly difficult to find a presence that wants to share and transmit Christianity. In this article, we highlight the difficulties that such an understanding poses for the entire field of education today. Especially in the age of digitalization, when young people are increasingly chained to their electronic devices and less and less capable of having genuine relationships, this loving presence of which Don Bosco writes is all the more necessary. Using the concrete example of a Salesian educational institution, we show that such a pedagogical orientation is not only an option, but that assistance with the traits of Christianity in practice can be effectively used to work with young people even in the digital age.

**Keywords:** assistance, Salesian education, St. John Bosco, digital, religious education, Letter from Rome

**Abstrakt:** Św. Jan Bosko najpełniej przedstawił swoją metodę wychowawczą w Liście z Rzymu z 1884 r., w którym jako podstawę pedagogiki salezjańskiej przyjął pełną miłości obecność wychowawcy. W długoletniej i różnorodnej praktyce pedagogicznej salezjanów tak zwana asystencja wychowawcza stanowi wyróżnik na tle innych metod nauczania i wychowania. We współczesnym społeczeństwie nacechowanym silnym poczuciem indywidualizmu stała asystencja wychowawcza może być raczej rozumiana jako chęć kontroli. Tak duży nacisk kładziony obecnie na wolność sumienia sprawia, że szczególnie trudno jest znaleźć dzisiaj taki rodzaj obecności wychowawcy, który będzie skutkował dzieleniem się i przekazywaniem wartości chrześcijańskich. Niniejszy artykuł zwraca uwagę na trudności wynikające z takiego właśnie rozumienia obecności wychowawcy dla całej dziedziny edukacji. To właśnie jednak w dobie cyfryzacji, kiedy to młodzi ludzie stają się coraz bardziej zależni od urządzeń elektronicznych i kiedy coraz trudniej przychodzi im nawiązywanie prawdziwych relacji z innymi, ta pełna miłości obecność, o której pisze Ksiądz Bosko, staje się tym bardziej konieczna. W oparciu o konkretny przykład salezjańskiej instytucji edukacyjnej zostanie ukazane, że taka metodyka kształcenia i wychowania nie stanowi jedynie jednej z możliwych opcji, ale może być skutecznie wykorzystana w kształtowaniu cech chrześcijańskich w pracy z młodymi ludźmi, nawet w epoce cyfrowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** asystencja, edukacja salezjańska, św. Jan Bosko, cyfrowa, edukacja religijna, List z Rzymu



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## INTRODUCTION

The words spoken 140 years ago still express the great pedagogical eros of every Christian educator: “Whether I am at home or away I am always thinking of you. I have only one wish, to see you happy both in this world and in the next” (Bosco 2020). It is a happiness that comes from the deep conviction that one is saved both here on earth and in eternal life. Without this background, it would be difficult to understand the words of St. John Bosco to his disciples. However, these words are even more pointedly addressed to his followers – to the Salesians and to all who strive to live in his spirit. For in his old age, St. John Bosco was beginning to feel that he could no longer be present to the youth as he had been in the past (Ciglar 2009, 32-33). His effort to find a new religious community was to help preserve the typical educational concept that leads young people to faith and prepares them for a responsible life. “There was a danger that the organization, the coldness, the formality, the timetable... would take precedence over spontaneity, familiarity, closeness, that the Salesian would no longer be a father, a friend, a counsellor, a brother, i.e., an educator, but only an overseer, a guard, i.e., a non-educator” (Ciglar 2009, 32). St. John Bosco was convinced that with the loss of this sense of familiarity, this loving-kindness, young people would cease to open up to being guided into a responsible adult life, even less so into a healthy relationship with God.

St. John Bosco was a realist in all the ideals he held as an educator of young people. He was convinced that if one could instil in the youth, the love of life, the spontaneous integration into society, and the joy of providing for himself and his family, it would be an achievement. “But, as a rule, he tried to achieve even more: a more refined moral-ethical sense and a firm faith, with a constant striving to live in a state of grace” (Braidó 2019, 325). Faith was undoubtedly the starting point of his professional activity, and it constituted his basic educational background. Of all his works and efforts, however, we can say that the only confirmation of being a good believer, as John Bosco himself often argues, is being a good citizen. The commitment to apprentices, the first evening schools, the boarding school, all certainly served to proclaim the message and, above all, to equip young people for a responsible and successful adult life.

In an increasingly secularized society, it would have been difficult for St. John Bosco to base his pedagogy on the “Hail Mary” and the paradigm: honest citizens and good Christians. Although in his times, he managed to successfully respond to all opposition to Christianity and the Church, today the situation is strikingly different. We live in a society that, at least in the West, is becoming increasingly areligious, deprived of a sense of faith. Modern social institutions no longer base their actions and existence on one kind of religiosity or another, which is fundamentally different from the times of St. John Bosco. This is and must be a challenge for Salesian education (Lydon and Briody 2023, 69). In addition, religious attitudes of young people are at stake, as the young live in a very pluralistic

environment. A monolithic Catholic society is a thing of the past (Kraner 2021). Nevertheless, it can be said that Salesian educational institutions around the world are trying to remain faithful to this core and to preserve the religious dimension of their actions. Our discussion will therefore be naturally linked to the necessity of establishing a close relationship with students emphasized by St. Bosco in his letter from Rome and the possibility of giving this closeness a religious dimension: “This is what gives rise to the coldness of so many in approaching the sacraments, to neglect of the prayers in church and elsewhere; to their reluctance to be in a place where Divine Providence heaps every possible blessing on their bodies, their souls and their minds” (Bosco 2020). Whether it is possible to maintain his charism in a time of areligiosity, often even anti-religiosity, is an urgent question for the successful application of pedagogy based on the presence, which in the Salesian tradition is understood as assistance.

However, what is an even greater challenge for those educating in the spirit of St. John Bosco today, is how to maintain and establish the closeness he portrays in the above-mentioned Letter from Rome. The decline of his educational model is visible at first sight: “But I saw quite a number of others on their own, leaning against the pillars, a prey to depressing thoughts. Others were on the steps or in the corridors, or up on the terraces near the garden so as to be away from the common recreation. Others were strolling about in groups, talking to each other in low tones and casting furtive and suspicious glances in every direction” (Bosco 2020). Today we would see more of such behaviour. Young people are becoming increasingly lonely. Recent years have given humanity communication capabilities that were unimaginable just a short time ago. One would think that we are more connected and less lonely. However, the opposite is the case. “So, all of them, even when communicating with others, are bound to feel solitude or loneliness, which they try to remedy by frantically consulting their messages, anxiously awaiting the reply, and speedily composing their response” (Larchet 2019). Young people in particular are finding it more and more difficult to interact with each other in the digital age (Kraner 2023a). They are increasingly apathetic to general social issues and their physical well-being is poor. A growing body of research on young users of digital technologies points to this. “The users surveyed are said to have frequently slept worse and felt lonelier than the comparison group. Consequently, the feeling and inferiority grows with the length of time spent in the (virtual) lives of others” (Hepp 2022). Although this is just a survey of Instagram users, there are increasing signs that society is becoming more and more asocial. Therefore, our attempt to situate the educational model as presented in the Letter from Rome in the environment in which young people live today, even more than the religious dimension itself, will focus on the changes that the so-called digital culture brings to authentic Salesian education.

## 1. DIGITAL CULTURE AND YOUNG PEOPLE

If St. John Bosco knew how to use all the means of his time to help young people grow up, become independent, and take responsible positions in society, then this is certainly the task of every responsible educator today. The only difference is the initial situation. Society in the developing industrial cities of the nineteenth century needed “only” young workers. Their only future was hard work and an even harder life that came with it. Most young people of his time had no chance of education and thus of improving their social and economic situation. Visits to prisons with his spiritual director, St. Joseph Cafasso, eventually led the young priest to what would later become Salesian pedagogy. Under his guidance and teaching, he discovered and developed the typical characteristics of his spirituality: Christian hope, a primary trust in God rather than a fearful reverence for Him, which is the basis of any Christian pedagogy that educates for life (Braido 1981, 304-306). Without this deep attitude of the good shepherd, he would not have gone out into the streets of Turin and gathered boys. Still less would he have done so without a belief in their better future. His education can be characterized as a pedagogy of hope (Braido 2019, 324). The results were obvious even among the most neglected pupils: many of the boys who came out of prison found it easy to turn to a profession to earn an honest living. Many who were in extreme danger of becoming promiscuous avoided the dangers and turned to the path of upstanding citizens (Braido 2005, 284-294). All of his work confirmed him in the realization that young people became unhappy not because of their own wickedness, but because of a lack of education and opportunity. After the first decade of his ministry, John Bosco lived out of a deep conviction that youth are not inherently bad but are driven to sin by bad companions and the social environment (Braido 1987, 39-62). The growth of the Salesian family also gave him the belief that youth have a great future. Therefore, the letter from Rome is a reminder not to squander this future of young people, because with the right education anything can be achieved: “One who knows he is loved loves in return, and one who loves can obtain anything, especially from the young” (Bosco 2020). This optimistic view of education is based on loving relationships, which are no longer found in the oratory in his dream vision.

Educators and teachers today have a difficult time sharing this educational optimism. First of all, in the spirit of freedom, society despises the role of authority and largely removes it from the educational process. While Don Bosco emphasizes the role of the educator and demands his constant presence, many modern people would see this as an invasion of privacy, as surveillance. Likewise, freedom of belief is something that everyone who works with people must respect: “Individuals themselves have become the supreme authorities for judging what is relevant to them, even what is right and true. Cultural postmodernity has questioned the previously held certainty and authority attributed to spiritual, religious knowledge and it casts doubts about the value of metanarratives. In this cultural atmosphere

of scepticism, the truth and reliability of personal knowledge and knowledge of the spiritual seem to deteriorate; what is now certain is that there is a natural uncertainty to this type of knowledge. Hence, it becomes very relative, and it is then up to the individual to decide what to believe. Spirituality now becomes personal, subjective and DIY (Do It Yourself) rather than both personal and communal as in traditional Christian spirituality” (Rossiter 2018, 33) The decline of faith in the grand narratives is most damaging to the structure of the educational system and traditional religious communities. The consequences, Rossiter says, are borne by the individual who, freed from self-evident certainty and authority, falls more and more into insecurity and scepticism, much as John Bosco sees young people who no longer enjoy the genuine closeness of their educators. He would agree with us in the observation that imposing the need to find his or her own way on a young person leads not only to egocentricity, but also to fear of the future and of taking responsibility for oneself. However, this follows from the fact “that we are increasingly disillusioned with real life. Reality seems increasingly boring, slow, colourless, and meaningless. Real life does not seem worth the effort” (Hepp 2022). This is the result of an increasing immersion in the virtual world. The dreamlike image of the oratory where everyone passively stays on the edges of the courtyard is getting worse in a digital culture. Society as a whole is losing faith in the future, despite the many opportunities available to it. Young people are feeling this more and more, and they no longer allow themselves to feel the foundation of all Salesian education: One who knows he is loved loves in return, because they no longer believe in the possibility of being loved for nothing. Therefore, the possibility of an “active, dynamic presence” is increasingly questionable (Lydon and Briody 2023, 62).

This closeness was based on a type of communication that required a living relationship. That is why, a safe courtyard is so important, because that is where a real relationship is built. Many young people today enter into relationships with the help of digital technology (Kraner 2023b). “Constructing friendships in the era of the Web therefore signifies dealing with more possibilities for contact, but it also requires a greater awareness of the intensity and profundity that is possible in ‘incarnated’ human relationships” (Spadaro 2014, 33), which young people no longer have. This has many consequences, as one of the authors of Digital Reality notes: “You’re sitting there swiping at a screen. You might spend less time with your family in proportion to the cuteness of the presentation of your family life you put out there on social media. You might be at risk for self-harm in proportion to your social media use, especially if you’re a young woman. You might be making traumatic experiences worse by using social media. You might be losing self-esteem even as you express yourself” (Lanier 2018). There is growing evidence of the dangers posed by the digitalization of society, especially for young people. They are increasingly growing up with the help of social networks that offer them many role models. To get as many ‘likes’ and ‘shares’ as possible, they adapt to the demands of their environment. “The relatively new media and communications technologies have created additional pressures

on the development of personal identity – particularly the projective function of identity concerned with the desired image and characteristics the individual wants to display for others” (Rossiter 2018, 67).

The former role of peer groups in the search for identity through the Internet is not disappearing. Young people still socialize, but now through digital technologies. There, they are much more subject to the limited views and interests of certain groups. There are also more and more fake profiles that radicalize the particularity of each group. Involvement in such groups does not end when people become adults. Many remain ‘trapped’ in virtual communities of one kind or another. “Our peer groups have a big impact on us when we’re young, but it stays that way throughout life. If your extended peer group contains a lot of fake people intent on manipulating you, you are likely to be influenced without realizing it” (Lanier 2018). In this we can recognize what John Bosco also observed in his own courtyard – groups, “but with looks and smirks that would make you not only suspect but feel quite certain that St. Aloysius would have blushed to find himself in their company” (Bosco 2020). Such association not only damages young people’s identity and religious attitudes, but also destroys the future of society. Not much is left of the paradigm of honest citizens and good Christians. “Something is pulling young people away from democracy. Despite all the hopeful self-congratulations of social media companies, it seems that when democracy has been weakened, the online world has only grown uglier and more fraudulent” (Lanier 2018).

## 2. NETWORK CHURCH AND NEW DIMENSIONS OF FAITH

According to St. John Bosco, the presence of the educator among young people must reflect the love of God. “Jesus Christ did not crush the bruised reed nor quench the smouldering flax. He is your model” (Bosco 2020). The understanding of faith is changing in the digital age and the question arises to what extent the direct presence of the educator and his transmission of faith is still acceptable in a digital culture (Kraner 2023a). The understanding and position of leaders in traditional religious communities has changed significantly, as online groups often function quite differently than religious communities in traditional religious settings. They function not as tightly bounded social structures but as loose social networks with varying degrees of religious affiliation and commitment. While the traditional religious community functioned in a hierarchical and largely closed manner, religious groups in the digital environment are governed by the principle of participation, free participation and creative contribution by the willing. Such a community resembles a network in which there is no single centre, but which connects individuals and allows them to work together. The concept of “networked community” has emerged as a way to describe this new conceptualization and structural form of religious community, both in the online environment and beyond (*Digital Religion* 2013, 64). The concept of the educator in faith, as espoused by John Bosco, is thus strongly challenged, as the solution to education

lies in the authority of the superior: “let the superior be all things to all, always ready to listen to any boy’s complaints or doubts, always alert to keep a paternal eye on their conduct, all heart to seek the spiritual and temporal good of those Divine Providence has entrusted to him” (Bosco 2020).

The Internet creates a sense of freedom for the user that extends to the religious sphere. At the same time, it allows for a much more open development and dissemination of one’s religious views, experiences, and forms of celebration. “Religious networks enable people typically outside the structures of the authority of a group to contribute opinions and help build the shape of their community. The network structure can empower religious community members and offer new opportunities for contributions to the group mission and practice. This means religious communities that function as social networks create space for members to experience new levels of freedom and participation in their group’s identity” (Campbell and Bellar 2023, 16). It turns out that an online religious community is indeed different from a traditional religious community, but it cannot be completely separated from faith in an offline world. This means that we need to question not only how the concept of community changes online, but also how traditional offline community is perceived and lived (*Digital Religion* 2013, 67), which brings us back to the notion of loving presence.

The notion of community as a network means that involvement in online faith communities often changes their members’ understanding of what it means to be part of a faith community or church. Such experiences can also change expectations about how faith communities can or should live in traditional communities outside of the digital. Understanding communities as networks explains how faith communities function as loose social networks with varying degrees of religious affiliation and commitment. This is because it is no longer religious leaders or institutions that determine who belongs in the community or how it looks or functions. Instead, it is the individual members of the community who shape, direct, and manage what the experience of the faith in the community will be (Campbell and Bellar 2023, 23).

This change in the understanding of the community in which we live our faith, or at least seek it, also changes individual believers and the relationships in the community. The Church is no longer the only place of reference, let alone the most appropriate one, for understanding Christ and his message. It is no longer a lighthouse that radiates light and sustains the joy of salvation, but a pillar that offers support. Its goal must not be to increase the number of its members, but to increase the Kingdom of God. From this perspective, we do not exclude pastors, heads, bishops, the Pope or others (Spadaro 2014, 114), but we understand them as a network, as ecologists, as people who have the task of maintaining the functions of the network within the society, which can very quickly change the relationships within a particular community. “This vision offers an idea of the Christian community that makes the characteristics of a virtual community itself turn into light, without historical constraints, and which is geographically fluid. Certainly,

this horizontality helps us greatly to understand the Church's mission, which is to evangelize" (Spadaro 2014, 39). This is also the basic purpose of the Letter from Rome.

From the perspective of the network community, the individual is not only the object of receiving the message, but increasingly becomes the subject of sharing, interpreting and evaluating the mission of the community and the content of the faith. This brings us to another element of Salesian education: the animator. "The Salesian animator should be involved with the young people in their activities, arousing their interest and leading them to constructive engagement" (Lydon and Briody 2023, 61). Religious education that takes place in a networked community setting should treat both the individual and the community as subjects rather than objects. It should consider the relationship with God and especially with Christ as fundamental, even where the digital and physical worlds intersect. In both, we should strive for authenticity, charity, and sincerity in educational presence, as John Bosco dreamed. "Let them like what pleases the youngsters, and the youngsters will come to like what pleases the superiors. In this way, their work will be made easy. The reason for the present change in the Oratory is that many of the boys no longer have confidence in their superiors" (Bosco 2020). The first three initiatives of Pope Francis' *The Global Compact on Education* are precisely in the spirit of active involvement of all (Pope Francis 2020). It is a presence that puts the person at the centre, listens to the voice of young people, and promotes the participation of young people in education. It is the vision of the first oratory in which education is part of play and play is part of the relationship between educators and young people in all openness to God. "In one corner a group of youngsters were gathered round a priest, hanging on his every word as he told them a story. In another a cleric was playing with a number of lads at "chase the donkey" and "trades." There was singing and laughing on all sides, there were priests and clerics everywhere and the boys were yelling and shouting all round them. You could see that the greatest cordiality and confidence reigned between youngsters and superiors" (Bosco 2020).

### 3. A LOVING PRESENCE IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL CULTURE

The ancient oratory must become the goal of Salesian educational presence today. To love what young people love is still the guiding principle that obliges the educator to seek the possibility of a new 'courtyard.' "He must seek to be in touch with young people in all possible situations of the school day and beyond, especially in activities that allow the educator to associate with young people not simply in the role of a teacher but as a brother or a friend" (Lydon and Briody 2023, 62). For many today, that is the internet. It is the place where we must meet and share life with young people. It is the task of the herald to know the language of today's young people and to speak through them. At the same time, he must preserve the heritage on which this proclamation is based. One of the first things

that links Salesian education and digital culture is active participation of young people. Psychotherapists have also noted this: “And for the younger ones, at some point it is no longer necessary to wait, to take life into their own hands and to learn to act independently – and to do so without becoming embittered on the long road to old age” (Hepp 2022). They will embark on this journey if they feel loved, as the Letter from Rome says.

“The problem today is not to find the message that makes sense, but to decode it, to recognize it on the basis of the multiple messages that we receive. Increasingly, digital witnessing to faith becomes “accounting for hope” (1 Pt 3:15) in a context in which reason is quickly and wildly being confronted” (Spadaro 2014, 23). That is why, young people need the presence of educators. Assistance is no less necessary today than in the past. Only the “courtyard” has changed, as have the games the young people play. The message is at hand, it just needs to speak to them in a way that gives them hope. In the apathy of the loneliness of the digital world, they need challenges that strengthen their faith in their own future and in the future of humanity. “In this context one of the principal challenges for the school leader centres on the demands something greater than simply the creation of harmonious relationships. Collegiality involves fostering a commitment to the goals of an institution larger than those of any particular individual” (Lydon and Briody 2023, 64). Only in this way can we achieve the paradigm of honest citizens and good Christians, which is also the background of the Letter from Rome.

That such educational presence-assistance is also possible today was confirmed, at least partially, by a survey conducted by Dr. David Kraner in 2022 among the students of four Catholic high schools in Slovenia (Kraner 2023c, 1005-1016). He asked 672 young people about the impact of digitalization on feelings of loneliness. One of the high schools is the Salesian High School Želimlje. It is characterized by the fact that 255 out of 280 students live in a boarding school. The other three Catholic high schools also have student boarding schools. However, it is difficult for students to choose to stay there. Students at the Salesian high school want to stay in a boarding school even though they could easily return to their homes on a daily basis. To the question “How easy is it to connect with your classmates,” the following answers are possible: very difficult, difficult, easy and very easy. Of all schools, 3.9% of students from Želimlje chose “very difficult,” the highest percentage (others ranged from 2.6% to 3.2%). The answer “very easy” was chosen by at least 12.5% (the others from 15.5% to 18.5%). We conclude that they do not have a very high opinion of themselves, that they simply enter into relationships. We also know that face-to-face communication with new people is much more difficult than in a digital environment. As students come from different backgrounds and have not known each other before, living together is certainly an endeavour in the quest for good communication. Which may help to illustrate why it is in this particular high school that they feel it is more difficult to maintain good communication. When asked, “How lonely do you feel,” where the possible answers are: always completely lonely, often completely lonely, rarely completely

lonely, never completely lonely, the opposite picture emerges. Only one student, 0.8%, always feels completely lonely (other schools from 1.6% to 5.7%). The majority answered that they rarely feel lonely, 63.3% (other schools from 56.7% to 64.1%). They also spend the least amount of time with digital media. On average, they are on digital media a quarter less per day than in the other three Catholic high schools. You would expect them to be more on their own at boarding school and therefore spend more time on digital media. The survey results show that this is not the case. This is largely due to the very atmosphere that is permeated with the Salesian assistance. This has an impact not only on students being on digital media less, but also on them wanting to stay in a boarding school at all. It is important to remember that these are similar schools with similar profiles of young people. While it is true that there are no major differences in the answers, it is a fact that young people at Želimlje High School are mostly housed in the dormitory, which could have an impact on loneliness, as they have left their homes and friends, they had in their home environment. However, in the program of the institution itself, since its foundation (it is the first private school in Slovenia), great emphasis has been placed on the active work of all educators in the spirit of the Letter from Rome. All employees must undergo training in Salesian pedagogy, with emphasis on the principle of assistance. We can state with certainty that the difference in results is significant enough. The young people are in the “courtyard” in their educational group together with the educator and despite the conviction that they find it difficult to build relationships with others, they do not close themselves in the digital world, but actively participate in life with their classmates and educators. The constant presence of educators, including younger and older Salesians, the varied offer of activities and the involvement in various projects keep young people busy enough not to need digital media for personal affirmation. The proximity of the educators is not understood as control, but they are present among the young people as animators. Students experience them as companions to be taken into account (Gimnazija Želimlje 2024).

## CONCLUSION

If the French theologian Larchet states that the Internet has become a substitute for community because of the way it communicates, “In fact communication has become a substitute for communion, which, in its spiritual reality, rests on the participation in one Body and one Spirit in a concrete community” (Larchet 2019), the Salesian vision of education, reflected in the “dream” of the Letter from Rome, can be preserved and integrated into today’s digital culture. In the digital age, Salesian education, inspired by the Letter from Rome, can help young people to have the courage to communicate face to face. Only through such communication will we be able to build true communions. This is the only way to empower young people to use digital media for their own benefit and for the benefit of society, and not, conversely, to be their slaves. Concrete examples of good Salesian educational

practice show that young people still have a sense of community, are willing to learn from their elders and dream of their mission in the world today. This is very close to what moved Saint John Bosco to dedicate his letter from Rome to the Salesians. So genuine assistance, which openly welcomes what young people like, can build a community in which young people share in one body and one spirit of the new Church. This new Church will not be afraid of the new media but will use them to be even more present in the modern world.

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## Suspended Parenting in the Case of Child Resocialization in a Youth Educational Centre

### Rodzicielstwo zawieszone w sytuacji resocjalizacji dziecka przebywającego w młodzieżowym ośrodku wychowawczym

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**Abstract:** The article defines the role and goals of suspended parenting in the case of juveniles' stay in a youth educational facility during their social rehabilitation. The publication is based on the author's five-year experience of work as an addiction psychotherapist. Over those years, the author conducted many hours of consultations with more than 125 charges and their parents in the course of therapeutic sessions. The analysis, apart from one-to-one consultations, also embraced personal files of charges. Juveniles may stay in such facilities for several weeks, but more often for months or even for several, e.g., 3-4 years. The present article discusses the tasks facing families of children staying in such facilities as well as introduces and defines such concepts as: suspended parenting, social rehabilitation, readaptation, attachment in children. The article also contains infographics on the reasons for referring minors to Youth Educational Centres (MOW) and the possibilities of supporting both the child and the parents/guardians by such a centre. In addition, it provides suggestions regarding the juvenile rehabilitation system as well as guidelines for practitioners.

**Keywords:** youth educational centre, social rehabilitation, readaptation, minors, suspended parenting

**Abstrakt:** Tekst przybliża znaczenie i zadania rodzicielstwa zawieszonego w warunkach przebywania nieletniego w MOW podczas jego resocjalizacji. Publikacja bazuje na ponad 5-letnim doświadczeniu w pracy na stanowisku psychoterapeuty uzależnień autorki tekstu. W ciągu tych kilku lat przeprowadzono wielogodzinne rozmowy z ponad 125 wychowankami podczas sesji terapeutycznych oraz ich rodzicami. Analizie poddano także dokumenty podopiecznych. Nieletni przebywają w ośrodku od kilku tygodni, częściej miesięcy do nawet kilku lat, np. 3-4 lata. W tekście znajdują się zadania stojące przed rodziną dziecka przebywającego w ośrodku oraz nawiązanie i rozumienie takich pojęć, jak: rodzicielstwo zawieszone, resocjalizacja, readaptacja, style przywiązania. Materiał zawiera także infografiki dotyczące przyczyn kierowania nieletnich do MOW oraz możliwości wsparcia dziecka i rodziców/opiekunów z pomocą tego ośrodka. Ponadto zawiera sugestie odnośnie do systemu resocjalizacji nieletnich i wskazówki dla praktyków.

**Słowa kluczowe:** młodzieżowy ośrodek wychowawczy, resocjalizacja, readaptacja, nieletni, rodzicielstwo zawieszone



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## INTRODUCTION

Each individual is born into a family. Such a family may be more or less stable, complete or incomplete, properly functioning or dysfunctional, etc. Models of family life, or general perception of parenting undergo constant changes. According to the research findings of the Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) from 2019, changes related to the socio-cultural factors determining marital and family life have an impact on, among others, the increasing number of divorces, postponing or renouncing the decision to get married or to procreate, an increasing percentage of informal relationships and children born in such relationships, as well as a growing number of single parents raising children. Research findings show that, in their everyday lives, Poles are primarily guided by such values as: 1) family happiness (80%), 2) health (55%), 3) striving for stability (48% of respondents), 4) taking care of friendships (45%). From the perspective of everyday life, less important for the respondents turned out to be the following: living an honest life, professional work, religion, prosperity of the homeland, freedom to express one's own views, prosperity and wealth, participation in democratic socio-political life, leading an adventurous life, collecting experiences, as well as achieving success and fame. Taking into account the category of gender, the value of living in a happy family was more often emphasized by women (Boguszewski 2019, 1-7). This element of family well-being is important for several reasons: 1) people spend most of their time in the family, it is the primary point of reference in building a hierarchy of values as well as a desired sphere of security; 2) people's adulthood and maturity are often measured by how they manage to find themselves in a family structure; 3) attitudes and behaviours, especially those of young people, are often evaluated against family expectations, beliefs and obligations.

The family is a system of mutual interdependencies, a system of communicating vessels. Problems arise already when even one its member exhibits destructive behaviour. The state care system disposes of various tools and capabilities to prevent, warn, eliminate, monitor, support or punish the family or its individual members. One of the educational measures, is to place a child in a care facility, e.g., a youth sociotherapy centre (MOS), a youth educational centre (MOW) or a district educational centre (OOW). However, this measure creates a complicated situation and based on my many years of therapeutic experience, I can claim that individuals most harmed in such a case are children themselves. Among the risk factors for personality disorders in the population of children, source literature lists the following: social isolation, developmentally inappropriate behaviours and poor health. In the case of adolescents, risk factors include also introversion, high level of emotionality and low social competences. Regardless of the developmental age, the risk factors include sexual, physical and emotional violence as well as inappropriate parental attitudes (Cohen et al. 2005; Lenkiewicz, Srebnicki and Bryńska 2015).

Source literature mentions various types of parenting: attentive, close, unconditional, neglective, difficult, etc. (*Rodzicielstwo i różne jego oblicza* 2020;

Stiffelman 2017; Brągiel, Matyjas and Segiet 2021; *Rodzicielstwo w obliczu niepełnosprawności* 2014; Maciarz 2009; Opozda 2017, 19-28; *Rodzina w sytuacji trudnej* 2019). In general, the family court, depending on the case, may decide on suspending, limiting or depriving parent(s) of their parental authority. In the present article, suspended parenting is understood in two contexts:

1) Parenting suspended as a result of a family court decision on the suspension of the certain scope of parental authority of one or both parents. This occurs when it is temporarily impossible for parents to fulfil their rights and obligations resulting from the exercise of parental authority. The factor of the temporary character of the change of state (temporariness) is very important here. Suspension of parental authority does not deprive parent(s) of their parental authority, although for the time of its duration it has the same effects as deprivation of parental rights. Suspension of parental authority implies the necessity of appointing a legal guardian, e.g., grandparents, for the period of its duration. It may be caused by, among others, a trip abroad, temporary hospital treatment or rehabilitation as well as a short stay in prison of the parent(s).

2) Parents' rights are not suspended by court decision. The child is placed in a centre, thus leading to a physical, and, indirectly, also a psychological separation of a child from his/her parents. It sometimes happens that children's stay in a centre exposes previous physical and/or psychological neglect, i.e., a kind of disruption of family relationships. Suspension of parenting in such cases may either deepen the process of such a disruption of relationships, or even be felt as beneficial by parents who can at least for some time dispose of problems related to their son or daughter. There are also situations where, because of the child's stay at the centre, the relationships begin to change and the type of parenting, sometimes single, begins to evolve, not infrequently for the better, e.g., more attentive one.

This article aims to present the character of suspended parenting in the conditions of minors' stay in MOW centres during their resocialization. The subject of the research is the importance of the family in the social rehabilitation of children staying in such a centre. The research problem was presented in the form of the following question: What are the roles and tasks of parents during children's stay at a youth educational centre as regards their social rehabilitation process? The article is based on over five years' experience in conducting individual and group sessions as an addiction psychotherapist at one of the MOWs in the Masovian Voivodeship. Dozens of documents, i.e., files of individual charges, were analysed including opinions of the psychological and pedagogical team, opinions of experts, opinions and judgments issued by psychological and pedagogical counselling centres at the request of parents/legal guardians, community interviews, family situation, school certificates, medical documentation, certificates, etc. Minors may stay in the centre for several weeks, more often months, up to several, e.g. 3-4, years (Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej 2017).

## 1. SPECIFICITY AND RULES OF OPERATION OF THE YOUTH EDUCATIONAL CENTRE

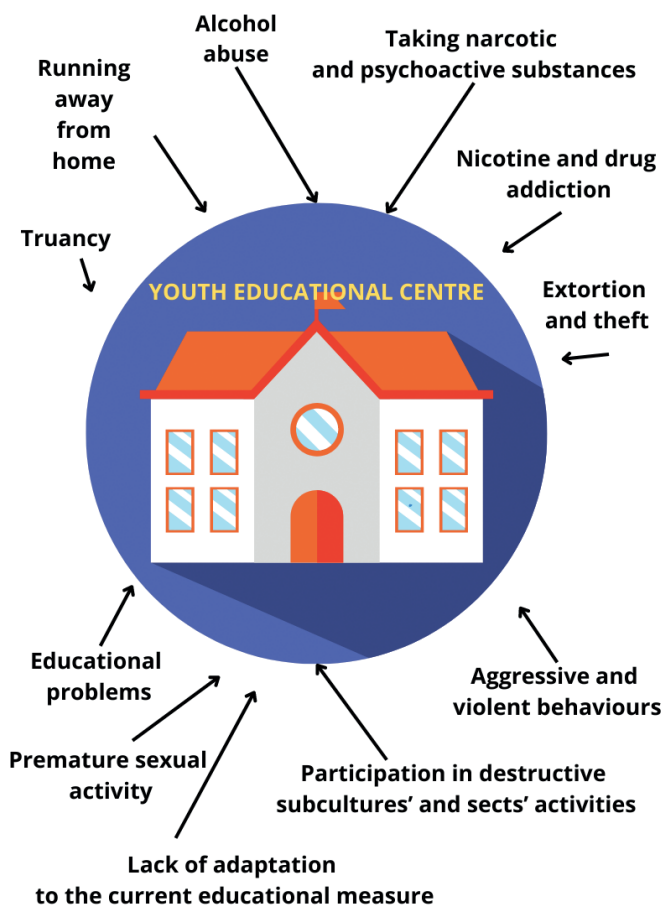
The Act of June 9, 2022 on the support and social rehabilitation of minors provides that minors can be subject to corrective measure in the form of placing them in a Youth Educational Centre (MOW) in order to strengthen their responsibility for their own actions prevent demoralization of juveniles or prevent juveniles from committing criminal acts and to create conditions allowing minors who have fallen into conflict with the law or violated principles of social coexistence to return to normal life (Dz. U. 2022). Youth educational centres fall into the scope of the education system (Ustawa z dnia 14 grudnia 2016 r.). They operate seven days a week, every month throughout the year. Within such a centre, there is usually a school attended by the charges. "The role of youth educational centres is to gradually eliminate children's cognitive and emotional deficits, teaching them proper interpersonal relationships and rules of functioning in society. These goals are achieved through providing children with integrated, corrective and compensatory teaching, care and therapeutic activities, preparing them for professional work, helping them to find their place on the labour market, cooperation with parents and with organizations and social associations working for children, youth and families. (*Działalność resocjalizacyjna* 2017).

Children may only be referred to the MOW centre by a family court based on a court decision on placing them in the centre, in cooperation with the district head (starosta) and the Education Development Centre in Warsaw. Juveniles referred to the centre include those who escape from home, are addicted to psychoactive substances, have committed crimes such as thefts or fights, failed to pass to the next grade, have learning difficulties, or are truant. It can be assumed that the centre receives demoralized children and youth who do not comply with the law or the generally accepted norms of behaviour in society or display risky behaviour. Risky behaviour refers to most of the undesirable activities of young people, such as use of psychoactive substances, violence, gambling, the Internet abuse, and cyberbullying. The pandemic additionally contributed to a rise in mental health disorders and increased suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts (*Dzieci się liczą* 2022, 181, 194). Numerous studies, among others by Łukasz Wirkus, confirm that the risk factors contributing to the occurrence of juvenile crime include poor parenting skills; dysfunctional family structure; family conflicts; parental criminality; single parenthood and upbringing based on punishment (Wirkus 2020, 267-281).

The main task of MOW centres is to eliminate symptoms of social maladjustment and prepare pupils to lead an independent and responsible life once they leave the centre, in accordance with applicable social and legal norms. The centre employs psychologists and educators, as well as, depending on the needs, other specialists and staff conducting classes, e.g., occupational therapists, psychotherapists building a therapeutic alliance, i.e., a therapeutic relationship, in addiction treatment, (Wampold and Flückiger 2023, 25-41). In order to provide control over the implementation of the

educational measure in the form of placing a minor in a youth educational centre, the judge of the family court or the probation officer supervising the implementation of this measure may apply to the school attended by the minor to provide information on fulfilling by the minor's parents or guardian(s) the obligations imposed on them. In fact, this regulation is a dead letter that is not effective in practice (Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej 2017 r.).

### Main reasons for the referral to the MOW centre



Infographic 1. Reasons for referring minors to a youth educational centre (MOW); source: *Działalność resocjalizacyjna*.

The above infographic presents the reasons for sending minors to a youth educational centre. It is possible to determine in percentage which of them predominate, however it does not prove anything, because each case is different and must be considered separately. Minors may be sent to a MOW due to their failing to perform well in a youth educational centre, running away from it, failing to cooperate with the probation officer, while others may be sent to the MOW because

they repeatedly miss classes and, for example, take psychoactive substances. First of all, the family situation of each charge is different, which significantly affects their daily functioning and the process of socialization or resocialization.

What is resocialization? It is often defined as part of the educational process, as a result of which an individual who fails to adapt to the generally accepted and applicable principles of social life is taught to re-socialize, adopt pro-social behaviours, and take constructive actions (Kalinowski 2008; Wysocka 2022).

Readaptation means striving to change the attitudes and behaviours of charges in order to help them find their place in society in accordance with common norms and principles. The centre in which children are placed has to implement a whole range of procedures enabling their optimal social readjustment. However, lack of life prospects, problems in finding employment after leaving the facility, insufficient social assistance or lack of support on the part of any environments apart from pathological ones may constitute factors hindering social readaptation of young people (Pytko 2000, 10). An important element in social rehabilitation and readaptation is developing minors' positive habits. This allows charges to learn self-discipline, punctuality, time management as well as conscientiousness in performing their duties. Simultaneously, minors may develop interpersonal skills and social competences (Karpuszenko 2017, 189).

The essence of the readaptation process is, among others, preventing social marginalization of charges. These goals can be achieved through various educational and resocialization activities, such as reducing or eliminating aggression, verbal and physical violence, therapy of addictions, participation in trainings, workshops, sections, and additional classes (Klingemann, Miturska and Moskalewicz 2008, 131).

As resocialization work is complex and multidimensional, it is difficult to clearly define the criteria of its effectiveness. Nevertheless, the Supreme Audit Office's (NIK) research findings clearly show that resocialization process conducted in the MOW centres faces various barriers and limitations, which result not only from the character of the centre's activity itself, but also from incorrectly imposed systemic solutions. In Poland, there is still insufficient number of specialized facilities dedicated to solving specific dysfunctions of the charges. Young people referred to a youth educational centre show varying degrees of demoralization and aggression, they may require addiction treatment or psychotherapy, e.g., due to their suffering from depression, ADHD, personality disorders, or psychiatric disorders. Directors of such centres openly admit that they are at times apprehensive when it comes to dealing with pregnant minors because they do not know what to do with them as such minors require not only psychological support but also providing them with medical care, specialized tests, and monitoring their health condition. All this has a negative impact on therapy, educational process and resocialization. The time allocated for specialist support from a psychologist, therapist, educational and career advisor, etc. is minimal, i.e., up to one hour per week. Individual Educational and Therapeutic Programs (IPE-T) and Self-Empowerment Programs (PU) imposed by law are in many cases implemented in a standard manner. The most

frequently quoted shortcomings as regards IPE-Ts included failure to specify the period of providing assistance; number of hours of psychological and pedagogical support, social rehabilitation and sociotherapeutic activities, activities in the field of educational and career counselling, activities supporting the child's parents, the scope of cooperation between specialist teachers and the child's parents. Another barrier hindering proper functioning of youth educational centres was the lack of legal regulations regarding the possibility for MOW employees to directly inspect personal belongings in cases justified by the behaviour of charges. Minors arriving in the centre for the first time, those returning from leave or visits to friends, smuggle various types of prohibited items and substances, including drugs and medicines. In the centre's jargon, this is called "messing around" or "trafficking." This not only exposes other charges to temptations and dangers, but also affects the entire MOW staff, e.g., by causing situations that may get out of control (fights, fainting, other illnesses, trading in goods, i.e., selling or exchanging these prohibited substances for other items). Moreover, the fate of the charges after leaving the centre is not monitored (*Działalność resocjalizacyjna* 2017, 8-15).

NIK conducted research in the years of 2018-2020. The percentage of people who came into conflict with the law after leaving the centres increased from 21% to 23% compared to the period of 2015-2018, those who continued education - from 37% to 54.5% or took up work - from 43.5 to 51.5%. NIK proposed, for example, the creation of several specialized MOWs intended for charges requiring addiction therapy, care related to pregnancy and maternity, or intensified supervision due to aggressive behaviour. What was disturbing was the fact that minors with different care and educational needs and showing very different degrees of demoralization, i.e., from those running away from home, those with symptoms of alcohol or drug addiction, to members of criminal groups, were sent to the same facility. This gave rise to conflicts, formation of subgroups or the so-called parallel life in the facility, with informal rules established by the strongest and most influential charges in the centre. The less demoralized assimilated from the more demoralized destructive behaviours such as vulgar language, shoplifting, cheating on the Internet, or learned what over-the-counter drugs or available chemicals can be used to make drugs or legal highs. (*Funkcjonowanie młodzieżowych ośrodków wychowawczych* 2021). There are also problems of a different nature, for example, the question of administering medicines, including psychotropic drugs prescribed by family doctors, specialists, and psychiatrists. As MOW centres do not have nurses, medications are usually administered to the charges by teachers on duty according to the schedule that defines which pupil should take what and how much. Needless to say, the responsibility associated with a minor's reaction to medications is enormous.

Strategies of actions of the Youth Educational Centre towards their charges during the suspension of parental rights

For the duration of the minors' stay, youth educational centres de facto take over the care and upbringing of their charges, who for various reasons, have been separated from their family environment. This suspension of parental custody

usually lasts from several months to several years. The task of youth educational centres is to eliminate in their charges any symptoms of social maladjustment, develop in them habits of constructive problems solving, teach them how to build healthy relationships, and prepare them for independent life led in accordance with applicable social and legal norms. This is a very difficult and tedious task, especially that the centres receive minors with different care and educational needs and varying degrees of demoralization. Among the charges there are young people who repeatedly evaded school obligations, resorted to using physical and psychological violence against their peers, stole, and took dangerous psychoactive substances. Therefore, an Individual Educational and Therapeutic Program (IPET) is developed for each student.

Children staying in a facility such as a youth educational centre (MOW) or a district educational centre (OOW) still remain part of their own families: natural, foster, adoptive, reconstructed, or patchwork. They still maintain a relationship with their family members. However, such a relationship may take different forms and sometimes it can be difficult. MOWs are under no obligation to conduct a systemic, i.e., family therapy, but through their activities they show young people the principles of social behaviour and teach them how to implement those principles in life. Their role is much wider though as they provide children with an opportunity to understand how they themselves function in a group. Such an experience usually proves to be difficult for either charges themselves or their families because leaving family home involves the necessity of learning new rules in a new environment and building relationships with strangers.

MOW employees include many specialists and people experienced in working with minors, such as, psychologists, pedagogues, therapists, teachers supporting the educational process, educators, trainers, tutors of individual charges. The resocialization process will not bring the expected results if there is no cooperation with parents and joint development of a rehabilitation process strategy. Contact with the parents of children staying in the centre can be difficult for many reasons, e.g., parents themselves may refuse to have any contact with either the centre or the specialists working there, or the distance from the place of their residence to the centre can make direct contact difficult, rare, or even sporadic. There is no comparison between a face-to-face conversation with parents and a phone conversation. It also happens that parents, facility employees and the charges widely differ in their expectations. For example, when a charge takes psychoactive substances such as marijuana and amphetamine, the family may expect that their son will completely give up these substances, while their offspring is currently able, as he says himself, to give up amphetamine and possibly limit smoking marijuana. This is difficult for both parties, because the ideal scenario cannot be introduced by force, and the pressure from parents is enormous, sometimes parents even accuse the facility of implementing ineffective measures. Meanwhile, giving up one substance and limiting the use of the other is a great success and the adolescent should be further supported in his decisions, because perhaps after some time, as a result of therapy, he will

decide to give up all stimulants. It is difficult to predict the outcomes of the therapy, as much as it is difficult to say whether there will be relapses, which are a natural part of the therapeutic process. Sometimes, parents are advised to start marital or individual therapy as it is difficult to help a child in a constructive manner if one element of the family system is dysfunctional. The whole system requires attention. Certain behaviours and events are difficult to make up for, although there is much that can be improved and learned. Parental bonds and the ways of building them are an integral element of the functioning of the entire system in which children also have to find a place for themselves. Such a family pattern of daily activity includes the parents' previous experiences, their beliefs, and the quality of life, including the so-called mental well-being, social and emotional skills, thinking and behaviour patterns. Parents who are interested in the fate of their offspring staying at MOW centres and who are provided with information about their children are sometimes surprised hearing that their child is artistically talented, can ride a horse well, has a good sense of humour, likes order, gets along with his or her friends, willingly talks to therapists, etc. At times, it appears that parents do not know their children at all and are unable to establish proper relationships with them, blaming them for all the misfortunes of the entire family.

Visits from the minor's relatives are always welcome at the facility. They usually take place on weekends or holidays, in cases when the family court refuses to grant permission for the charge to go on leave or for other reasons, e.g., to prevent the charge from running away before the date of court hearing. Depending on the minor's behaviour, visits may take place inside the facility, in specially designated rooms, in the common room, or outside the facility. The family may also take their child to do shopping or to go for a walk. Visits also depend on the distance from the parents' or legal guardians' place of residence. There are people who live on the other end of Poland, and it is difficult for them to come to the centre for financial reasons, because they work on weekends, must take care of other children, or have other obligations. It is important that children know why they are not visited, and that the separation is compensated by telephone calls, so as not to trigger in them the feeling of rejection, uncertainty, helplessness, hopelessness.

If the charges do not have close relationships with their relatives, it is important to strengthen their bonds with distant family members, peers, friends, and in adult life, with co-workers and, finally, with their own families. It is very important because after leaving the centre, children usually return, at least initially, to their environment which is often destructive. Therapeutic work at the centre is intended to restore the charges' faith in their own abilities, to teach them how to distinguish what is good and what is bad, to help them learn how to think and act constructively, transform old wrong habits, i.e. the imprinted patterns of behaviour and conduct, into those promising for the future, or to revise former beliefs that did not serve the good of either themselves or the society. "An important element of strengthening mental well-being is the sense of agency, which means the ability to initiate some actions, solve problems and persistently pursue goals in a specific

situation. An ability to solve a problem brings satisfaction and increases the child's motivation to act and set new goals" (Syrek and Polok 2023, 58).

MOW centres help the charges to discover and strengthen their own potential and interests through participation in various types of sections. This in turn allows parents to start perceiving their children as young people showing some potential and accept them the way they are. It is crucial that parents, but also the children themselves, should distinguish absolute acceptance from the possible lack of approval for their actions, i.e., for their improper behaviour.



Infographic 2. Support for the child and parents/guardians with the help of the Youth Educational Centre (MOW); source: own study.

MOW centres undertake a number of activities intended in the first place to serve the children's well-being, to prepare them to responsibly fulfil various roles in society as well as to build their potential. In this way, they also support the family that, for various reasons, has not been able to cope with its tasks. It is up to

the family itself whether it will take advantage of the opportunity and accept help in the form of advice on how to deal with children, notice their strengths, and introduce changes in the current, dysfunctional, educational approach.

### 3. TASKS AND ACTIONS OF PARENTS DURING SUSPENDED PARENTING OF CHILDREN PLACED IN A YOUTH EDUCATIONAL CENTRE

Being a parent means being there for your child: physically and mentally. Creating a new life involves taking responsibility and offering constant attention to children's needs until they reach the age of majority, or in fact, maturity, which does not always coincide with the age of 18. There is no law or school for parents that would allow them to have children only after obtaining a certificate. Just as there is no single way of upbringing children, there are no strictly established norms of conduct. Parenting is a process governed by the experiences of people's own parents, grandparents, their observations, instincts, beliefs, assumptions as well as many other factors. Moreover, each period of children's development is different, each subsequent child in a family is different. John Bowlby wrote that in raising a child properly, it is good to be a good enough parent. According to this theory, an extremely important factor in the first stage of life are proper relationships with parents, especially the relationships of a child with the mother or guardian. The term "secure base" is also used in this context. Mothers provide such a secure base for their children. They are a safe haven where children can come if they need it and which allow them to discover the world with curiosity (Gawda and Czubak 2012, 37-54; Bettelheim 2005; Ainsworth 1989, 711; Bowlby 2020).

Upbringing styles are not the same as types of parenting. An upbringing style is a specific determinant of the quality of the family environment. Each family has its own unique style, which includes ways of expressing feelings, exercising control, showing mutual understanding, as well as attitudes towards the world (Zaborowski 1976, 57-58). The concept of type of parenting is much broader and superior to upbringing styles. Parenting types may, but do not have to include upbringing styles. Parenting may drift between styles or there may be no particular style at all, because if parenting is dysfunctional, it is difficult to talk generally about upbringing understood as intentional interactions aimed at achieving desired changes in the functioning of individuals and groups, especially minors.

There may be various signs that the system is failing and needs support or various indications regarding possible solutions to crises. Children's behaviour is one of the possible indicators regarding the functioning of the whole family, whether the needs of all members are met, what emotions are most often revealed, and which are suppressed, what are the communication patterns in the family members, what scope of responsibilities and privileges individual household members have, and what values they cultivate.

If one of the elements in the family system begins to fail, the whole family should be closely analysed in order to restore the state of stability or to be able to provide

special support to the person who requires such help, e.g., in cases of physical or mental abuse, addiction to psychoactive substances or certain activities, e.g. games, Internet (behavioural addiction). Families differ and their structure is often complicated and changes dynamically, e.g. patchwork families, living with the parent's common-law partner, parents living abroad, children from foster families, conflicted families, parents unable to solve their own problems. In families where a son or daughter is placed in a youth educational centre, the burden on the family system increases. In any case, placing a child in a MOW centre does not release parents from their duties and neither does it transfer the child's upbringing to the institution. The facility is responsible for the care, and to some extent for the education, resocialization and support of children. However, a youth educational centre is not a repair shop where children can be placed to be "fixed" or cured. The entire family of children placed in the centre, including the children themselves, experience many emotions, usually negative ones. During many years of consultations with parents and the centre charges it was possible to discover varying reactions: aggression, anger, disappointment, disbelief that the whole situation got out of control, mutual blaming for what happened, shame and sometimes great relief. This last emotion may concern both children who admit that they finally have a chance to escape from a family that did not understand them and where they experienced physical and mental abuse, while the parents may feel comforted that their child is finally safe (e.g., he or she will not get involved in fights or use drugs) and will continue compulsory education. Paradoxically, the separation of children from their parents, even the forced one, provides families with many opportunities to reflect and work on their own weaknesses, neglects or deficits. While visiting their children at the centre, parents themselves often admitted that they had not noticed certain behaviours of their children before.

The time and space distance between parents and children makes room for action. Below is the list of actions that can be taken by parents whose children stay in MOW centres, depending on the situation they are in:

- revise their current behaviours and activities: what worked and what did not work, e.g. spending time together, preparing and eating meals, revising the dos and don'ts,
- learn how to have honest, calm conversations with teenagers: what they expect from their parents and vice versa. Contrary to appearances, it is separation and longing that allow for a constructive exchange of opinions. This most often happens during visits and during leaves,
- taking care of themselves, e.g., by starting a therapy, doing medical tests, seeking help from specialists, looking for a job or changing jobs to a more favourable one in various respects,
- dealing with the feeling of guilt and remorse. The feeling of guilt can be very destructive if the act that causes this feeling of discomfort is not named and possibly corrected. Remorse is the mind's response to a mistake made or a bad deed done. Guilt is a thought pattern that is selected and perpetuated. We feel guilty when we condemn ourselves for something, when we believe that we are

responsible for some bad act. A person can be stuck in guilt for a long time, which is destructive and may obscure other perspectives (Eger 2021, 100).

- looking at one's immediate life: functioning in a relationship and among friends and revising these connections. Jesper Juul (2017) wrote that in a relationship, two adults are equally responsible for each other's relationships, but only adults are fully responsible for the quality of the relationship with the child,

- trying to take an honest look at oneself: the mistakes made in life in order to become more aware of changing the current habits and breaking out of the functioning patterns, if this may prove beneficial for the person and the child,

- looking at roles and tasks in the family, who takes care of whom, because it sometimes happens that the child actually took care of younger siblings and mother, e.g., who was depressed, fired from work, betrayed by her partner,

- reflecting on the milestones in one's life and the significance they had for a given person as well as for the functioning of the entire family,

- consulting one's concerns and proposals for changing the current ways of functioning between parents and children with specialists working in the youth care centre,

- authentic and long-term cooperation with people and institutions that are able to improve the functioning of the entire family.

Sometimes a small change in behaviour, taking an initiative, correcting one's stereotypes of behaviour may mean a lot, because it may be the beginning of the path to self-understanding and to understanding one's child which may lead to improving the situation of the family. The sense of agency builds self-esteem.

## CONCLUSIONS. SUGGESTIONS REGARDING THE SYSTEM OF RESOCIALIZATION OF MINORS AND TIPS FOR PRACTITIONERS

The aim of the article was to present the importance of suspended parenting in the case of a minor's stay in a youth educational centre during the process of resocialization. Legally, the family may still have full parental rights, but physical and mental separation has its consequences, both positive and negative. The negative ones include difficulties in adapting to the new environment of the facility, rebellion, low mood, outbursts of aggression, refusal to accept the new rules, etc. The positive impacts include developing consciousness, fulfilment of school obligations, taking responsibility for one's own actions, learning consequence, discovering one's potential, correcting destructive behaviours and relations, functioning without psychoactive substances, taking care of one's health and well-being, the possibility of spending free time in a variety of ways, appreciating the efforts of parents or noticing their care and upbringing mistakes.

The effectiveness of youth educational centres in the process of resocialization of minors depends on many factors: the centres themselves, the atmosphere there, specialists, the children under their care who are burdened with various, often traumatic, experiences, as well as the parents of these minors.

1. From a statistical point of view, tendency to show risky behaviours in the case of teenagers is the highest in their entire life during adolescence, because it is an integral part of the maturation process. It is then that young people learn skills they will need in adult their adult life, they learn how to satisfy the need for experiences, crossing and testing boundaries. This is a kind of developmental norm as long as it does not get out of control, threaten the health and life of the teenager or other people, or grossly violate the norms of social functioning. However, the question arises: How to assess this thin border between the acceptable and the unacceptable, this crossing of the line beyond which a probation officer or an educational centre come into play? The way the entire family functions and responds to various types of situations is crucial for the proper development of minors.

2. The system of supporting minors does not work because it has gaps, e.g., after charges leave the centre, their future fates are not monitored nor is the fulfilment of parental duties checked, especially in the case of minors. The current systemic solutions are criticized by many specialists, pointing to social rehabilitation idiosyncrasies. Laws or regulations, fail to take into account the voices of directors and employees directly related to social rehabilitation centres, facilities supporting the development of children and youth, and scientists basing their knowledge on research (Konopczyński 2022).

3. The need for systemic solutions involving the participation of the entire family in social rehabilitation, i.e., active participation of parents in the resocialization process should not be voluntary but obligatory. During a minor's stay in a MOW-type centre, his or her family members should, for example, be obligated to participate in systemic therapy, support groups, training depending on the needs. In order to control the implementation of an educational measure in the form of placing a minor in a youth educational centre, the judge of the family court or the probation officer supervising the implementation of this measure may apply to the school attended by the minor to provide information on fulfilling by the minor's parents or guardian(s) the obligations imposed on them. In fact, this regulation is a dead letter that is not effective in practice to support the social rehabilitation of children.

4. Cooperation with parents during a minor's stay in a youth educational centre may be difficult or non-existent, e.g., due to the large distance from the facility where the child has been placed. Moreover, some parents believe that the child or partner is entirely responsible for the situation, and this is a case of shifting responsibility.

The article touches on the possibilities and limitations of helping children staying in youth educational centres and their families. At the same time, it draws attention to one more added value related with the content of this article. Dissatisfaction and frustration of children and teenagers provides very important information for adults, especially those responsible for supporting them and correcting their behaviour, including resocialization. If something hurts, we should first look for the causes and possible remedies, rather than inflict punishment.

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## Aiding and Abetting in Suicide Among Children and Adolescents

### Namowa lub udzielenie pomocy do samobójstwa wśród dzieci i młodzieży

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**Abstract:** An increasing number of children and young people are committing suicide. Very often this occurs as a result of persuasion or with the provision of aid by peers. The purpose of this article is to introduce and explain the most important issues related to the offence under Article 151 of the Criminal Code. The perpetrator of the criminal act in question leads another person to take his or her own life. At the same time, it is not necessary for death to occur. The mere taking of actions directly aimed at suicide is sufficient.

Persuasion involves inducing another person to take his or her own life. The persuasion should be explicit in oral or written form. Providing assistance, on the other hand, may consist of providing a measure, giving advice or guidance.

**Keywords:** suicide, persuasion, providing aid, young people

**Abstrakt:** Coraz więcej dzieci i młodzieży popełnia samobójstwo. Bardzo często dochodzi do tego na skutek namowy lub przy udzieleniu pomocy przez rówieśników. Celem artykułu jest przybliżenie i wyjaśnienie najważniejszych zagadnień związanych z przestępstwem, o którym mowa w art. 151 kodeksu karnego. Sprawca czynu zabronionego omawianego przestępstwa doprowadza drugą osobę do targnięcia się na swoje życie. Przy czym nie jest konieczne, aby nastąpiła śmierć. Wystarczy samo podjęcie działań bezpośrednio zmierzających do samobójstwa. Namowa polega na nakłanianiu innej osoby do targnięcia się na własne życie. Namowa powinna być wyraźna w formie ustnej lub pisemnej. Natomiast udzielenie pomocy może polegać na udostępnieniu środka, udzieleniu rady lub wskazówki.

**Słowa kluczowe:** samobójstwo, namowa, udzielenie pomocy, młodzież



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## INTRODUCTION

This article is aimed at providing a synthetic account of the criminal offence of leading another person to take his or her own life by means of persuasion or aiding. The offence is typified in Article 151 of the Criminal Code, as one of the offences against life and health. Suicide is a huge social and legal issue. According to statistics from the World Health Organisation, more than 700,000 people around the world take their own lives every year. Communications presented by the WHO state that every 40 seconds someone commits suicide, while every three seconds someone attempts suicide. Furthermore, WHO data demonstrates that suicide is the fourth most common cause of death among 15-29-year-olds (World Health Organisation 2023). According to statistics from the National Police Headquarters, the number of people involved in suicides in Poland between 2017 and 2022 is steadily increasing (from 11139 – 2017 to 14520 – 2022) (National Police Headquarters 2023). The reasons for committing suicide are varied, often resulting from mental illness and disorders. Other factors that influence the decision to commit suicide include occupational problems, lack of acceptance from the environment, lack of life prospects. Police statistics also indicate that the greatest increase and percentage of suicide attacks is among children and young people. For example: 1) for the 7-12 age group, the number of people involved in suicides in 2017 was 28, while in 2022 it was 85; 2) for the 13-18 age group, the number of people involved in suicide attacks in 2017 was 702, while in 2022 it was 2008; 3) for the 19-24 age group, the number of people involved in suicide in 2017 was 1143, while in 2022 it was 1699; 4) for the 50-54 age group, the number of people involved in suicides in 2017 was 796, while in 2022 it was 893; 5) for the 60-64 age group, the number of people involved in suicides in 2017 was 759, while in 2022 it was 767.

This article, which provides only a brief characterisation of the crime, is also intended to highlight the wider social problem of influencing and interfering in the lives of others. Nowadays, especially among young people, we can see how much influence peers have on their life. Unfortunately, the environment often has a destructive influence. Sometimes all it takes is one word or so-called “friendly advice” for a young person to decide to commit suicide. Therefore, in order to prevent the commission of an offence under Article 151 of the Criminal Code, particularly among young people, it would be advisable to provide information about it in various forms not only to avoid possible criminal responsibility, but also to prevent such situations from occurring at all.

The last major amendment to the Criminal Code, despite the introduction of a new criminal policy consisting, in particular, of an increase in the threat of punishment for perpetrators of offences against life and health, did not include a change in the criminal sanction of the offence under Article 151. Increasing the penalty imposed on the perpetrator who, by his or her behaviour, causes a person to take his or her own life, could have the effect of reducing the discussed crime and protecting the important social value of human life and health.

First of all, it is worth noting that suicide does not constitute a crime under Polish criminal law. It cannot be considered as granting the right to commit suicide

or as legal neutrality regarding such behaviour. Nevertheless, the legislator did not establish punishment for making an attempt against one's own life. The question has to be asked: why, then, if suicide itself does not constitute an act punishable by law, does the legislator prohibit third parties from interacting with persons committing suicide? Why did the legislator introduce a *sui generis* offence and impose a punishment for complicity in suicide?

## 1. SUBJECT OF PROTECTION

The subject of protection in the case of the crime in question is human life, which is a supreme and priceless value. According to A. Zoll, this regulation protects life as a value constituting a social good and thus which is not at the free disposal of the holder of this good. The individual right to life does not fully explain the justification for the protection of life. However, a highly important aspect of such protection is the value of life as a social good, not just one which belongs individually to a person. Therefore, the possessor of this good does not have the right to dispose of it freely (Zoll 2017, 4). Bearing in mind the author's arguments above, it should be emphasised that the perpetrator will be liable for the offence under Article 151 of the Criminal Code, despite the fact that the suicide will not lead to deprivation of life. Yet, it is enough to simply take one's life which is already a contradiction to the order to protect every human life. It should be emphasised that even if suicide is not a crime as such under Polish criminal law, it does not mean that a person has the right to take his/her own life, as such an act is in breach of a constitutional norm. According to Article 38 of the Constitution of Poland: "The Republic of Poland shall ensure legal protection of the life of every human being." J. Giezek, on the other hand, further points out that, in addition, freedom from exerting a destructive influence on the way a person disposes of his or her life will also be subject of protection (Giezek 2021, 3).

In the doctrine, one can also encounter the view that Article 151 of the Criminal Code serves the purpose of protecting potential suicide victims from the unwanted and harmful influence of third parties. This is supported by the location of Article 151 in the chapter of offences against life and health. Accordingly, complicity in suicide (aiding and persuasion) should be regarded as a special kind of attempt against another person's life. As P. Konieczniak points out, "The criminalisation of assisted suicide can be justified by the desire to remove third parties from influencing the suicide rather than by condemning suicide itself. The prohibition on supporting another in suicide is thus simply intended to make people not support others in suicide (...). And why do we not want suicide to be influenced by third parties? This is because the suicidal person – rationally or not – makes and executes a decision of his or her own on a matter that is fundamental to him or her in life. His/her intentions are clear: for reasons he/she subjectively considers important (he/she may be wrong at most), he/she wants to stop living. The aider's intentions can be most varied. The perpetrator himself/herself cannot abuse suicide; the presence of an aide can potentially lead to abuse" (Konieczniak 1999, 75). So, following the above

arguments, it can be assumed that the prohibition of soliciting and assisting suicide is aimed at preventing abuse, i.e., situations where a person who is complicit in the suicide of another person, does so for very low motives, in order to harm that person and his family or to gain a material benefit from his/her death.

## 2. PERPETRATOR

Under Article 151 of the Criminal Code, the perpetrator of an act which involves persuasion or aiding in the form of action, can be any person performing such an act. To that extent, it will therefore be a *delicta communia*. On the other hand, if assistance is given by way of omission, it will be an individual offence. This is because then the criminal offense can be committed only by the person who has a legal special duty to prevent the effect of another person from taking his/her own life (Karnat 2020, 3).

## 3. VICTIM

The causative act consists of leading a person to take his/her own life by persuasion or assistance. It might therefore appear that we are dealing here with incitement and accessory to an offence. Nothing could be further from the truth, the terms are not the same. The offence under Article 151 of the Criminal Code boils down to the perpetrator's behaviour in driving a person to suicide, which does not actually constitute a criminal act in itself. Therefore, the provisions of the general part of the Criminal Code regarding the criminal liability of the abettor and the aider would not work in this case (Giezek 2021, 6).

Persuasion consists of inducing another person to take his or her own life. Different views can be found in the doctrine on the interpretation of the term "persuasion". Some authors assume that persuasion referred to in Article 151 of the Criminal Code is narrower in scope than the inducement that characterises abetting in Article 18 § 2 of the Criminal Code. According to these authors, persuasion to suicide is limited to verbal influence only. Outside the scope of the meaning of this signifier are any non-verbal encouragements to take his or her own life, e.g., gestures (Daszkiewicz 2000, 250-251; Kokot 2021, 23). However, one has to agree with a slightly broader view of persuasion in verbal form, but also in written form. The words do not necessarily have to be spoken verbally, but they can be expressed in the form of a letter, email or text message. Written inducement can be equated with a verbal form of direct inducement. The authors rightly assume that a mere gesture cannot constitute an inducement to suicide, except in sign language (Karnat 2020, 7). Inducement can therefore be a suggestion, advice, proposal, request or recommendation. The Inducement should be expressed in a clear and unambiguous manner (Kaszowicz 2018, 53). Its form and content must not raise any doubts about the perpetrator's intentions. In order to accept the realisation of the sign of persuasion to suicide, it is not sufficient to influence the victim by means of emotional manipulation aimed at creating a state of deep depression, breakdown or despair, and consequently "suicidal thoughts". If such behaviour takes the form of

bullying resulting in the victim's life-threatening behaviour, liability under Article 207 § 3 of the Criminal Code may come into play (Kokot 2021, 26).

However, in the literature, one can also encounter a view that the concept of persuasion from Article 151 of the Criminal Code is in its meaning the same as the concept of inducement from Article 18 § 2 of the Criminal Code (Wąsek 1982, 60-61; Kosonoga-Zygmunt 2015, 50; Zoll 2017, 6). Magdalena Budyn-Kulik clearly advocates a broader meaning of persuasion and argues that persuasion of another person can be not only verbal, but also implicit, such as a gesture or any other action that may influence the decision to attempt suicide (Budyn-Kulik 2022, 3). The concept of persuasion in Article 151 of the Criminal Code is still differently interpreted by Leon Tyszkiewicz, who argues that, unlike inducement, it is a less intense form of abetting. Tyszkiewicz contends that this excludes threat, the use of which in relation to bringing a person to suicide should be considered as commission or attempted murder (Tyszkiewicz 2016, 3). There is no doubt that persuasion within the meaning of Article 151 of the Criminal Code may take the form of a request, suggestion, advice, proposal, recommendation. What is questionable is the classification of behaviour involving blackmail, extortion or giving orders. Will we then be dealing with inducement to suicide or will it be directing the commission of a prohibited act? Accepting the latter solution, however, would be difficult to agree with, due to the fact that, after all, on the part of the executor (person performing suicide) who has taken his/her own life, we are not dealing with a criminal act (Giezek 2021, 8).

Inducement consists in persuading another person to take his or her own life, i.e., by influencing his or her psyche, intellectual and emotional spheres in such a way as to induce an intention to commit suicide. It leaves no doubt that persuasion will occur when the persuaded person did not have the intention to take his or her own life at all and only began to have such an intention as a result of the perpetrator's actions. Accordingly, in this situation, the perpetrator's behaviour was inspirational to the victim. In the doctrine, however, there is no unanimous position on whether it will be persuasion within the meaning of Article 151 of the Criminal Code if the persuaded person only considered the possibility of suicide but hesitated and decided to take his/her life as a result of persuasion by the perpetrator. According to some authors, reaffirming someone's suicidal intention will also constitute persuasion. Persuasion must be directed at a specific, individualised person, even if the perpetrator will not know the identity of the would-be suicide (Wąsek 1982, 61; Karnat 2020, 7).

In a judgment, the Appeal Court in Katowice noted and distinguished between abetting murder and inducement to suicide. According to the Court: "The intention and *modus operandi* of the perpetrator instigating the murder of the victim is different, and different actions accompany inducement to commit suicide, already aimed directly at the person who would deprive himself/herself of life. In the first case, two separate offences would be committed, remaining in real concurrence with each other, and not one act qualified cumulatively under Article 148 § 1 KK and Article 151 KK in connection with Article 11 § 2 KK – as in the second case." (Judgment of the Appeal Court in Katowice 2013, II AKa 279/13).

Providing assistance, on the other hand, may consist of providing a measure or tool, advice or guidance. It formally corresponds to the elements of accessory in Article 18 § 3 of the Criminal Code. This characteristic may also be exhausted by forbearance, i.e., by not preventing the suicide. In this case, the perpetrator can only be the guarantor of the prevention of the consequence. The causative act of providing assistance may precede the victim's attempt against his/her own life but may also be undertaken simultaneously with the suicide attempt on his/her own life and continue until the moment of death. In fact, for the existence of the offence in question, it is irrelevant whether the person committing suicide is aware that they are being aided (Karnat 2020, 8).

As the Court of Appeal in Gdansk rightly noted: "A person who is persuaded or aided to take his/her own life must, due to his/her mental characteristics, be able to recognise fully the meaning of the act and to direct his/her conduct. Lacking such recognition (a child, a mentally disabled person), the perpetrator's act may be considered an offence under Article 148 of the Criminal Code." (Judgment of the Court of Appeal in Gdańsk 2009, II AKa 276/09).

The offence of inciting and aiding suicide is a substantive crime. Therefore, the effect required for its accomplishment is to cause a person to take his or her own life. However, it is not necessary that the death of the victim takes place. The offence under Article 151 of the Criminal Code is committed already at the stage of taking action directly aimed at suicide. In the event that a person who has been persuaded or aided to commit suicide does not attempt suicide, the perpetrator is liable for making the attempt (Giezek 2021, 11-12).

#### 4. PERPETRATOR

The offence in question can only be committed intentionally. However, given that the offence involves the attempt to take one's own life through inducement or assistance, the form of intent will vary. In the case where a suicide attempt occurs as a result of persuasion of another person, we can only speak of direct intent. This is because one cannot persuade "someone to do something" while not wanting the person to do it. In contrast, in the case of providing aid, this offence can be committed with both direct and conceivable intent (Zoll 2017, 14; Giezek 2021, 13).

#### 5. CRIMINAL SANCTION

The offence under Article 151 of the Criminal Code is a misdemeanour punishable by imprisonment from three months to five years. The legislator did not provide for a possible exceptional mitigation or waiver of punishment for a perpetrator who, for example, provides aid towards suicide at the request of the victim and under the influence of compassion for the victim due to being in a terminal state and suffering. Such a possibility is provided for under Article 150 § 2 of the Criminal Code. Therefore, the question arises whether, in imposing

a criminal sanction on the perpetrator, in the case of an offence under Article 151, the court could possibly make use of the possibility referred to in Article 37a of the Criminal Code (i.e., impose, instead of imprisonment, a restriction of liberty sentence or a fine) (Konarska-Wrzonek 2020, 9). Article 19(2) of the Criminal Code does not apply to the punishment of a person aiding to suicide, and – for both perpetrating forms provided for in Article 151 – Article 22 of the Criminal Code does not apply. On the other hand, in the case of an attempt to commit an offence under Article 151, the regulations relating to either abandoning the attempt or preventing the effect apply, in accordance with Article 15 of the Criminal Code (Królikowski 2023, 21).

On the basis of Article 40(2) of the Criminal Code, when the leading to suicide was caused by a motivation deserving particular condemnation and the perpetrator has been given a sentence of imprisonment of not less than three years, a punitive measure of deprivation of public rights may be imposed. The offence in question is prosecuted *ex officio*.

## CONCLUSION

The offence in question is not easy to identify. However, the criminal sanction should act as a repellent to potential perpetrators. It would therefore be advisable to increase the penalty and punitive measures. Furthermore, it is worth considering whether, in view of the significant and very dynamic development of the Web, to introduce a possible amendment to Article 151 of the Criminal Code covering new forms of persuasion or aiding suicide via the Internet (Gawliński and Zero 2021, 129). Nowadays, young people and even children are experiencing more and more mental health problems. Numerous mental disorders result in just a “little spark” in the form of even a small and “seemingly innocent” persuasion for a person, to make an attempt against his or her own life. Young people in particular are susceptible to the suggestions of others. Therefore, it may be protective against the increasing number of suicide attempts to increase criminal liability against those who, by persuasions or accessory, lead to suicide.

The questions presented in the introduction have been addressed in the above discussion. Finally, it is worth reiterating that the legislator has not provided for punishment for suicides, which it does not condemn. Nonetheless, it is forbidden for third parties to be complicit in the suicide. This is due, for example, to the possibly reprehensible motives of those who aid and abet suicide. A person who persuades or provides aid does not want to be held responsible for the criminal offence of murder, yet he or she expects that the person will himself or herself cause his or her own death and that the perpetrator will ultimately benefit from it. Despite the fact that this is one of the criminal offences against life and health and that, according to statistics, suicide attempts are plentiful, the case law in this area is not sufficiently extensive.

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## Christian Understanding of Patriotism in Selected Child and Youth Theatre Plays

### Chrześcijańska wizja patriotyzmu w wybranych spektaklach dla dzieci i młodzieży

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**Abstract:** Patriotic upbringing in the spirit of Christian faith is an important factor influencing the development of children and teenagers. It emphasizes the importance of tradition, which holds space for historical figures who become role models. In this process, theatre activities prepared by youngsters and addressed to their peers play a major role. Among numerous stage plays of questionable quality, appears a growing number of groups who approach this task with an increasing level of maturity, especially in recent years. They operate within biotheatre and create biogramas (often while being unaware of it). The historical figures mentioned in this article and brought to life by a few particular theatre groups exemplify the direction theatre initiatives for young audiences are heading towards.

**Keywords:** Youth theater, amateur theater, biograma, biotheatre, patriotism, education

**Abstrakt:** Wychowanie do patriotyzmu w duchu chrześcijańskim jest istotnym elementem rozwoju dzieci i młodzieży. Skupia się ono na ukazaniu istotnej roli, jaką spełnia tradycja, w której wyjątkowe postaci mogą być wzorem do naśladowania. Ważną rolę w tym procesie pełnią różne aktywności teatralne, przygotowywane przez młodych i skierowane do ich rówieśników. Wśród wielu bardzo słabych przedstawień teatralnych dostrzec można w ostatnich latach pojawiające się środowiska, które w coraz bardziej świadomy sposób podchodzą do tego zadania. Działając na polu bioteatru, stwarzają (często będąc tego nieświadomymi) tzw. „biogramaty”. Zaprezentowane w artykule postaci ukazane przez wybrane zespoły teatralne są przykładem ukazującym kierunek rozwoju tej części działań artystycznych skierowanych do dzieci i młodzieży.

**Słowa kluczowe:** teatr amatorski, teatr młodzieżowy, biogramat, bioteatr, patriotyzm, wychowanie



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## INTRODUCTION

The subject of patriotism, which appears in theatre plays addressed to young audiences focuses mainly on didacticism and morality. The goal of such plays is not only to introduce the audience to compelling historical events and figures, but also to shape proper attitudes towards life. Traditional understanding of patriotism which emerged at the time Poland was not being considered a sovereign country, may be defined as devotion to one's homeland, as well as respect and admiration of it. Such outlook encourages sacrifice and readiness to defend the nation's independence. Youngsters brought up with the spirit of patriotism in mind tend to prioritize their country over their personal gain. Moreover, they are ready to work for the country's well-being and sacrifice their health or even life for it, if necessary.

According to Polish Church, the Christian understanding of patriotism emphasizes the importance of attachment to and concern for one's motherland, which is built upon several historically shaped characteristics such as: statehood, language, nation, culture and tradition, as well as the legacy of separate regions of the country and their local specificity (Konferencja Episkopatu Polski 1972).

Among collectives such as family, school, religious community or various non-governmental organizations, which introduce younger generations to patriotism, a vital role in creating and shaping cultural environments is played by activists.

The issue of globalization tasks them with teaching next generations of Poles how dramatic our history has been, as well as with emphasizing the beauty of Polish lands and the uniqueness of Polish literature, music, art, film or theatre. Rapid societal and technological changes call for a diligent search for proper language and collaboration space between high and mass culture, where vast traditionalism of Polish customs and invaluable experiences of past generations can interact with the current experiences, hopes and worries of generations of the present (Konferencja Episkopatu Polski 1972, 11).

Lately, the topic of patriotism has been raised in academic discourse, however, the interpretations of this issue and the methods of teaching about it tend to focus on propagating certain opinions and forming political/societal agendas rather than highlighting the importance of homeland in the nation's history or personal histories of individuals. Those interpretations concentrate on identifying the wrongs of one's special relationship with their country and precipitous understanding of such connection by describing patriotism as a chauvinistic or nationalistic movement. The circles which embrace such an approach are attempting to label Poles as hostile towards different nations, which allegedly do not accept their right of sovereignty and independence. They draw attention to Poles' mistakes and incorrect comprehension of history. Moreover, they push for severing ties with the past in order to build a future for the contemporary youth.

There do exist certain theatre communities, be that adolescent or those performing for adolescent audience, which occasionally discuss the subject of traditionally understood patriotism. Mostly, however, their works are not of the best

quality as regards both their form and subject matter. Their choices often allude to socialist realism without proper understanding of it. Lines recited in a barely acceptable way, static presentations or archaic methods of performing fail to reach contemporary viewers. A fatigued onlooker not only ignores what is being presented to them, but also associates such form with unrealistic, vapid spectacle, detached from reality.

Nevertheless, among the myriad of badly told stories, another kind of plays is slowly emerging, namely, plays which challenge the widespread belief that they are mediocre and ineffective. These theatrical pieces attempt to discuss the events in Polish history in an appealing manner and introduce the audience to remarkable historical figures which, in turn, may encourage viewers to engage in reflection. Such an approach is often presented by those who adhere to the Christian concept of upbringing. Their works exemplify biographical drama, or *biograma*, a movement in Polish dramatic literature whose popularity has grown in the last several decades.

## 1. REMEMBERED BIOGRAPHIES

The usage of biographies in theatre has recently caused the emergence of artistic movements such as biographical theatre (*biotheatre*) and biographical drama (*biograma*). They are not easy to classify, however, they may be described by recurrent sources of inspiration. Those phenomena, although popular during various periods of Polish dramaturgy, have been meticulously analysed only recently. Several valuable elaborations in which the subject was addressed attempted to characterize *biograma* as a new dramatic form which arose due to various modifications and amalgamations of older literary genres.

In the area of the latest, widely varied practices of writing for theatre, a particular interest may be observed in biography as an artistic expression genre as well as an inspiration for screenplays and theatre plays. Theatrical and dramaturgical projects inspired by the lives of famous individuals or, in broad terms, literary and stage representations of particular individuals' lives, very often appear in modern works of the Polish theatre and, when it comes to individual performance techniques, they are quite diverse – which has been enough to invent separate terminology for them in the field of critical and academic commentary (Popczyk-Szczęśna 2020, 59).

In the last few decades, it can be observed that theatre writers exhibit an increasing interest in biographies. This interest is manifested in the emergence of various dramaturgical works based on the lives of chosen individuals in the form of *biograma* on stage. However, in modern theatre, biography is often treated as a tool for exploring alternative realities. Such an application helps to present history in an unconventional manner and allows artists to highlight historical details which for various reasons have not yet been addressed. Among the playwrights and directors who employ this form of narration are: Wiktor Rubin, Paweł Demirski, Krystian Lupa, Jerzy Jarocki, Remigiusz Brzyk and Michał Zadara.

*Biotheatre* and *biograma* go beyond the limits of classic biography and separate themselves from its traditional patterns of presentation. In modern

theatre biography is neither the main part of stage narration, nor a central point impacting the plot. It is merely regarded as a starting point and an opportunity to highlight problems minimized and silenced in the past. And nowadays, artists desire the freedom to speak about them confidently and courageously.

With that in mind, the elements of biograma in theatre developing in Christian communities and aimed at children as well as adolescents and teenagers assume a different role. Playwrights, who have familiarized themselves with details of certain personas' lives attempt to convey them on stage and present them to young audience members in a reliable manner. The choice of stories told in this process is not arbitrary. Most often, the characters are known to the youngsters, are somewhat connected to them or have the capacity to become their role models. These works are written for the sake of neither reckoning with history, nor attempting to use specific biographies as vehicles for directors' opinions. In this regard the plays are slightly conservative and focus on the well-known, but sometimes forgotten facts as well as introduce viewers to the profiles of certain occasionality.

## 2. ROLE MODELS IN WOJCIECH KUŁAK'S "TUTAJ JEST DOBRZE"

Nurturing patriotic values begins in families, however, during the process of upbringing, schools come to play a major role in it. That process is a cycle of various activities which ought to be perpetual and continuously actualized. In this process

the witnessing of life, in which such values find their place, carries notable significance. Respecting one's homeland and developing a personal sense of patriotism becomes a link with other nations as well as uplifts the spirit of friendship and cooperation in the name of personal dignity, dignity of others and common good. Patriotic principles unite other values such as love, freedom, responsibility, justice, solidarity, family, honour, loyalty, labour, respect and courtesy (Drzeżdżon 2013, 79).

One of the more interesting examples of schools which emphasizes the importance of shaping mature moral attitudes, including those related to patriotism, is the St. John Bosco's Salesian School Complex in Łódź. There, a prolific theatre group, *Teatr BezNazwy*<sup>1</sup> ("Theatre Without A Name") has operated since 2005. Its artistic activity plays an important role in nurturing patriotism. Owing to such artistic initiative, children and teenagers gain understanding of the world, develop their passions, interests and, through studying/performing scenes based on biographies of numerous figures, learn about their histories, which, in turn, helps them raise their national awareness. Since the group's inception, over five hundred students have participated in its activities, and fruits of their labour in the form of plays can be admired by countless young audience members. It was this group which performed a play created by a Salesian, Wojciech Kułak, titled *Tutaj*

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<sup>1</sup> Further details on the group's history and its educational significance may be found in Lach 2020, 134-145.

*Jest Dobrze*<sup>2</sup> ("It is great here"). The work tells a story about a group of juvenile boys from Poznań during World War II. The screenplay, built upon various biographical documents of young people from the city, is a tale of youth, joy, friendship, and immense courage. Such reports prove to be greatly inspiring to young spectators in the present day, just as they were at the time of World War II. The characters: Czesław Józwiak, Jarogniew Wojciechowski, Edward Kaźmierski, Franciszek Kęsy and Edward Klinik – known as "the Poznań Five" – experience the war as young students of the Salesian oratory in Wroniecka street in Poznań. Their story is often adapted to theatre plays in order to encourage self-reflection and introduce the audience members, especially the young ones, to new role models. The seventy fifth anniversary of the heroic boys' deaths was the catalyst for the play to be created.

The narration contains the young boys' story arcs developing around certain locations where war prisoners were detained. Wronki, Berlin, Zwickau and Drezno are associated with subsequent stages of Gestapo investigation and interrogation of captives. There, the main characters mature rather quickly and alter their way of thinking. They undergo spiritual metamorphosis akin to the Mysteries of The Rosary which describe the events in the Passion of Christ and aid the characters in their suffering from the hands of the homeland's enemy. What the boys had experienced was possible to be described in a screenplay thanks to the authentic letters sent to their loved ones from prison. The letters, surviving in good condition until today, are important pieces of evidence, which visualize the horrors of those events.

My dearest Liduś! I have enjoyed the holidays like never before. I even sang carols, though only for a short while. The guards did not like it. As punishment, I had to stand still. Throughout the entire Christmas day, I stood in water reaching my waist. But I still felt Baby Jesus being born. (...) My dearest parents, you ask me if the joy I'm writing to you with is dishonest. Not at all! I am not falsely joyful or falsely sad. Whenever I feel worried, or pleased, it is real and honest. I'm learning to suffer with a smile on my face. (...). My lovely sister! Today, after having experienced many lessons about life, I look at the world differently. Prison changes a person. (...) My beloved! I am sending you all some of my mementos. Mainly, this album. It is not nice-looking, but to me it is very valuable (*Tutaj jest dobrze*. BezNazwy Theatre. Screenplay: Wojciech Kułak, pp. 10-11).

These well-preserved letters not only describe real-life events, but also allow modern audience to peek into the souls of the boys from Poznań. Sincere documents written by the youngsters have become a guiding light and an incredible tool aiding in the upbringing of a current teen in the spirit of patriotism (Musielak 2017; Skibilska 2022). Presented as a stage play and performed by actors in an age range similar to the characters', they are crucial to shaping and promoting the notion of loving one's homeland.

Such attitudes, however, cannot be learned from textbooks. Discovering and incorporating them into one's life may happen only when the intellectual approach is

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<sup>2</sup> *Tutaj jest dobrze*. BezNazwy Theatre. Screenplay: Wojciech Kułak. Direction: Sylwia Gajewska. Premiered: May 7, 2017. Łódź.

being enriched with real experiences and feelings. Hence, in school systems, recounts of past events play a major role, especially when told by the current students' peers, who had treated the subject of admiration for homeland as a foundation for personal growth – not only intellectual and theoretical, but also confirmed by their own, often tragic choices. If the concept of patriotism is assumed to stand for a collection of attitudes with national identity at their core, then the example of five young men from Poznań, tortured and murdered by Nazis, becomes essential in the process of perfecting and determining correct civil attitudes.

Wojciech Kułak's stage play has been performed by the young theatre adepts in Łódź on numerous occasions, each time met with critical acclaim. Model behaviour of the teenage martyrs is still being promoted by various Salesian circles for educational and pastoral purposes all over Poland. New monographs, in-person meetings or theatre activities inspired by the lives of "the Poznań Five" appear to this day.

### 3. LITTLE HOMELANDS IN PAWEŁ OZGA'S "KSIĄDZ DOMINIK MAJ – KAPŁAN SERCA BOŻEGO"

The effectiveness of proper raising of children and teens strongly depends on education which ought to be accurate, diverse and responsive to modern requirements of educational institutions. However, it has to be noted that patriotic upbringing does not happen in societal isolation. Separately from the didactic process, family and family traditions, literature, mass media or religious education impact the sense of patriotism the most.

How a child's personality as well as its sense of personal, societal and national identity develop depend on which educational model is followed. With that in mind, before admiration for the history of one's country and nation can truly mature, the importance of a different measure should be noted, namely,

aiding a child in building a concept of "little homeland" by creating opportunities for new experiences in the nearest area. Such aiding is tailored to their psychophysical characteristics as well as their immediate comprehension capabilities. It stimulates their behaviour with eagerness to learn and openness to what is and who is new (Drzeżdżon 2013, 76).

The youth's identification with their local history and its heroes may develop with the help of educational paths which are being implemented in many communities and relate to cultural legacy of particular areas where the youth reaches adulthood. In practice, children and teens, in agreement with previously established goals, gain and broaden their knowledge about their region, people, customs and culture. Such a "little homeland," intertwined with family or local collectives, becomes dear to students, and strengthens their regional and national identity.

An example of a collective whose formal purpose revolves around educating minors is Happy Childhood Foundation,<sup>3</sup> which has operated in Lublin since

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<sup>3</sup> Happy Childhood Foundation – Fundacja Szczęśliwe Dzieciństwo.

1990. For more than three decades, the organisation has originated a variety of training schemes for children, adolescents and adults who work with youngsters. The founders developed a formative/educational program called Youth Academy to carefully guide the newest generation of Poles through their early years of life.

The program of Youth Academy is built upon three pillars: God, Honour and Homeland. Those fundamental values do not strictly pertain to ideals. Participants strive for incorporating them into their life by completing detailed programs of religious and societal formation initiatives as well as by honing their talents throughout the period of 12 semesters (6 years). Pupils' progress on the way to academic prowess is measured by obtaining Shells and Pearls, successively accumulated throughout the years and proudly displayed on a blue sash. What makes Youth Academy so valuable is the method of teaching which appeals to adolescents – youth theatre and television. TV programmes produced by teens promote important ideas and values. Theatre plays themed around faith and patriotism are also presented on stage. Parish Magazines are regularly published with great success. Additionally, evangelical gatherings are being hosted; they encourage prayer to Virgin Mary for fruitful education.<sup>4</sup>

One of the fundamental elements of shaping a young person is inspiring their passion for theatre. Under the wing of experienced instructors, the pupils of Youth Academy periodically put together new theatre productions, in which they discuss subjects relevant to their peers. In 2016 one of the groups created a play titled *Ksiądz Dominik Maj – Kapłan Serca Bożego*<sup>5</sup> (“Reverend Dominik Maj – the Preacher of God’s Heart”). The screenplay references focal points of his life and is based on a book by Rev. Jerzy Krawczyk (Krawczyk 2016). The publication contains a biography of the clergyman from Bychawa, interviews with witnesses of his activities, memories of him as well as numerous photos and images. It is an important document which authenticates the life of this charismatic priest. Even though 50 years have passed since his death, the memory of Rev. Maj is still alive, especially in the local community. He was a seemingly ordinary person, however, he had suffered in concentration camps during Communism. Rev. Dominik Maj is considered one of the Rays of Dachau. He died in Bychawa and is remembered as a saint.

To pay tribute to him on an anniversary of his death, young members of local theatre group decided to create a stage show about this remarkable cleric. The play was presented in the Culture Centre in Bychawa. On the opening night, pupils from Youth Academy performed alongside local priests, teachers, children and adults from parishes of St. John the Baptist and St. Francis as well as those from the parish of St. Francis of Assisi in Bychawa. The stage show is an example of biograma which presents a biography of a specific figure, who might be an individual unknown

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<sup>4</sup> The program and main objectives of Youth Academy are listed on its website: <https://akademiamlodziezowa.pl/> (access: July 12, 2023).

<sup>5</sup> *Ksiądz Dominik Maj – Kapłan Serca Bożego*, Screenplay and direction: Paweł Ozga, premiered: May 7, 2017, Youth Academy Theatre, Bychawa.

to the masses, yet particularly important to the local, little homeland. One may refer to him as a martyr, who had survived the great torment of concentration camps and surrendered himself to self-sacrifice and tirelessly worked for the well-being of others. This phrase represents the essence of his existence. Even today the gravestone of Rev. Maj at Bychawa's cemetery is surrounded with vigil lights; he is considered a saint by those who regularly ask for his intercession.

The play validates the memory of the clergyman who had devoted his life to fellow believers. This memory is still alive and confirms a claim even the smallest amount of effort may motivate local communities to take part in creative activities. The stage show could be considered a history lesson. It reminded the audience about Rev. Maj's qualities, the most important events from his life, including the stay at the concentration camp in Dachau, as well as his last will. It is also a different approach to his legacy; a moving spectacle experienced in the flesh by the audience members who might have never heard of him before and, owing to this theatre event, could be inspired to become better people.

Because of such initiatives, youngsters, while learning about astonishing tales of key figures in history, develop a personal connection with their local circles. Additionally, they promote amplified patriotic awareness, especially to their peers, by playing certain characters on stage. Youth Academy pupils, through their abundant artistic efforts, pursue the path of wisdom and responsibility for their country. Each semester at the Academy focuses on one collective: family, fatherland or the Church. Youngsters eagerly study those collectives and seek answers to questions such as: how to build adequate groups or how to be level-headed leaders. By researching their history, they define their individual position in modernity.

#### 4. EVANGELICAL MODEL IN BENEDYKTA KAROLINA BAUMANN'S "MIŁOŚĆ ZMARTWYCHWSTAŁA"

Christian formation of children and adolescents focuses on the axiological aspect of patriotism – awakening awareness of mature humanity, which does not fear following Christ. The pupils are presented with the truth about faith as a foundation of life and the truth about humans as beings created in God's image. As a result, children and teens sensitised to the basic Christian values become patriots for whom the principles such as: truth, love, mercy, courage, honour, generosity and respect of others' dignity become paramount. Therefore, a connection between spirituality and patriotism is not surprising.

In 2020, a theatre group called *Dziki Koty* ("Wild Cats") operating at the Bolesław I the Brave High School in Kłodzko created a musical inspired by the life of Bl. Julia Rodzińska, a Dominican sister and a martyr of the concentration camp in Stutthof. Owing to artistic initiatives of the director and author of the libretto, sister Benedykta Baumann, residents of Kłodzko and neighbouring villages had an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the story of a beatified sufferer through a play titled *Miłość*

*zmartwychwstała*<sup>6</sup> ("Love Resurrected"). The audience of the musical was mostly comprised of students who were taking part in school Lenten retreat. Later, the show was performed on several different occasions in front of a bigger, varied crowd. The absence of excessive set design, the presence of play of light as well as only essential props and costumes being used let the spectators focus on the story told by young actors and brought them back to the time Bl. Julia Rodzińska lived.

Difficult life of the Dominican sister, who was one of the 108 beatified Polish martyrs of World War II, became the focal point of the libretto, based on sister Benedykta's publication titled *Niebo w kolorze popiołu* ("Ash-coloured Sky") (Baumann 2020). It is a yet another example of biotheatre – a play derived from a biography of a particular figure. The first part of the musical presents little Stasia as an orphan, then recalls her time at the gymnasium, her monastic vocation and communal/educational initiatives in Vilnius during the interwar period. In the second part the audience witnesses the dramatic fate of Poles in Vilnius region after the outbreak of WWII. The third part visually transports spectators to the concentration camp in Stutthof, where sister Julia fulfilled her Dominican and Christian calling among tormented and hopeless prisoners as well as violent officers of coercive apparatus of the Nazis – until her untimely demise.

In the story of Bl. Julia Rodzińska, sister Benedykta noted her incredible resilience which had given mankind hope in a time when fear loomed large over the world. Despite the Coronavirus pandemic, which, after the premiere, prevented it from being performed for months, the play gained new depth after the end of its hiatus. The account of those specific events became a universal example of a self-aware person deciding for themselves, following their vocation and taking on a "sign of the times" role. Even though beatified sister Rodzińska never drew attention to her heritage, her subservience and devotion to morals she had been taught may inspire humility and dutifulness in others.

## CONCLUSION

In modern theatre, especially since at least the end of the twentieth century, increased popularity of biography may be observed. The vast majority of current dramaturgical and theatre projects utilize texts and screenplays inspired by biographical material. This trend, which focuses mostly on presenting the profiles of extraordinary historical figures is a suitable method of upbringing adolescents in the spirit of patriotism. Unfortunately, its interpretations vary.

The interest in biograma in contemporary theatre prioritizes rediscovering forgotten truths about humanity and revealing hidden details previously present in public discourse. It explores alternative realities which are simultaneously dependant on outstanding traits of biographies' main characters, and conditioned by how the stories of specific figures were told. Creators of the present day are

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<sup>6</sup> *Miłość zmartwychwstała*, direction and libretto: Benedykta Karolina Baumann, music: Przemysław Piechocki, premiered: March 9, 2020, Wild Cats Theatre, Kłodzko.

especially sensitive to the aforementioned aspect of biographies forged by only seemingly neutral, a priori rules. Therefore, the material which is used by them for their stage work is only a pretext – biography is a starting point, not a central aspect of stage narration. It slightly differs, however, when it comes to modern amateur theatre. For many theatre groups, focusing on biographies becomes an opportunity to present particular historical figures to the audience, which may encourage children and teens in particular, to reflect and emulate those characters.

This idea can be often seen in groups created for educational purposes. Schools, various foundations and associations, as well as religious communities frequently stress the importance of raising the youth in the spirit of patriotism. Previously mentioned collectives: the school in Łódź, Youth Academy in Lublin or the theatre from Kłodzko are only a few examples of initiatives in this field. Admittedly, a faulty formal approach, or incorrect patterns being followed (such as archaically structured commemorative plays) are often noticeable in many school theatres, however, their lively and sincere involvement in those projects cannot be overlooked. The subject of patriotism in stage shows created by those communities, despite not always being met with enthusiasm of critics, works well as an educational tool. It is beneficial to focus on further professional development of those groups as well as to recognise how much of an important role they play in advocating for maturing in the spirit of patriotism.

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## The War in Ukraine: Challenges for the Polish Education System

### Wojna na Ukrainie – wyzwania dla polskiego systemu edukacji

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**Abstract:** The article takes a closer look at the most relevant issues related to the sudden influx of refugees from Ukraine fleeing from the war to Poland. A significant part of them, according to Polish law, is of an age that is subject to compulsory education or schooling. In view of this, in a short period of time, almost 200 thousand pupils from Ukraine were placed in the units of the Polish education system. The purpose of this article is to present the scale of the problem – statistical data on pupils who are refugees, citizens of Ukraine, the measures taken by the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Ministry of Education and Science that were necessary to meet the considerable challenges, primarily the legal regulations and financial resources allocated from the state budget to provide these measures. According to the reported data, almost 198.3 thousand children and pupils who have arrived from Ukraine since 24 February 2022 (currently more than 182 thousand) are listed in the units of the Polish education system (in pre-school education, primary and secondary schools). Children and pupils – refugees from Ukraine can be found in all 16 provinces, all across Poland, although almost 40% are concentrated in provincial cities, with the highest number in Warsaw – 17 thousand and about 8 thousand in Wrocław and Kraków each. Faced with this situation, a number of ad hoc systemic changes have been introduced and financial resources of around PLN 3 billion have been allocated from the state budget. The war in Ukraine and the exodus caused by it has become a considerable challenge for the Polish education system. Poland, despite the lack of external financial assistance (including from the European Union), opened the doors of its borders, homes and schools from the first days of this military conflict, providing the necessary support to refugees and introducing the necessary systemic changes to enable the absorption of such a large number of children and young people, in a short period of time, in the middle of the school year.

**Keywords:** war in Ukraine, education of Ukrainians in Poland, education/learning, war refugees, refugee children, Polish education system, educational assistance for war refugees



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**Abstrakt:** Artykuł przybliża najistotniejsze kwestie związane z gwałtownym napływem do Polski uchodźców przed wojną z Ukrainy. Znaczna ich część, zgodnie z polskim prawem, jest w wieku podlegającym obowiązkowi szkolnemu lub obowiązkowi nauki. Wobec tego, w krótkim czasie w jednostkach polskiego systemu oświaty znalazło się niemal 200 tysięcy uczniów z Ukrainy. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przybliżenie skali problemu – danych statystycznych dotyczących uczniów będących uchodźcami, obywatelami Ukrainy, podjętych przez Rząd Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej i Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki działań koniecznych dla sprostania niemałym wyzwaniom, przede wszystkim uregulowań prawnych i środków finansowych przeznaczonych z budżetu państwa na zapewnienie tych działań.

Wg raportowanych danych, w jednostkach polskiego systemu oświaty (w wychowaniu przedszkolnym, szkołach podstawowych i ponadpodstawowych) wykazano niemal 198,3 tys. dzieci i uczniów, którzy przybyli z Ukrainy od 24.02.2022 r. (aktualnie ponad 182 tys.). Dzieci i uczniowie – uchodźcy z Ukrainy są we wszystkich 16 województwach, na terenie całej Polski, przy czym niemal 40% skupia się w miastach wojewódzkich, najwięcej w Warszawie – 17 tys. i po ok. 8 tys. we Wrocławiu i Krakowie. Wobec tej sytuacji wprowadzono doraźnie liczne zmiany systemowe oraz wyasygnowano z budżetu państwa środki finansowe rzędu 3 mld zł. Wojna na Ukrainie i spowodowany nią exodus stał się niemalym wyzwaniem dla polskiego systemu edukacji. Polska, mimo braku zewnętrznego wsparcia finansowego (także ze strony Unii Europejskiej), od pierwszych dni tego konfliktu militarnego, otworzyła drzwi swoich granic, domów i szkół, obejmując niezbędną pomocą uchodźców i wprowadzając niezbędne zmiany systemowe, umożliwiające absorpcję tak dużej liczby dzieci i młodzieży, w krótkim czasie, w trakcie roku szkolnego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** wojna na Ukrainie, edukacja Ukraińców w Polsce, kształcenie, uchodźcy wojenni, dzieci uchodźcy, system edukacyjny w Polsce, pomoc edukacyjna uchodźcom wojennym

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## INTRODUCTION

Almost from the first day of the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine, i.e. 24 February 2022, we faced a huge influx of refugees – mostly women – mothers with children. When it seemed that the strength of the COVID-19 pandemic was waning, there began an invasion of Ukraine, arousing much anxiety and fear, not only among the older generation, perhaps still remembering from their childhood the years of the Second World War, but also affecting the younger ones, for whom war was associated only with film, history or play. The sudden influx of so many refugees (in a short period of time more than two million), mainly Ukrainian women and children, caused in many pupils, on the one hand, an increased activity and willingness to get involved in helping others, awakened their sensitivity to the needs of others, but on the other hand – intensified anxiety, fears about the future, and perhaps even greater confinement, a feeling of losing the sense of their own lives, and thus the pointlessness of any effort, an escape into the virtual world and ambivalent feelings, causing a huge crisis of mental condition.<sup>1</sup>

Surely we all remember this social spurt of solidarity, the volunteers at the Polish-Ukrainian border or at railway stations (mainly in Przemyśl), the crowds of people willing to carry and take under their roofs the fleeing, often terrified mothers and their children. It became clear very quickly that this was not a temporary, short-term immigration crisis. The decision made by the Russian authorities to invade Ukraine, with tragic consequences, triggered an avalanche of events. Helping the hundreds of thousands of refugees streaming in from Ukraine is a great challenge for Poland, including the Polish school system. In crisis situations, it is essential to act quickly and learn quickly. There is a need for close-to-practice solutions.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistical data and other information presented in this paper are taken from the Educational Information System (SIO) and from individual departments of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Poland. The data refers to the period from the outbreak of full-scale war in Ukraine, i.e. from 24 February 2022 to 15 May 2023.

What is most valuable is the concrete experience of those who were affected most severely by the new situation and therefore had to react to it most quickly.

The outbreak of the war in Ukraine and the influx of a wave of refugees were events so sudden and so dramatic that it was necessary to reconsider and accordingly adapt the measures taken for education, prevention and support. What was helpful in making this adjustment was to draw on the experience of all those who worked in schools and institutions close to the border, where refugees had been arriving since the first day of the war and where young people from Ukraine were already studying. It is worth reminding that the invasion of Ukraine started when, pupils from for example the Lubelskie Province were still on winter holidays. A large number of Ukraine-born pupils did not return to school. Some of them, at the age of 18, stayed to defend their country, either by volunteering to help in the fight or by helping in other ways as much as they could. Unfortunately, it was also reported that some of them had already been killed.

It was necessary to provide care and psychological support for pupils who were particularly affected by this new reality, to discuss with them the very difficult topic of the war, and to provide pupils arriving from Ukraine with the opportunity to continue their education or to provide pre-school care for those who were a little younger. In the first three months, the Polish education system received almost 200 thousand children and pupils. In addition, a significant number of children and young people benefited from remote learning in the Ukrainian system.

As a ministry of education, we have prepared detailed legislative solutions to enable nursery schools and schools to meet these challenges. The Act on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of that state<sup>2</sup> was adopted as early as 12 March 2022. On 21 March 2022 the Minister of Education and Science issued a regulation on the organisation of education, upbringing and care for children and young people who are citizens of Ukraine.<sup>3</sup> Taking into account the new challenges, necessary amendments or derogations from the application of certain provisions have been made to the Act – the Education Law,<sup>4</sup> as well as other implementing acts (regulations<sup>5</sup>). From 1 March 2022, headmasters were allowed to introduce additional hours for psychological and pedagogical support. For this purpose alone, an additional amount of 15 million Polish zlotys was transferred from the state budget to local government units in 2022.

According to the data available in the Educational Information System as of 15 May 2023, the system – in primary and secondary education – shows 182,014 children and pupils who have arrived from Ukraine since 24 February 2022, including: 42,971 children in pre-school education, 111,387 pupils in primary

<sup>2</sup> Journal of Laws item 583 as amended.

<sup>3</sup> Journal of Laws item 645 as amended.

<sup>4</sup> Act of 14 December 2016 – the Education Law (Journal of Laws 2023, item 900).

<sup>5</sup> Among others, the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 23 August 2017 on the education of persons who are not Polish citizens and persons who are Polish citizens who have received education in schools operating in the education systems of other countries (Journal of Laws of 2020, item 1283 as amended).

schools and 27,656 in secondary schools. It is estimated that approximately 50.85% of these pupils benefit from additional free of charge lessons of Polish language, 95.17% of children and pupils have the Polish Personal Identification Number (PESEL).

The provinces that have accepted the greatest number of children and pupils who are refugees from Ukraine include:

- mazowieckie (Masovian) 32,736,
- śląskie (Silesian) 20,418,
- dolnośląskie (Lower Silesian) 20,169.

According to data from the Ministry of Education and Science, the provinces with the lowest number of children and pupils from Ukraine are:

- świętokrzyskie 3,061,
- podlaskie 2,811.

It should be noted that approximately 39.45% of all Ukrainian children and pupils are concentrated in provincial cities. The highest number was recorded in Warsaw – 17,018, in Wrocław – 8,314, in Krakow – 7,926, while the lowest number in Olsztyn – 783. In the previous school year, there was a record-breaking number of children and pupils (data as of 12.05.2022) which was reported to be 198,291. A significant number of the incoming Ukrainian pupils had no knowledge of the Polish language.

#### 1. INITIATIVES BY THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE (MEiN) FOR THE INCLUSION OF UKRAINIAN PUPILS IN THE POLISH EDUCATION SYSTEM AT PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY LEVEL

The need to absorb such a large number of children and young people all of a sudden, in a short period of time and in the middle of the school year resulted in the introduction of numerous system changes in the Polish education system. In response to these challenges, the MEiN has taken the following actions:

1) Changes in the functioning of preparatory units: an increase in the maximum number of pupils from 15 to 25, an increase in the number of hours allocated for teaching Polish from 3 to minimum 6. In the opinion of the Ministry of Education and Science, in the case of pupils who do not know Polish or know it at a level insufficient to benefit from education and who require adaptation of the learning process to their needs and educational capabilities, as well as adaptation of the organisational form supporting the effectiveness of learning, the optimal and recommended solution is a preparatory unit, and its organisation falls within the competence of the authority running the school.

Preparatory units played an important role especially in the second half of the school year 2021/2022, which was the first period of the war in Ukraine. By learning in a preparatory unit, a large number of pupils from Ukraine were given the opportunity to learn the Polish language intensively and to be integrated into the Polish education system gradually, while taking into account their current educational preparation. According to the data from the Educational Information

System (currently indicating that the number of preparatory units attended by this category of pupils has been reduced at least by half compared to the end of the 2021/2022 school year), from September 2022, a significant number of Ukrainian pupils continue their education in regular classes, together with their Polish peers. Pupils are qualified for the preparatory unit by a team appointed by the headmaster, consisting of two teachers and an educator or psychologist. The number of pupils in a preparatory class may not exceed 25 pupils. Teaching in a preparatory unit is carried out on the basis of general education curricula implemented at the school, adapted, in terms of the scope of teaching content and the methods and forms of its implementation, to the developmental and educational needs and psychophysical capabilities of pupils. The highest number of pupils (27.94%) attending such units come from general secondary schools. From 1 September 2022, preparatory units can also be established in sports schools and athletics championship schools.

2) Additional free of charge Classes in the Polish language.

Additional hours of Polish classes are organised for both pupils who are in preparatory units and those who study in regular ones. These are conducted individually or in groups of up to 15 persons; the minimum number of hours in these classes has been increased from 2 to 6 hours per week. In addition, in the school year 2022/2023, it was made possible to provide additional lessons of Polish language in an inter-school group. More than half (50.82%) of Ukrainian pupils benefit from additional lessons of Polish language.

3) Increase in the number of children in a nursery class (by the end of the 2022/2023 school year) to 28 pupils and in classes I-III of the primary school to 29 pupils; increase in the number of pupils for the entire education stage.

4) Increase by no more than 4 (from 25 to 29) in the number of children in common rooms under the care of one teacher.

5) Increase in the number of inclusive and special classes by no more than 2 pupils with disabilities who are Ukrainian citizens.

6) Providing pupils from Ukraine with financial assistance in the form of supplementary benefits.

For pupils who are citizens of Ukraine, financial assistance in the form of supplementary benefits was already launched in March 2022:

- for the 2021/2022 school year (from March to August 2022), school scholarships were awarded to 6,784 pupils, citizens of Ukraine,
- for the 2022/2023 school year (from September to December 2022), school scholarships were awarded to 7,742 pupils, citizens of Ukraine,
- school allowances were received by 3,309 pupils between March and December 2022.

According to the semi-annual report, approximately 12,000 Ukrainian pupils (6.59%) were provided with financial assistance in the form of supplementary benefits.

7) When admitting pupils to school, it was introduced that a declaration could be made not only by parents/guardians, but also by other persons having custody of the pupil.

Persons who are not Polish citizens benefit from education and care respectively in pre-school education institutions, in primary schools, and those who are subject to compulsory schooling, in secondary schools under the terms applicable to Polish citizens until they reach the age of 18 or graduate from a secondary school.

A pupil is admitted to a school on the basis of a diploma, certificate or any other document confirming the fact that the pupil has graduated from a school or accomplished another stage of education abroad or a document issued by a school abroad confirming the fact that the pupil arriving from abroad is attending a school abroad and indicating the grade or stage of education completed by the pupil at the school abroad, and a document confirming the total years of the pupil's school education, or a written statement concerning the total years of the pupil's school education, submitted by the pupil's parent or an adult pupil, if it is not possible to establish the total years of school education on the basis of a diploma, certificate or other document. Documents do not need to be translated into Polish by a sworn translator.

The grade (year of study) is determined on the basis of documents issued by the school abroad, or in the absence thereof, a statement made by the parents on the total years of education abroad. In the case of pupils – refugees from Ukraine – we have introduced the possibility to submit a statement on the child's total years of education in Ukraine not only by the parents/guardians, but also by other persons having custody of the pupil.

Pupils are admitted to primary school *ex officio*, while to secondary school – provided there are free places available at the school.

8) Lack of compulsory education/schooling obligation, as defined by Polish law, for children and pupils from Ukraine who are in Poland and who study in the Ukrainian education system in the distance learning formula.

In view of the special situation of children and young people coming from Ukraine due to the armed conflict on the territory of that country, a regulation has been introduced allowing Ukrainian pupils to receive online education in the Ukrainian education system:

“Children and pupils who are citizens of Ukraine, whose residence on the territory of the Republic of Poland is considered legal, and who receive education in a nursery school or school operating in the Ukrainian education system using methods and techniques of distance learning, shall not be subject to compulsory one-year pre-school preparation, compulsory education or compulsory schooling referred to in the Act – the Education Law. The parent or the person taking care of the child or pupil shall submit to the municipality competent for the place of residence of the child or pupil a declaration that the child or pupil is continuing education in the Ukrainian education system.”<sup>6</sup>

If the child's parent or guardian fails to make such a declaration or withdraws

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<sup>6</sup> §15 of the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Science of 21 March 2022 on the organisation of education, upbringing and care for children and young people who are citizens of Ukraine (Journal of Laws of 2022, item 645as amended).

it, the child must be admitted to a Polish school, thus fulfilling the relevant educational obligations under the Polish legal system.

Simultaneously, Ukrainian pupils have the possibility to take up parallel education in Polish schools. In this case, they are subject to compulsory one-year pre-school preparation, compulsory education or compulsory schooling, as referred to in the Act – the Education Law, and are thus entered on the list of pupils of the school, reported in the Educational Information System and, consequently, funds are allocated to them.

9) Possibility to take the eight-grade exam (primary school final exam), the maturity exam (matura) and the vocational exam by the end of the 2022/2023 school year: a new deadline for submitting the declaration; introduction by the Central Examination Board (CKE) of additional adjustments of conditions for the above exams; possibility to appoint as a member of the team of examiners checking the work of pupils for the eighth-grade or matura exam, persons not entered in the register of examiners who speak Ukrainian.

10) Possibility to establish other locations for carrying out didactic and educational classes and providing after-school care.

Taking into account the number of new pupils from Ukraine, we have introduced the possibility to establish other locations for carrying out didactic and educational classes and providing after-school care, including pre-school education activities, which are organisationally subordinate to nursery schools and schools.

The necessary requirements for nursery school or school facilities were differentiated according to the age of the children and pupils attending them. The schools were allowed to hold classes in facilities that may also be located in a public building or part of a public building in use other than the school. In order to facilitate the establishment of other locations to hold classes in public buildings, the requirement to comply with the procedure for changing the use of a building or part thereof has been temporarily waived. It should be emphasised that this does not remove the obligation to provide safe conditions for education, upbringing and care as defined by the legislation. The implementation of this regulation makes it possible to use any public building, such as an office or social building, which has proved to be particularly helpful in the organisation of education in large cities.

11) Possibility to assign to a teacher, with his/her consent, overtime hours of more than one-half of the mandatory weekly teaching load in the case of establishing an additional unit. The existing statutory regulation<sup>7</sup> provides for the assignment to a teacher, with his/her consent, of overtime hours not exceeding one-half of the weekly mandatory teaching load.

12) Allowing teachers with entitlement to compensatory benefit to take up employment at the position of a teaching assistance and a teacher in a school where an additional unit will be established, without suspending the right to compensatory benefit.

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<sup>7</sup> Article 35(1) of the Act of 26 January 1982 – the Teacher's Charter (Journal of Laws of 2023, item 984).

13) Facilitating the employment at the position of a teaching assistant of Ukrainian citizens who have knowledge of the Polish language to a sufficient degree to assist a pupil.

14) Enabling the education superintendent to exempt from payment of fees persons from Ukraine applying for confirmation of education received abroad.

15) In the case of special nursery schools, special schools, special education care centres or special education centres – allowing the admission of a disabled pupil who is a citizen of Ukraine on the basis of a statement from the parents or temporary guardian that an application for a certificate has been submitted to the counselling centre, without having to wait for an examination and receiving a certificate on the need for special education.

16) Broadening the catalogue of persons employed in public psychological and pedagogical counselling centres to include persons who are not teachers.

17) Possibility to employ, with the consent of the education superintendent, a person who is not a teacher and has a background recognised by the head of the establishment as suitable for the performance of the tasks specified by the head of the establishment in public educational establishments and public establishments providing care and upbringing for pupils during the period of receiving education outside the place of permanent residence in order to provide classes for children and young people.

18) Possibility of financial assistance for local government units from the funds of the general subsidy reserved for school education and the Assistance Fund.

19) Funding of new tasks: children in pre-school education at the age of 2.5-5 and school transport for pupils.

20) Making it possible to depart from annual classification.

A pupil attending a preparatory unit will not be subject to classification when the teachers' board finds that the pupil does not know Polish or that the pupil's knowledge of the Polish language is insufficient to take part in lessons, or that the range of educational activities carried out at school makes it impossible to proceed with the pupil's annual classification; the pupil will then receive a certificate.

21) In the 2022/2023 school year, a pupil who is a citizen of Ukraine attending a preparatory unit will not be subject to mid-year classification – in the cases indicated in the regulation.

22) Textbook subsidy through which free textbooks were provided for pupils from Ukraine.

23) Determining the need to modify the educational and preventive programme implemented in the school or institution.

In connection with the organisation of education, upbringing and care for children and young people who are citizens of Ukraine, the head of the school or establishment has been obliged to determine, in consultation with the teachers' board and the parents' board, the need to modify, in the school year 2021/2022 and 2022/2023, the educational and preventive programme implemented in the school or establishment and, if necessary, to modify this programme during the school year.

New solutions introduced in the school year 2022/2023 which were not in place in the school year 2021/2022:

1) Extra hours in excess of those specified in Article 35(1) of the Act – the Teachers' Charter may be assigned to a Polish language teacher, with his/her consent, also in a school in which no additional unit has been established to provide education, upbringing and care for children and pupils who are citizens of Ukraine.

2) Possibility for a person using the right to teacher's compensatory benefit to work as a Polish language teacher, also if no additional unit has been established in the school to provide education, upbringing and care for children and pupils who are citizens of Ukraine, without suspending the right to this benefit.

3) Additional lessons of Polish language, as referred to in Article 165(7) of the Act – the Education Law, may be provided in an inter-school group.

In addition, under current legislation, pupils who are not Polish citizens are entitled to:

- additional remedial classes in the subjects taught;
- assistance of a person speaking the language of the country of origin employed as a teaching assistant.

The decision to grant a pupil a given form of support is made by the headmaster of the school, in agreement with the authority managing the school. Simultaneously, a diplomatic or consular establishment of a country of origin of persons who are not Polish citizens operating in Poland or a cultural and educational association of a given nationality may organise at school, in agreement with the headmaster and with the consent of the authority managing the school, lessons in the language and culture of the country of origin (max. 5hrs/week), provided that at least 7 students apply. The school provides rooms and teaching aids free of charge.

Since the first days of the war in Ukraine, the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Science has been in regular contact with education superintendents, indicating desirable or even necessary measures, as well as receiving information on the current situation in the province. The school superintendents, in turn, organised meetings with the headmasters and educational establishments and with representatives of local government units, which are the authorities managing these schools.

In connection with the situation in Ukraine, the school superintendents held 895 regular district meetings with headmasters of schools and institutions, including:

- 248 covering, among others, the following topics: changes in education law, teacher specialist at school, regulations on the classification and grading of pupils, organisation of education for foreigners, in particular for pupils arriving from Ukraine after 24 February 2022;
- 238 were devoted to changes in provisions of the education law effective from 1 September 2022;
- 204 – to the rules of admission of foreigners to Polish schools in the context of the current situation in Ukraine. How to talk to children and pupils about the

situation in Ukraine – recommendations for teachers and school educators. Safety of pupils in school and nursery school;

- 105 on the subject Organisation of education and support for pupils from Ukraine, including the functioning of preparatory units, grading, the number of pupils per class and unit;

- 100 the educational and preventive programme in the context of the diagnosis of the educational situation and the development needs of pupils.

Meetings between representatives of Poland, Ukraine and other neighbouring countries were held at ministerial level as part of the exchange of experience and joint arrangements. The most important of these include:

- On 5 October 2022 Minister Przemysław Czarnek received delegations of ministers from the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, who then (6 October 2022), together with Minister Tomasz Rzymkowski, travelled to Ukraine to attend a meeting of ministers from the region (including a meeting with the Ukrainian Minister of Education and Science).

- On 6-10 October 2022 Minister Tomasz Rzymkowski visited Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk – including a meeting at the Precarpathian National University in Ivano-Frankivsk, a meeting at School No. 10 and School No. 24 in Lviv.

## 2. FINANCIAL COMMITMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND FOR PUPILS FROM UKRAINE WHO HAVE JOINED THE POLISH EDUCATION SYSTEM AT PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY LEVEL

The data below refers to the financing by the Polish state of educational tasks related to pupils from Ukraine who arrived in Poland after 24 February 2022.

The Act of 12 March 2022 on Assistance to citizens of Ukraine provides for the possibility of financial assistance from the funds of the general subsidy reserved for school education or the Assistance Fund for additional educational tasks related to education, upbringing and care of pupils from Ukraine. These funds were allocated exclusively from the Polish state budget.

Support was provided for tasks that had not yet been financed from the education subsidy – funding of pre-school education for children aged 2.5-5 and funding of school transport for pupils.

Transfers for this task from the Assistance Fund, for the period from 24 February 2022 to the end of April 2023 – in monthly instalments – have already been transferred to local governments. Next transfers – will be made analogously, i.e. also in monthly instalments. The total amount of funds accrued on the basis of data for the aforementioned period, intended for the implementation of educational tasks carried out by local government units, amounts to more than PLN 2.7 billion.

### 3. INITIATIVES OF THE MEiN FOR THE INCLUSION OF UKRAINIAN STUDENTS AND RESEARCHERS IN THE POLISH SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

According to the data in the POL-on system as of 11 May 2023, the total number of Ukrainian students on a full cycle of education registered after 24 February 2022 is 25,741, of which 16,074 are on full-time courses for which the language of education is Polish.

The total number of employees with Ukrainian citizenship who, after 24 February 2022, received employment in institutions supervised by the MEiN and other ministries as academic teachers, other persons giving lectures, persons conducting scientific activities and persons participating in conducting scientific activities is 541.

Statistical data for the 2022/2023 academic year:

- Total number of foreign students from Ukraine: 43,199.
- The majority of Ukrainian students study at non-public higher education institutions in Poland – 26,519 persons. There are 16,085 students in public higher education institutions and 632 students in ecclesiastical higher education institutions.
- There are currently 3,280 refugees living in dormitories.
- The majority of students are on full-time studies – 36,960 persons:
- on first-cycle studies – 28,712 persons,
- on second-cycle studies – 6,500 persons,
- on long-cycle graduate studies – 1,795 pupils.
- On part-time studies – 6,309 persons:
- on first-cycle studies – 3,755 persons,
- on second-cycle studies – 1,843 persons,
- on long-cycle graduate studies – 719 persons.

The current academic year faces problems regarding the lack of possibility for students (mostly men) to leave Ukraine, due to the procedure for obtaining an exit permit from the military command.

As a result, on 27 September 2022 Minister of Education and Science Przemysław Czarnek sent recommendations to the rectors of Polish higher education institutions to allow Ukrainian students to study through distance learning methods and technics, as well as individual organisation of studies and leaves of absence from classes.

According to the data from CRASP (Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland), the number of students admitted to HEIs (1st year of studies) is:

- The number of students who were granted dean's leave due to the fact that they could not cross the border is: 213,
- The number of students who will participate remotely due to the fact that they could not cross the border is: 1,051.

There is a special crisis team of CRASP provincial coordinators operating at the Minister of Education and Science under the direction of the AGH University.

The team collects data from individual HEIs and discusses current issues related to Ukrainian refugees in the Polish system of higher education and science.

#### 4. FINANCIAL COMMITMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND FOR STUDENTS AND RESEARCHERS FROM UKRAINE WHO HAVE JOINED THE POLISH SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Citizens of Ukraine studying in Poland are entitled to financial assistance in the form of: the rector's scholarship, the scholarship for persons with disabilities and the allowance under the general rules of the HESL Act<sup>8</sup> (and after meeting the conditions stipulated in Article 324 (2) (2-8) of the HESL Act also to social scholarship and student loan). They represent the largest group of foreigners – beneficiaries of financial assistance from the state budget.

According to estimated data, approx. 50 million Polish zlotys were allocated for financial assistance, including approx. 39 million for maintenance grants, approx. 6.7 million for the rector's scholarship, approx. 3.3 million for the allowance, approx. 0.5 million for the scholarship for persons with disabilities and 0.05 million for the minister's scholarship.<sup>9</sup>

In the 2021/2022 academic year, 3,148 citizens of Ukraine received financial assistance from the state budget, of which 2,204 received maintenance grants, 1,004 received rector's scholarships, 28 received allowances, 36 received scholarships for persons with disabilities. According to incomplete data as of 11 May 2023, in the 2022/2023 academic year financial assistance from the state budget was granted to 6,630 students from Ukraine, including maintenance grants – 4,299, rector's scholarships – 982, allowances – 2,241, scholarships for persons with disabilities – 75, minister's scholarships – 6.

In addition, funds were allocated from the Polish budget for the following tasks:

- Full-time studies in Polish – according to estimated data, an amount of approx. 241 million Polish zlotys has been allocated;
- The programme of the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange “Solidarity with Ukraine” – funds in the total amount of PLN 24.1 million were planned (PLN 12.7 million for the task “Solidarity with Ukraine – European Universities” and PLN 11.4 million for the task “Solidarity with Ukraine – students and PhD students”), scholarship support was provided to 1.5 thousand students and 18 HEIs participating in the European Universities initiative;

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<sup>8</sup> Act of 20 July 2018 – the Law on higher education and science (Journal of Laws of 2022, item 574 as amended).

<sup>9</sup> Rates of average monthly benefits according to the latest data published by GUS (Central Statistical office) for 2021. ('Higher education and its finances in 2021') – the maintenance grant was PLN 961.46 per month, the scholarship for people with disabilities – PLN 638.15, the rector's scholarship – PLN 691.79, and the allowance – PLN 1,639.3 (one-off). There is an upward trend from year to year.

– Programmes of the National Science Centre for researchers from Ukraine planned funds in the total amount of PLN 7.2 million, support was provided to 51 persons;

– Programmes of the Polish Academy of Sciences for Ukrainian researchers, funds in the amount of PLN 2 million were planned, support was provided to 330 persons.

A total amount of approx. PLN 324 million was allocated for the implementation of the above tasks.

## CONCLUSION

This paper provides an overview of the initiatives by the Ministry of Education and Science (MEiN) for the inclusion of Ukrainian pupils in the Polish education system at the primary and post-primary level; discusses the financial commitment of the Republic of Poland for Ukrainian pupils who have joined the Polish education system at the primary and post-primary level; presents the initiatives for the inclusion of Ukrainian students and researchers in the Polish system of higher education and science, as well as the financial commitment of the Republic of Poland for Ukrainian students and researchers who have joined the Polish system of higher education and science. The work done to provide immediate assistance to refugees from Ukraine demonstrates the seriousness of the situation and the scale of the problem faced on a structural and humanitarian level. The systemic solutions adopted efficiently provided care and education to pupils who are citizens of Ukraine and who arrived in the Republic of Poland after 24 February 2022. The analysis of the current situation necessitates further planning in view of the upcoming 2023/2024 school year and proposing further initiatives. As a result of subsequent initiatives, it is planned that children and young people from Ukraine aged 7-18 will be admitted to public schools and will be provided with care and education under the conditions applicable to Polish citizens, whereby:

1) Admission to schools will be possible during the whole school year, and the determination of the grade in which the pupil will continue his/her education will be made on the basis of the sum of the completed years of schooling abroad, according to the documents issued by the school abroad, and in the absence of such documents – a statement of the parents or the person who takes care of the child/ or the actual guardians of the child.

2) Parents may request the headmaster to admit their child to a grade lower than that resulting from the total years of schooling, e.g. because of the child's age.

3) The admission of pupils coming from abroad is regulated at the statutory level. The legal basis of the pupil's residence in Poland is irrelevant for the possibility of admission to a public school and possible forms of educational support.

4) Considering the educational needs of children and youth coming to Poland from Ukraine, which result from the lack or poor knowledge of Polish, as

well as taking into account the necessity to adjust the content taught in preparatory units – adequately to the needs of pupils, the Ministry of Education and Science continues to recommend organising the education of pupils coming from Ukraine in the form of preparatory units.

The amendments to the legislation currently under procedure,<sup>10</sup> including the Act of 12 March 2022 on assistance to citizens of Ukraine in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of that state (Journal of Laws item 583, as amended), provide for recognition of legal residence of Ukrainian citizens until:

1) 31 August 2024 – if these persons:

– on 4 March 2024 are benefiting from pre-school education, fulfilling their compulsory education obligation or fulfilling their compulsory schooling obligation in accordance with the Act – the Education Law, or

– on 4 March 2024 are receiving education in a nursery school or school operating in the Ukrainian education system through distance learning methods and techniques, or

– no later than in the 2022/2023 school year they started their education in second-level vocational school, post-secondary school or school for adults;

2) 30 September 2024 – if these persons take the matura exam referred to in Chapter 3b of the Act of 7 September 1991 on the education system,<sup>11</sup> at a resit date.

At the same time, the said amendments provide for prolongation of applicability of the provisions on increasing the funds of the general subsidy reserved for school education, securing funds for the purchase of textbooks, educational materials and exercise materials for pupils who are citizens of Ukraine, organising early development support for children, schoolchildren, pupils or participants of revalidation and education classes, establishing and closing other locations for conducting educational activities, free transport to the school place, material assistance for pupils, additional lessons of Polish language, extra hours for a teacher, employment at the position of a teaching assistant, as well as for the exclusion of the applicability of the provisions on suspending the right to the compensatory benefit.

The applicability of the following provisions will also be extended for the 2023/2024 school year: provisions on increasing the number of pupils in common room activities in a mainstream primary school and of disabled pupils in common room activities in a mainstream school, an inclusive school, a special school and a mainstream school with special units; provisions on the organisation of additional classes of Polish language in groups of no more than 15 pupils and with weekly duration of no less than 6 lesson periods; provisions on admission to a special nursery school, a pre-school unit in a special primary school, a special school, a special education care centre or a special care centre of a disabled child or a disabled pupil on the basis of a statement made by the parent or a person who has

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<sup>10</sup> Draft act amending the names of the state service higher education institutions supervised by the minister competent for internal affairs, amending the Act on the Police, the Act on the Border Guard, the Act on the State Fire Service and certain other acts (paper 3133).

<sup>11</sup> Journal of Laws of 2022 item 2230.

custody of the child or pupil on submission of an application for a certificate on the need for special education to a public psychological and pedagogical counselling centre, including a public specialist counselling centre; provisions on the determination by the headmaster of a school or institution, in agreement with the teachers' board and the parents' board, of the need to modify the educational and preventive programme implemented in the school or institution, and to modify this programme if necessary; provisions on employment in a public psychological and pedagogical counselling centre, in justified cases and with consent of the education superintendent, of a person who is not a teacher and who is prepared by the head of the counselling centre to carry out specific tasks in this respect.

Units, grades and groups, with an increased number of children, schoolchildren and pupils in the school years 2021/2022 and 2022/2023, can function respectively until the completion of pre-school education and throughout the entire stage of education. On the other hand, due to the stable number of pupils from Ukraine in Polish education system units, the applicability of the provisions allowing for an increase in the number of pupils in further established units is not extended for the 2023/2024 school year.

The following provisions will remain unchanged and continue to apply:

1) provisions on lack of compulsory one-year pre-school preparation, compulsory education and compulsory schooling obligation for children and pupils who are citizens of Ukraine and who receive their education in a nursery school or school operating in the Ukrainian education system through distance learning methods and techniques,

2) provisions on other locations for conducting educational activities.

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Regulation of the Minister of Education and Science of 21 March 2022 on the organisation of education, upbringing and care for children and young people who are citizens of Ukraine, Journal of Laws 645 as amended.

## The Role of Activity of Ukrainian Youth – War Refugees in the Development of their Cultural Identity. Experiences of Ukrainian

Rola aktywności młodzieży ukraińskiej – uchodźców wojennych w rozwoju ich tożsamości kulturowej. Doświadczenia ukraińskich uczniów szkoły średniej

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**Abstract:** The article focuses on describing the role of the activity of Ukrainian refugees – youth aged 17-19 aimed at sustaining Ukrainian cultural identity. Materials gathered in the course of individual interviews allowed to divide into categories the projects undertaken by the respondents at school, home and in peer groups, supporting dissemination of awareness of the Ukrainian cultural community, identifying students' expectations regarding the development of their identity. As a result of the research, it was found that the activities presented by the respondents are among the main determinants influencing the development of the cultural identity of young Ukrainian war refugees.

**Keywords:** Ukrainian minority, secondary school, cultural identity,

**Abstrakt:** W artykule skupiono się na określeniu roli działalności uchodźców ukraińskich – młodzieży w wieku 17-19 lat – na rzecz ukraińskiej tożsamości kulturowej. Za pośrednictwem wywiadów indywidualnych zebrano materiał, który pozwolił na: skategoryzowanie przedsięwzięć podejmowanych przez badanych w środowisku szkolnym, domowym i w grupie rówieśniczej, sprzyjających rozpowszechnianiu świadomości ukraińskiej wspólnoty kulturowej; określenie ich oczekiwań w zakresie rozwoju ich tożsamości. W wyniku badań stwierdzono, że aktywności reprezentowane przez badanych są jednym z głównych determinantów rozwoju tożsamości kulturowej młodych wojennych uchodźców ukraińskich.

**Słowa kluczowe:** mniejszość ukraińska, szkoła ponadpodstawowa, tożsamość kulturowa, tożsamość zbiorowa, uchodźcy wojenni



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## INTRODUCTION

Russia's attack on Ukraine triggered a number of changes on the international arena. On the one hand, it marked a turning point as regards both the world's security and economy, and the architecture of global energy. On the other hand, it initiated one of the largest processes of population mobility in the history of modern Europe, thus leading to the reorganization of the number and structure of national and religious minorities. In this way, the war determined a new approach to the perception of identity both on an individual and a collective/social level. Those changes affected both national culture and tradition and its relation to other cultures. As regards local communities, the war led to the encounter of individuals and communities representing various cultural symbols and codes. Those are social groups that will maintain what in their consciousness is related to the history and tradition of their ancestors, what is unique and exceptional. Groups that were forced to adapt to new living conditions, will seek understanding, cooperation, and the possibility of coexistence.

In this context, war refugees as a new Ukrainian minority – immigrants who have been forced out of their territory, constitute a community striving to maintain Ukrainian cultural identity at the times of change when they have to defend their country against the Russian policy of the 21st century.

The aim of the present research is to determine the role of activities aimed at developing Ukrainian cultural identity based on the experiences of secondary school students – Ukrainian war refugees who found themselves in Poland after February 24, 2022.

### 1. RESEARCH METHOD

The research was based on a collective case study using individual, semi-structured, problem-centred interviews (Rubacha 2016). The research aimed at providing the answer to the question of the role of the activities undertaken by war refugees from Ukraine/secondary school students in maintaining and developing Ukrainian cultural identity.

The research group consisted of 12 students aged 17-19 from one of the secondary schools in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodship – 8 girls and 4 boys. Some of them came to Poland just before the outbreak of the war due to their families' living and working here, but others arrived in Poland immediately after Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Although having various refugee and war experiences as they come from different, remote areas of Ukraine, they all feel like a community in Poland.

Table 1. Characteristics of the researched group

| No. | Name       | Age | Oblast         | City            | Reason for choosing Poland | Grade/Level of education      |
|-----|------------|-----|----------------|-----------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1.  | Yelyzaveta | 17  | Dnipropetrovsk | Kryvyi Rih      | parent's work              | 2                             |
| 2.  | Maksym     | 17  | Vinnytsia      | Vinnytsia       | parent's work              | 2                             |
| 3.  | Karyna     | 18  | Mykolaiv       | Mykolaiv        | parent's work              | 3                             |
| 4.  | Sabrina    | 18  | Mykolaiv       | Mykolaiv        | parent's work              | 3                             |
| 5.  | Oleksandra | 18  | Kherson        | Kherson         | war circumstances          | 2                             |
| 6.  | Yevhenii   | 19  | Mykolaiv       | Mykolaiv        | war circumstances          | 2 extramural secondary school |
| 7.  | Alina      | 17  | Kharkiv        | Kharkiv         | war circumstances          | 3                             |
| 8.  | Aliona     | 17  | Moldova        | Camenca         | distant relatives          | 2                             |
| 9.  | Veronika   | 17  | Kharkiv        | Kharkiv         | war circumstances          | 3                             |
| 10. | Yelyzaveta | 18  | Dnipropetrovsk | Pavlohrad       | parent's work              | 3                             |
| 11. | Vladyslav  | 17  | Kyiv           | Irpın           | war circumstances          | 2                             |
| 12. | Illia      | 18  | Luhansk        | Sievierodonetsk | war circumstances          | 2                             |

Source: own study.

Selection of the research sample was based on the methodological assumptions of K. Rubacha (2016, 116), it was non-random purposeful, and it consisted in selecting those from the population of respondents who meet the criterion included in the research question. The researched group consists of students from the same educational institution, its authorities expressed their consent to the research and acted as an intermediary in contacts with parents who facilitated conducting interviews with young people. It was assumed that the answer to the research question should be based on the experience of young refugees attending the same school.

The research was carried out from January to March 2023 in Olsztyn in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship. The interviews were conducted at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn (WNS UWM) in a room specially prepared to prevent any interference. Instructions were prepared for the interviews, focusing on the activities undertaken by the respondents that were conducive to disseminating the awareness of the Ukrainian cultural community in the school, home and peer groups environment, as well as students' expectations regarding the development of their cultural identity.

A code system was adopted for data collection and analysis based on the following key: respondent's number/gender/name abbreviation, e.g., 1/F/Y. The raw text created during the research, was abbreviated. A stratified sampling of units was adopted according to the variables contained in each of these units. These, in turn, after identification, were analysed, which made it possible to extract information contained

in the collected texts, which make up the context of the data. The data was verified using the analytical induction method, focusing on confronting the selected hypothetical statement with each element identified in the area of study (Rubacha 2016, 279).

## 2. UKRAINIAN WAR REFUGEES IN POLAND

Based on Article 1 of the Geneva Convention and the New York Protocol of 1967, a refugee is: a person who is outside his/her own country; fearing persecution due to race, religion, nationality, belonging to a social group or political views. Persecution must indicate a serious violation of human rights through the accumulation of various behaviours, actions in the form of physical and psychological violence, the lack of fair judgment or discrimination (Wierzbicki 2003, 9).

From February 24, 2022 to March 6, 2023, 10.2 million Ukrainians crossed the Polish border (Statystyki Straży Granicznej 2023). Refugees who came to Poland were mainly educated women with children, who are middle class representatives inhabiting urban agglomerations in Ukraine. They chose Poland because of the similar language and culture or due to having friends or family here. Most refugees came to the Masovian Voivodeship – 20%; much fewer to Lower Silesian Voivodeship – 11%; Lesser Poland and Silesia Voivodeships – 10%; Greater Poland Voivodeship – 9%; Pomeranian Voivodeship – 7%; Łódź Voivodeship – 6% and West Pomeranian Voivodeship – 5% (Żółciak and Osiecki 2022). The number of Ukrainian citizens in Poland is gradually decreasing. Some of them moved on to other European countries, and some returned to their homes (Długosz, Izdebska-Długosz and Kryvachuk 2022, 6). The total number of refugees returning from Poland to Ukraine by March 6, 2023 amounted to 8.191 million people (Statystyki Straży Granicznej 2023). Data from the Ministry of the Interior indicate that in 2022 the number of refugees registered in the PESEL system amounted to 1.1 million, including over 500,000. children (Żółciak and Osiecki 2022). By the end of February 2023, over 1.5 million people applied for a PESEL number. It is assumed that there are currently about 1.3 million Ukrainian refugees in Poland (Dobrołowicz 2023).

According to the Central Statistical Office (as of June 24, 2022), at the end of the 2021/2022 school year, there were 182.5 thousand students in the Polish education system. Ukrainian war refugees (GUS 2022). Based on the report of the Educational Information System, made available by the prawo.pl website (as of February 14, 2023), it was established that 187.9 thousand children and youth from Ukraine are included in the Polish education system. Most students attend schools in the following voivodeships: Masovian – 33.6 thousand, Silesian – 21 thousand, Lower Silesian – nearly 21 thousand. As regards individual stages of education, the largest group of children attends primary schools – approx. 116.8 thousand, followed by kindergartens – 43.8 thousand. The smallest number of youths attend secondary schools, i.e., approx. 27.2 thousand students: approx. 10 thousand attend general secondary schools; approx. 8 thousand attend technical

secondary schools; approx. 3 thousand attend stage 1 and 2 sectoral vocational schools, and approx. 5.9 thousand attend post-secondary schools. (Matłacz 2023).

### 3. CULTURAL IDENTITY

The issue of identity in the etymological sense is understood as: a characteristic sameness that allows to compare or replace one element with another; a set of features and properties that enable identification of a given person or object, taking into account the activities and relations taking place between the subject and the object. This concept can be considered in the psychological aspect related to the consciousness and self-awareness of an individual as well as in the metaphysical aspect, i.e., related to the immutability of an individual's nature and essence (Jeszka 2022).

Identity is constructed at both an individual and collective level. In the personal sphere, the structure of the Self is formed – one's own sets of judgments, ideas and beliefs (Zellma 2002, 420). An individual creates a sense of uniqueness, separateness in the process of getting to know oneself and by determining the differences between the Self and Others (Piechaczek-Ogierman 2019, 158).

Collective structure – We is characterized by a common system of norms, values, customs, habits, language and a specific territory of a given group; by experiencing and accepting tradition, the present and by determining the future (Lisowska 2022, 173). It is a set of self-definitions thanks to which an individual differentiates in terms of We-not-We, i.e. They (Reber and Reber 2002, 376). It is associated with the awareness of belonging to a specific group and social category.

Self-perception occurs through interpretation in relation to Others, while searching for separateness embedded in each individual's biography and experiences (Jeszka 2022). A person with a fixed identity is given the opportunity to reflectively relate to the course of their own life and the ability to relate it to others (Giddens 2002, 41). The basis of identity remains unchanged, but its peripheries undergo transformations. Therefore, it is partly given, but also constructed, and its modification emerges in the course of (un)intentional communication with the environment. Each individual expresses the need to remain in the community – to be settled in it (Jeszka 2022).

One of the basic forms of collective identity is cultural identity, which allows an individual to answer the fundamental existential questions: "Who am I?"; "Where do I come from" (Melchior 1990, 30). The fact of belonging to a specific structure (cultural community) gives people a sense of pride (Szczepański 1999, 10).

According to T. Lewowicki's identity behaviour theory in the view of intercultural education, culture is one of the pillars on which people build their identity behaviours. Among such fundamental areas of cultural identity as the historical fate of a group; identification with a territory and a group; historical genealogy; the economic and social sphere, Lewowicki distinguishes also culture, language and religion. The first substitute for culture is language – a symbolic form that constitutes both an instrument and an intrinsic value. Religion and art contribute

to anchoring an individual in an identity through significant attributes. People are included in a symbolic universe, and by accepting the behaviours specific to a given group, they emphasize their belonging to a given community (Lewowicki 1995, 53).

J. Nikitorowicz distinguishes four stages in the process of identity formation under the conditions of cultural borderland. The first formative stage involves family interactions, identification with one's family, the language they represent and the accepted culture. In the second, an individual turns towards the local community. In this way, in multicultural environments, a person selects the right group of reference ("significant others") and attributes values to local elements of culture. In the third stage, the identity of the minority group is formed. The basic values of the subculture as well as the forms of life in which an individual grows are reflected. An individual develops positive and negative attitudes towards the functioning social structure (Nikitorowicz 1995, 83). The author points to the final achievement of personal autonomy, i.e., "entering split autonomous identity." At the beginning, the so-called "isolated identity" is formed – an individual closes himself/herself in his/her own ethnic group by assimilating a system of values that is related only to that group. This results in the feelings of distrust, antagonism and prejudice in relation to others. The next stage involves the formation of "accommodative identity", where a person becomes open to Others – a characteristic majority group. It gives rise to cooperation among specific spheres of I-We-They, which allows for mutual cognition, recognition and certain concessions. This stage ends with the "reorienting identity", which is conditioned by a dissonance between the values and aspirations of an individual and the rules adopted in the minority group to which that individual belongs. Various variants of identity may emerge in result: the weakening of bonds with one's own group and lack of interest with the majority group; isolating oneself; integrating with the majority group simultaneously developing an unwilling or indifferent attitude towards the group of origin; assimilation with the majority group (Nikitorowicz 1995, 84).

Borderline, bicultural communities create a specific type of identity that is focused, on the one hand, on the place of residence and, on the other hand, on the area of origin. In culturally diverse societies, an individual feels "at home" and at the same time experiences a sense of "alienation". He/she remains in constant confrontation with Others, their traditions and cultures; behaviours, activities and lifestyles. Identity is shaped through identification with Others as well as the ability to understand and evaluate oneself, through criticism towards diverse situations, conditions, groups and people (Nikitorowicz 2005, 34).

The process of maintaining and forming the cultural identity of Ukrainian youth who found themselves in Poland as a result of warfare should be considered taking into account the impact of multicultural factors, as in the case of societies functioning in borderline areas.

#### 4. ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY THE RESPONDENTS IN THE SCHOOL, HOME AND PEER-GROUP ENVIRONMENT AIMED AT DEVELOPING THE UKRAINIAN CULTURAL COMMUNITY

Schools are places where both the education process and the formation of individual and collective identity take place. They enable implementation of activities in a closed space, in a culturally diverse community of students, their parents, as well as teachers and other employees.

According to the respondents, the school creates many opportunities to emphasize the distinctiveness and uniqueness of cultural groups, at the same time showing respect towards Others and focusing on cooperation among given communities. However, as Ukrainian students point out, it all depends on a given institution: the people involved in its management, the adopted direction of educational work and the issuing awareness and tolerance towards otherness of the school youth. Their experience regarding education in Poland also includes schools where cultural differences gave rise to many problems in everyday contacts with other students. This induced them to change their previous educational institutions to the current one, choosing it foremostly because of its cultural openness. “I was at a different high school at the beginning. It was impossible to function there. Nobody wanted to talk to me” – 5/F/Ch. They also noted that in other schools they experienced dislike on the part of their peers, especially when:

- they achieved better results in learning despite not knowing the language
- “I had to change classes, because when I was successful in computer classes and other colleagues were not, my colleagues felt resentful towards me” – 2/M/M.

- they could boast of sports, artistic or dancing skills – “friends claimed that I took away their place in the school performance and I can dance only because I attended a dance school in Ukraine” – 7/F/A.

The respondents come from different parts of Ukraine, and they did not know one another before coming to Poland. The teachers of the school attended by young refugees, guide students towards integration – they organize additional outings and meetings with representatives of, among others, scientific institutions – the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn (WNS UWM), the Northern Institute in Olsztyn; administration offices – the Olsztyn City Hall, the Marshal's Office; NGO organizations and foundations, i.e. Caritas in Olsztyn, Federation of Social Organizations (FOSA), Foundation for the Development of Warmia and Mazury. In the course of those meetings, young people learn about various possibilities of acting in the sphere of the voivodeship for the benefit of their cultural community. Young people establish cooperation with representatives of the above-mentioned institutions and actively participate in social projects implemented by them, e.g., in multicultural meetings at Caritas in Olsztyn; in the professional activity and social integration zone for foreigners and at the FOSA volunteer centre; social actions of the Foundation for the Development of Warmia and Mazury; workshops and intercultural seminars of the Marshal's Office in Olsztyn.

Such projects are of great importance to the surveyed youth who need support and opportunities to form their identity and express themselves. They facilitate their adaptation to the Polish education system and the peer environment, while at the same time preserving their own distinctive cultural identity and a sense of community. According to the respondents, integration of Ukrainian students is necessary. "We come from different parts of Ukraine and sometimes we notice differences in the words we use to refer to some things or in pronunciation of certain words" – 2/M/M. "We have different roots, some of us have ancestors from China, Moldova or Russia. Our home cultures differ" – 9/F/V. "Joint activities organized out of school allowed us to get closer to each other, we created a kind of family, a Ukrainian family in Poland. It's like finding relatives we didn't know about." – 10/F/Y. The teachers' actions led to the creation of a cultural community in the school environment, which allows to intensify works on supporting Ukrainian identity of young refugees.

The place where the respondents meet regularly is the school library, which after the opening hours becomes a space for:

- development of a group/community/young refugees – creating specific cultural codes; types of behaviour; building shared experiences, strategies for perceiving reality and solving problems;
- working out projects promoting Ukrainian culture in Poland, its preservation and dissemination, in particular among young people who identify themselves as Ukrainians.

As regards the first analysed scope of activities, young people talk about everyday problems, about history and tradition embedded in their families and regions of origin. It is in the library that the respondents often organize photo shows about interesting places related to Ukraine – its tradition, heroes, important places and events for young people in the 21st century. They exchange their impressions from film shows. In their opinion, they form a group that is not closed to others and willingly invites all interested. Through these meetings, they acquire a sense of belonging to a specific community whose members are characterized by the same symbols and cultural codes. "Sometimes when we do something together, it seems to me that we are in Ukraine" – 12/M/I. "We tell each other about our cities. We show photos. It's good because it feels a bit like being back home." – 1/F/Y. "We can feel at home, although we know that it will be difficult to go back. But we're here together, we are not alone. There are other people of the same age as we are who feel and think the same, speak the same language" – 10/F/Y. For them, the library is a space where they can feel at home, where the outside world ceases to matter and where all problems disappear or are solved.

In the second analysed aspect, the library "is the centre of our meetings, here we prepare for workshops and projects in which we participate in various institutions and organizations" – 7/F/A. "This is a place where we can talk or rehearse in peace before a dance, music or other performance in which we are involved with the repertoire about Ukraine" – 2/M/M. Without organizational support, young people would not be able to develop activities promoting the Ukrainian cultural community.

Another form of activity of young refugees involves a music and art group, in which the respondents sing in Ukrainian and perform dances. “At school, we always stage performances during ceremonial assemblies, and on two occasions, we performed just to present ourselves. It was an amazing moment because we were finally able to share our experiences with our colleagues” – 7/F/A. “The feedback that we received was very good and students at our school congratulated us and even sang with us pieces of our songs in Ukrainian” – 10/F/Y. For young refugees those school performances provide a form of communication and allow them to express themselves in the peer environment. What they fail to express in words to the school community, they can show through artistic performances. Additionally, they can preserve their tradition and culture in the educational environment.

With their repertoire, the respondents attracted the interest of representatives of educational institutions in the Warmian–Masurian Voivodeship. Recordings of these performances have been published online. Currently, Ukrainian students have started cooperation with the WNS UWM and the Intergenerational University at the Faculty of Social Sciences (UM at the WNS) in “European Intergenerational Days” project. It is a new initiative that brings together representatives of national and ethnic minorities of all ages associated with such institutions as: Catholic Kindergarten of the Saint Family in Olsztyn; the Primary School No. 30 in Olsztyn; day care homes in Olsztyn; the aforementioned Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn and the Intergenerational University at the Faculty of Social Sciences. The researched group will also present their repertoire at two scientific conferences: 10th National Scientific Conference “Aging and Late Adulthood in the Intergenerational Discourse” and the National Scientific Conference “The National Education Commission and Its Legacy”. “It is a very big event for us, but we are also happy that we can show our culture to people who will come from other areas of Poland” – 11/M/V. “Of course, we feel a bit nervous. However, at the same time it is an honour, and we can’t wait to perform. The more so that among the invited guests and speakers there will be people of Ukrainian origin” – 7/F/A. On the one hand, it is a huge challenge for young people, and on the other, an opportunity to show their roots and establish intercultural dialogue.

Working together on the preparation of specific performances and choreography requires seeking inspiration in Ukrainian traditional music and folk dance. It leads young people to reflect on the adaptation of cultural artistic expression to the contemporary audience. At the same time, it links it with artistic creation, which becomes a carrier of knowledge about the history of their ancestors. Students integrate, focus on a common goal and thus consciously form a unique identity structure in the collective sense (I-We-You). At the same time, they do not limit themselves to the peripheries of their identity, but rather build the basis for its functioning. “Setting up a band was the best idea. We enjoy showing our culture. We want to share it, we feel noticed then, but we also feel that we are together” – 9/F/V. “The band helps us to express what cannot be said in words, to talk about our culture and the history of our country” – 2/M/M.

Appropriate costumes and decorations that refer to traditional folk clothes or are related to popular culture constituting a specific trend in the environment of young Ukrainian refugees are prepared for each such event. As regards the latter, the respondents refer primarily to contemporary Ukrainian bands and artists. "We want to support our idols from Ukraine. We still listen to them, and we share their great music as much as possible" – 10/F/Y. "We are also interested in folk music and folk costumes, and we are seeking possibilities to prepare them in Poland. It's good that we can find a lot of old recordings on the Internet. Thanks to this, we have something to follow" – 7/F/A. The respondents' statements demonstrate that Ukrainian students are inspired by traditional music, which they try to adapt to contemporary artistic forms of expression. Particular elements of the prepared performances help students discover their own cultural roots. Each of the respondents has an assigned role in the described artistic undertakings. "One could say that we all have our tasks. This is great because we do everything on time. We act together and we are with our Ukraine" – 4/F/S. Among the respondents there are those responsible for promotion, i.e., posters and information on the school's website, for performance, dance, and scenery.

In their experiences, the respondents point to the sense of stability provided by the family with whom they came to Poland. "We ran away leaving everything behind. We miss it. But we probably won't be back." – 11/M/V. "At first, it was very hard for us, but thanks to our parents and siblings and because we are together, it started to get better and better" – 2/M/M. The family as the basic cultural community helps to preserve Ukrainian tradition and history. For them, it is a source of awareness of their own identity and an added value in activities undertaken for the benefit of Ukrainian culture in school and peer environment. At home, young refugees speak Ukrainian, tell stories from the lives of previous generations. Outside, they try to speak Polish to learn the language faster. "The family is our little Ukraine here in Poland" – 2/M/M. Basically, they live in the same way as before the Russian attack: they cook the same dishes at home, they maintain the habitual routine of everyday life, they stick to their beliefs and organize festivals in a similar way. The awareness of family members of young refugees is focused on the cultural heritage of their ancestors, and as regards their efforts at its preservation it is only the place of living that has changed. Students transfer all activities carried out at school to their home environment. They seek parents' advice on how to present particular elements of culture and involve them in the preparation of costumes and scenography. They share the family stories they hear at home with the school and peer group. "We ask mom and dad how it used to be. About the fate of our grandparents, about their favourite dishes, clothes, but also whether they took part in any military operations or where they worked" – 4/F/S.

The respondents also initiate meetings between their families, involving them in school and extracurricular projects. Thanks to this, the cultural community created in the educational environment has a chance to develop also outside of the educational institution. The more so that in the course of everyday duties, the respondents' parents often lack time for contacts with the Ukrainian minority gathered in associations in Poland. "We like these outings together. It's like we've

enlarged our family or regained a lost one” – 2/M/M. “We came to Poland, and it is difficult for us to keep in touch with aunts, uncles, etc., and through these meetings we gain new family members with whom we can share our thoughts” – 11/M/V.

Outside of school, the respondents meet, like most young people, in the place of their residence: on sports fields, playgrounds and other green areas. Most often, however, they seek contact with young people of Ukrainian origin. In the peer group, they live enclosed in their own distinctiveness – they are afraid of being noticed by Others. “On some occasions, when we spoke Ukrainian in a public place, passers-by paid attention to us” – 3/F/K. “We feel best in our own company, most at ease, but we do not close ourselves off to others” – 2/M/M. During the meetings, young refugees talk mainly about everyday events, anxiety related to the fate of their country, but also about their feelings related to their adaptation to living in the Polish culture and community. What binds them together is popular culture, they share their feelings and opinions while listening to music or watching movies. They try to take advantage of the fact that they do not have to live in a war zone. They get to know the area in which they currently live, organizing bicycle and walking trips to interesting urban and green spaces in Olsztyn. “We are fortunate to live in a beautiful place with many lakes and forests. It reminds us a bit of the beautiful landscapes in Ukraine” – 11/M/V.

The peer group provides them with support in everyday worries and helps them solve problems. Being together is the most important thing for them as, in their opinion, it prevents them from feeling lonely, alienated, different, because not from here. It helps them overcome the feelings of inferiority resulting from the fact that they do not speak the language, that they are not in their own country, that they do not live in their own culture. It also allows them to cope with difficult moments of self-doubt related to school failures resulting from language barriers.

## 5. EXPECTATIONS OF THE RESPONDENTS REGARDING FORMATION OF THEIR CULTURAL IDENTITY

The respondents indicate the need for integration with the Ukrainian minority in Poland. Currently, they do not feel part of this community, do not participate in projects carried out by organizations related to Ukrainian culture in Poland. However, they would especially like to meet young people whose ancestors came from Ukraine in other periods of European history. In their opinion, this would strengthen the Ukrainian community and enable communication among individual generations of the minority. “We have no contact with other Ukrainians. And getting to know them could help us in functioning in Poland” – 11/M/V. “It is a pity that the Ukrainian minority does not organize meetings with refugees. We would like to be part of this community. It is important for us to be with the rest of people from Ukraine” – 6/M/Y. Young refugees express the need to be part of the Ukrainian national community in a foreign country, i.e., to preserve their own cultural space. It does not mean that they want to close themselves off to

Others, but that they wish to secure their own sense of distinctiveness while being open to coexistence. Active participation in the life of the Ukrainian minority is their chance to develop their own identity in the perspective of their cultural roots, while at the same time opening up to elements from other cultural areas. This is the way to intercultural dialogue – to coexistence on the periphery of various elements of identity structures – to adaptation. “We know that we will not return, we will live, study and then work here in Poland, but we do not want to give up our roots” – 8/F/A.

The second issue that resounds in the respondents’ statements is the fear associated with the question of social acceptance of their cultural expression by which they do not mean to impose their own values and norms, but only to maintain their tradition. Young refugees emphasize that outside the school where they were well received, they do not always have the courage to reveal their origin. “We always wonder about people’s reaction to our being Ukrainian. We don’t want to impose anything on anyone, although our culture is beautiful, and we are always happy to present it” – 7/F/A. The respondents would like to be perceived through the prism of establishing intercultural dialogue and ways of coexistence. They hope for more openness on the part of their peers and adults that they meet in their daily lives. They believe that they can contribute to this by acquainting their environment with Ukrainian culture, which will simultaneously help them to form their own identity. “We have a constant need to talk about our country, to gain new information and thus learn our history. We want to share it with others” – 10/F/Y.

The respondents express their willingness to become part of the multicultural community of Warmia and Mazury, members of the Ukrainian minority in Poland. They want to be able to develop their own identity, rooted in what is traditional, valuable, and derived from the history of their ancestors. At the same time, they are open to what is different/new/contemporary striving towards multidimensionality of individuals and social groups, identifying themselves with different origins, but living in the same territory and caring for it together. “I already feel from here, I’ve got used to it. I feel safe and basically, I’m fine here” – 2/M/M. Belonging to a local community is a way to fully adapt and settle into a new living environment. Young refugees realize that being part of a multicultural group related to a given territory, they can shape their own living space, and also the native culture and transcultural identity structures of all its members.

## CONCLUSIONS

Cultural identity of the respondents – young Ukrainian war refugees provides grounds for their stable functioning in the space of unfavourable living conditions in which they found themselves together with their families. Forced migration, leaving the place where they formed the sense of their own and collective belonging to a specific structure of a social – territorial – national group, deprived the respondents of a sense of stability in terms of I-We-They.

The initiative to stimulate and organize activities aimed at supporting Ukrainian cultural identity in the school environment sets a common goal for students, enables them to develop similar beliefs and ways of solving problems accompanying their education. It liberates, constitutes values and norms of conduct derived from tradition and contemporary political events. Implementation of artistic projects, film meetings and workshops in the field of Ukrainian culture creates a kind of safe haven within the school walls, where young people can move towards the awareness of their own culture, but also open up in the periphery to multiculturalism.

An important element in shaping the cultural identity of students of Ukrainian origin are meetings with representatives of institutions and non-governmental organizations. Establishing cooperation, participation in extracurricular projects, on the one hand, integrates young people as a community/group, and on the other, sets them a goal in activities aimed at supporting Ukrainian culture, their own expectations and views, and ways of solving problems. This leads to the opening of students to cooperation and intergenerational, interinstitutional and intercultural dialogue. The integration of young people that takes place in the school space enables young refugees to work out tasks that determine the development of their cultural identity.

The family environment provides young refugees with knowledge about their ancestors and determines the formation of views related to the dynamically changing political situation in Ukraine. Their activity in the home and peer environment perpetuates the tradition of Ukrainian culture in the minds of young people, which provides them with a sense of stability, uniqueness, distinctiveness and results in discovering the need to show their otherness and learn from other cultural groups. It facilitates young refugees' adaption to new living conditions. It leads to family reunification, creation of a new Ukrainian community – people who came to Poland after February 24, 2022. A community whose identity structures are open on the periphery to what is different, but valuable, while maintaining their own native traditions.

The respondents are eager to undertake activities aimed at presenting their culture and history, but also to take over from Others what is significant, i.e., dynamic co-creation of a multicultural community. They postulate a willingness to contact and cooperate with organizations of the Ukrainian minority in Poland. They do not want to impose their culture on others. They only look for a space providing them with new opportunities to form their own Ukrainian cultural identity, which can become part of the transcultural structure of the local environment of Warmia and Mazury. It gives them an opportunity to take an active part in co-creating their own identity, which is influenced by the experiences and views of people having different fates. At the same time, it is a path towards full adaptation and responsibility for the environment in which they live.

The research contributes to the issue of the identity of ethnic and cultural minorities in Poland and the prospects of creating transcultural societies in the era of political, economic, and social changes of the 21st century. It should

be extended to include a larger research group of Ukrainian youth studying in secondary schools in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship (and subsequently in other areas of Poland) and for a comparative analysis of the functioning of these students within the institutions, taking into account their specific character.

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# The Church's Responsibility for Sports for Children and Youth in the Light of the Teachings of Pope Francis

## Odpowiedzialność Kościoła za sport dzieci i młodzieży w świetle nauczania papieża Franciszka

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**Abstract:** The article aims at presenting the teaching of Pope Francis on sport and on the need for active participation of the Church in this area. Based on an analysis of Pope's document titled *Giving the Best of Yourself. A Document on the Christian Perspective on Sport and the Human Person*, but also on his other messages and statements, the article encapsulates Francis' position on the responsibility of the Church for the sport community of children and youth. The conducted analyses show that Pope Francis affirms the Church's responsibility for sport, which is a global phenomenon endowed with numerous values and which can thus be used for the full and harmonious development of young people, in terms of both their physical fitness and health, as well as their socio-cultural, ethical and spiritual condition. Through its pastoral leaders, the Church participates in all dimensions and stages of sports development building its humanistic and personalistic facet as well as in its social practice.

**Keywords:** sport, the Church, children and youth, the teaching of Pope

**Abstrakt:** Celem artykułu jest ukazanie nauczania papieża Franciszka na temat sportu i potrzeby aktywnej obecności Kościoła na jego gruncie, w oparciu o analizy papieskiego dokumentu zatytułowanego *Dać z siebie to, co najlepsze, w chrześcijańskiej perspektywie sportu i osoby ludzkiej*, ale także innych przesłań i wypowiedzi, stanowiska Franciszka dotyczącego odpowiedzialności Kościoła za tę wspólnotę dzieci i młodzieży, jaką jest sport. Z przeprowadzonych analiz wynika, że papież Franciszek potwierdza odpowiedzialność Kościoła za sport, który jest fenomenem globalnym, mającym liczne walory, które mogą być wykorzystane do pełnego i harmonijnego rozwoju młodego człowieka w jego wymiarze sprawnościowo-zdrowotnym, społeczno-kulturowym oraz etyczno-duchowym. Kościół przez swoich duszpasterzy uczestniczy we wszystkich jego wymiarach i etapach rozwoju, zarówno w budowaniu humanistycznego i personalistycznego jego oblicza, jak również w jego praktyce społecznej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** sport, Kościół, dzieci i młodzież, nauczanie papieża Franciszka



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## INTRODUCTION

The present article addressing the issue of sport in the teaching of Pope Francis was inspired by was the announcement by the Holy See of a high-ranking document on sport, entitled *Giving the Best of Yourself. A Document on the Christian Perspective on Sport and the Human Person* (Giving the best 2018). The institutional author of this document is the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, under the leadership of the Prefect Cardinal Kevin Farrell. It was prepared by an international team, which included representatives of many professions, holding various positions in the structures of sport, and dealing with it from diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives (Press Conference 2018). It is worth noting that work on the document has been conducted for many years as it originates in a distant past and is related to a project undertaken by the Pontifical Council for the Laity, to which John Paul II entrusted the task of developing cooperation with sports organizations at the international and national level and of inspiring local church communities to create sports pastoral service and care for sports environments.

On the occasion of announcing the new document on sports, Pope Francis sent a letter to Cardinal Farrell, in which he wrote: “The value of sports consists in its being a place of unity and encounter between people. We reach great results, in sports as in life, together, as a team! Sports is also a formative vehicle. Perhaps today more than ever, we must fix our gaze on the young, because the earlier the process of formation begins, the easier the person’s integral development through sports will be. We know how the new generations look at sportsmen and are inspired by them! The participation of all athletes of every age and level is, therefore, necessary; because those who are part of the sports world exemplify virtues such as generosity, humility, sacrifice, constancy, and cheerfulness. Likewise, they should make their contribution to the group spirit, to respect, healthy competition, and solidarity with others. (...) To give the best of oneself in sports is also a call to aspire to holiness. (...) For the Christian athlete, holiness will, therefore, consist in living sports as a means of encounter, personality formation, witnessing, and proclaiming the joy of being Christian with the people around oneself” (Franciszek 2018).

The aim of the article is to present the teachings of Pope Francis on sport and on the need for active participation of the Church in this area. The article uses desk research data, mainly from in the papal document titled *Giving the Best of Yourself. A Document on the Christian Perspective on Sport and the Human Person* as well as in other teachings. The article is of a theoretical character, and it lays emphasis on reflection and highlighting the merit of the Pope’s teaching on sport, without referring to empirical studies. The following research methods have been used in the article: analysis of subject literature, as well as axiological, comparative, but also idiographic and nomothetic methods.

## 1. UNDERSTANDING SPORT

Sport in (post)modern societies, but also in traditional ones, is the subject of interest of researchers representing various fields and disciplines of science. This is the result, on the one hand of recognizing the possibility of realizing many important values, especially among children and young people, and on the other, of the growing popularity, attractiveness and demand for sport in global society. Sport brings numerous and multidimensional advantages. It can support proper development of a person's somatic structure, physical fitness, endurance, health and motor skills. It can serve the implementation of aesthetic patterns and allow to satisfy hedonistic needs of a kinetic nature. Sport can support implementation of universal values, which are primarily manifested by Olympism and its entire humanistic background. Sport involves such values as peace, friendship, justice, goodness, nobility, beauty, solidarity, brotherhood, truth, but also fair play. Moreover, sport can be used to implement patriotic, military, national and ethnic, mercantile, class, health, educational, political, religious, and other values (Dziubiński 2022).

Bearing the above in mind, let us try to organize the knowledge by slightly schematizing and simplifying the issue of sport, according to the criterion of values that we assign to it. The first vision of sport results from focusing on the corporeal and biological nature of man. In this case, sport is intended primarily to achieve development, fitness, performance, health, corrective, compensatory and rehabilitation goals. Therefore, training and competition conducted with this attitude are intended to bring about the desired changes in the biological structure of a person. Such an understanding of sport locates it primarily in the sphere of the culture of existence as sport ensures the development of a person's somatic structure, maintaining a certain level of his or her functional fitness and allows the recovery of the lost physical and motor potential. The second vision of sport serves not only comparison and competition in terms of physical fitness, but above all the implementation of humanistic values voiced primarily in the slogans of Olympism and the Olympic movement. It is the question of universal values such as peace, friendship, brotherhood, beauty, truth, and goodness. Such an understanding of sport additionally serves the purpose of implementing local values related to the cultivation of traditions and customs, as well as national symbols. It locates sport not only in the sphere of the culture of existence, but also in the sphere of social and symbolic culture. The third vision of sport has its theistic, Christian, or more precisely Catholic, origin and has the widest scope. Without questioning either bodily and biological goals of sport or its humanistic values, it expands the vision of sport to include its theocentric, personalistic and religious dimensions. Sport understood in this way gains additional axiological justification, based on the values of Christian tradition, the theological and philosophical background, the *Holy Scripture itself*, but also on the evolving doctrine of the Church. This type of understanding of sport locates it both in the sphere of the culture of existence, the sphere of social culture, but also in the sphere of symbolic culture extended by the issues of the supernatural.

Therefore, we can say that there are three theoretical approaches to sports, namely 1) the somatic-biological approach (focusing on matters of the biological body), 2) the universal-humanistic approach (taking into account biological issues and supplementing the concept of sport with socio-cultural values) and 3) the personalistic-theological approach (accepting and strengthening the meaning of the two previously mentioned approaches and expanding the concept of sport to include the dimension of transcendence) (Dziubiński 2020). The present article focuses on the last one, namely, the personalistic and theological approach.

## 2. A COMMUNITY OF THE CHURCH'S AND SPORT'S GOALS

According to Francis, the Church is present in sports in an organized and institutionalized way. This allows not only to promote the Christian vision of sport, but also to implement that vision into sports practice, realized in various forms and at various levels. The Church has manifold organizational structures dealing with the phenomenon of sport, which support sport from both an institutional and pastoral perspective (*Giving the best* 2018).

According to the Pope, sport is a reality that is open to all and invites everyone without exception. It is a community that meets people's expectations and helps eliminate various barriers and obstacles. It attracts people to stadiums, pitches and sports halls to help them pursue their interests and realize their passions. Among other areas of life, it is sport that supports the downtrodden and the bereaved, the marginalized and those rejected by their closer or further social environment. It takes care of immigrants, but it is also open to the rich and the poor, to the strong and the weak alike. It offers a common space for encounter and creates opportunities for personal development (Dziubiński 2020, 185).

Sport is a field that brings together young people from different backgrounds and in different life situations. Similarly, the Church reaches out to people and invites everyone to itself. As Francis says, "The way of the Church is precisely to leave her four walls behind and to go out in search of those who are distant, those essentially on the 'outskirts' of life. (...) Not only to welcome and reinstate with evangelical courage all those who knock at our door, but to go out and seek, fearlessly and without prejudice, those who are distant, freely sharing what we ourselves freely received" (Franciszek 2015a).

The issue of teleological similarities between sport and the doctrine of the Church was earlier pointed out by John Paul II. "This man is the way for the Church-a way that, in a sense, is the basis of all the other ways that the Church must walk". Thus, the antinomy between anthropocentric humanism and Christian theocentrism, between man's earthly aspirations and his duties towards God, disappears. The pursuit of the absolute highest value leads through the other man, and the implementation of man's earthly plans is somehow on the trail of his supernatural aspirations. This, in turn, is a proof that anthropocentrism and theocentrism are not contradictory, and what is more, they complement each other. Eliminating the antinomy between

anthropocentrism and theocentrism is of great importance for sport. First of all, it does not impose on man the necessity to choose between himself and his sporting aspirations, or God and the pursuit of spiritual perfection. There is no antinomy between the values of sport and spiritual values, on the contrary, there is convergence and harmony between them (John Paul II 1979).

### 3. SPORT IN THE SERVICE OF THE HUMAN PERSON

According to Francis, the Church is constantly trying to clarify the vision of sport that emerges from the truths inherent in the philosophical, theological, and doctrinal assumptions of the Church, but also from its centuries-old tradition and experience. This specific and original vision of sport emphasizes pastoral duties towards it, which consist in educational engagement in the growth of each young sports participant, regardless of his or her position and role in it. It also consists in creating bonds and building a community of people involved in sport (*Giving the best* 2018).

According to Francis, a man who is created in the image and likeness of God exceeds sport in importance. Man does not exist to serve sport, but it is sport that should serve man in his wholistic development. Each person constitutes a unity of body, soul and spirit, which means that real experiences of competition and sports activity must also affect young people in their spiritual dimension, since only then can sport become an important element of the education of the whole person. Francis encourages participation in play and sports, understood as part or stage of a comprehensive, holistic education, which means that it concerns the head, heart and hands, but also what one thinks, feels and does. According to the Pope, formal (school) education in our times has been limited and reduced to the intellectual and technical sphere, to equipping young people with mental and technological competences. Francis encourages us to open up to all forms of informal education, such as sports. Because, as he contends, in the process of formal education, which is aimed at acquiring utilitarian competences, “there is no room for lofty ideas of humanism, and where there is no humanism, Christ cannot enter!” (Franciszek 2015b).

When sport is truly human, when it respects the dignity of the person and is free from economic, media or political pressure, it can provide a model for all areas of life. According to Francis, when this happens, “sport transcends the level of pure corporeality and takes us into the arena of the spirit, even the mysteries” (Franciszek 2016). Christian education is aimed at preparing young people to discover humanistic values, to live them and strive for them. to achieve them, but it also takes into account the dimension of transcendence. The profound importance of sport is that it can prepare young people for a fully meaningful life (*Giving the best* 2018).

Sport can also be extremely attractive and interesting for the marginalized and those in difficult life situations. There are many international sports organizations, private associations and non-profit organizations that promote and use sport as an effective tool in working with young people who live in deviant environments, susceptible to gang influence, drug abuse and drug trafficking. Christian communities around the world

are already involved in initiatives that utilize sports activities and competitions, training, and various events as appropriate tools to divert young people from violence against others and the use of psychoactive substances (Giving the best 2018).

#### 4. PASTORAL COMMITMENT TO SPORT

Pope Francis states that involvement of the Church in sport guarantees, that sport will always be an experience of deep meaning and thus it will help to make the lives of young people more valuable. Sport must invariably aim at the integral formation of a person, at improving people's living conditions, but also at building positive interpersonal relationships. It should thus lead to the creation of one big family, a community of people of different races and nations, societies and cultures, classes and social strata, educated and uneducated, the wealthy and the poor, those with and without power, those occupying high social positions and those marginalized. That is why, pastoral care for sport is so important. It is in sport that the Church sees hope for solving various problems of individual people, as well as those that plague local and regional communities, but also the community on a global scale (Giving the best 2018).

As Francis said, "It's beautiful when a parish has a sports club and something is missing without one" (Franciszek 2014). However, the ideological and practical assumptions of the sports club in the parish must be consistent with the requirements of faith and be anchored in Christian education and pastoral project. There are many benefits to the presence of parish sports clubs. They enable young people not only to meet during training and go to camps together, but they also create opportunities to meet during tournaments and sports competitions held at the diocesan or national level. In addition, parish sports clubs should offer sports not only to children and young people, but also to older people, whose number is increasing in post-modern societies and who are also waiting for an interesting offer in the field of sports activities, tailored to the needs and possibilities of their age group (Giving the best 2018).

The Church should develop appropriate pastoral plans for accompanying and assisting coaches and athletes, i.e., for those who have a significant impact on the reality of sports, but also on other areas of life outside sports. Part of this accompaniment should consist in helping athletes understand the true role, meaning and the essence of sport, as well as its socializing impact on the attitudes and behaviors of numerous children and youth, but also adults. "This professional dimension of sport must never ignore its impact on beginner athletes. When a competitive or professional athlete cultivates the humanistic values of sport, when through sporting practice he or she strengthens the basic values of sport, such as the common good, generosity, camaraderie and beauty, the benefits for young athletes and society in general are difficult to overestimate". The Church should accompany athletes on their personal journey, helping them understand their responsibility for the socializing impact on large numbers of spectators, especially young people, for whom the attitudes and behaviors of athletes are role models (Dziubiński 2020, 196).

## 5. PASTORAL CARE OF SPORTS ANIMATORS

Pope Francis contends that without an educational strategy pastoral care of sports for children and youth is not possible. This involves the active role of all those who have chosen sport as a way to serve the Church and help achieve its goals. Sport needs, above all, teachers, not only services providers devoid of any ideals. Pastoral care of sports cannot be improvised, but it requires competent people (having professional, cultural and moral competences) as well as those motivated to rediscover the educational role of sport and having the need to engage in serving the Christian vision of sport. Coaches, referees, teachers, and managers play extremely important roles in sports, because they have a decisive influence on the attitudes and behaviors of athletes. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare a formation and pastoral plan addressed to sports animators. The implementation of such a plan may eventually play a key role in humanization of sport. In social practice, each animator looks for the best, most holistic and unique plan for those entrusted to his or her care. Supplementing this plan with a pastoral content can help create an integral, wholistic plan that would address all dimensions of a young person's development (*Giving the best* 2018).

Dialogue and cooperation with the family, especially with parents, becomes an important element of integrated and continuous pastoral care, especially for children and young people. It is extremely important that families recognize and accept the educational and pastoral goals that should be incorporated into the sports training process. Of course, this does not mean that a sports proposal should be a confessional one, but it certainly cannot be a neutral proposition as regards values. Therefore, it is important to organize meetings and create conditions for dialogue with parents to make them aware of the roles and importance of educational elements in the sports training process, share with them priorities in the field of upbringing, but at the same time emphasize the key roles of sports coaches and managers in this process (*Giving the best* 2018).

According to Francis, sport is developing, among other things, thanks to the involvement of many volunteers. They play a fundamental role in the development of sport, which goes far beyond technical and organizational skills. Through their actions and testimony, they cultivate a culture of gift and a style of gratuitousness. They help sport maintain its service-oriented function towards others, not only focus on the economic and bureaucratic dimension. These people need an accompaniment that will help them develop, validate their choices and motivations, and let them be harmoniously integrated into the organizational structure of sport. The presence of priests in sports must be validated by their usefulness. They should demonstrate that it is them who, through educational activities, assist athletes and facilitate achieving by them moral, cultural, and social goals. Their role cannot arise solely from theoretical justifications or intellectual analyses, often somewhat detached from everyday life. It is because sport expects specific ideas, strategies and practical actions that will help it develop harmoniously and sustainably. Sport is a world open to everyone, but at the same time it calls for pastoral leaders to

mark their competent presence in sport, to be aware of its dynamics, the roles played in it and specific skills necessary to function in sport (Giving the best 2018).

According to the Pope, it is vital for the pastoral care of sports to be included in the formation of candidates for the priesthood. In this case, it is the question of both providing the necessary knowledge in the field of pastoral care of sport and creating conditions and opportunities for them to practice sports at the seminary. Many seminaries around the world use proven programs and practices in this area. They make sport a permanent element of evangelization, as well as of seminary formation of seminarians, present in the process of priestly, human, spiritual and intellectual formation (*Giving the best* 2018).

## 6. SPORT AT THE SERVICE OF PASTORAL CARE FOR EDUCATION OF THE YOUNG

According to Francis, sport, as a great pastoral good must be valued and promoted in society. We are called to bring forth its great potential, values and advantages, including its distinctive principles, specificity and beauty, while emphasizing its technical and organizational quality. However, we must realize and constantly call to mind that the beauty of the human body in motion, perfectionism in performing various technical tasks, as well as organizational efficiency are not ends in themselves. Sport triggers passions and generates strong emotions, but the goal of pastoral activity must go beyond the level of emotions, it needs to produce long-term effects that can have a deep and lasting, and, above all, useful impact on everyday life. The task of pastoral leaders in sport is to accept athletes as they are, accompany them on their sports journey, help them make their choices in sport and other life spheres, but also give them reasons for hope and trust. It is a long-term process that does not end in a sports event, but requires patience and continuity, because it must bear fruit in everyday life, also after the end of a sports career (*Giving the best* 2018; Vecchi 1983).

“It is possible to change the world only if we change education” (Franciszek 2015c). In order to have a real impact on the formation of the athletes encompassed by our activities, the project of pastoral care for sport must be closely networked with local educational agencies, starting with families, schools and various types of public institutions. If we want to influence the educational process of youth, we must go beyond delegating educational responsibility to people working in silos, who often lack sufficient pedagogical competences. We must combine everyone’s efforts for education to develop a modern educational program together, using everyone’s specific experience. Only in this way, providing that all parties responsible for the education of our children and youth cooperate with each other, can education change and become more effective and thus better serve both individuals and society (Franciszek 2015c).

Pope Francis points out that by participating in sports, young people “taste the beauty of teamwork, which is so important in life”. To belong to a sports club means to reject every form of individualism, selfishness and isolation and provides “an

opportunity to encounter and be with others, to help one another, to compete in mutual esteem and to grow in brotherhood". Sports experience naturally promotes deepening friendships and building bonds. When valued and cultivated, they can transcend sports fields and arenas and become the basis for meaningful, important and lasting relationships between people. Sport, so to speak, has an empathetic character because it understands and connects people from all walks of life, creating a specific culture of encounter and being together. The throw away culture, the culture of marginalization are alien to it. Instead, the culture of openness and friendship is somehow attributive to it. Sport should also enable the integration of diversity, including diversity as regards the skin color, national and social affiliation, represented civilization and culture, religion, gender, age, class, wealth, social position, physical or intellectual disability. Everyone should have the opportunity to participate in the game, not only those who have exemplary developed bodies and virtuoso movement skills, but also those with limitations of various nature. Sport should also focus on the disadvantaged, just as Jesus did. In this way, sport becomes an egalitarian reality and an authentic element serving the development of society (Franciszek 2014).

The era in which we live and which we experience is not simply an era of changes, but it is an era that changes everything, a change intensified by technological and digital revolution. The young people who are growing up today are profoundly influenced by those changes, and sport itself is at their very heart, benefiting from scientific and technological achievements. The emergence and dynamic development of e-Sports (electronic sports) and new forms of doping, which are dependent on technological and medical innovations, are just the tip of the iceberg of a phenomenon that deeply permeates sport and gives its development a post-modern character. Technological and digital revolutions have brought many benefits to humanity, and they are rightly approached with respect. However, we must acknowledge that the currently dominant technological paradigm also brings negative effects. As Francis points out, those effects manifest themselves in many ways, including through "such as environmental degradation, anxiety, a loss of the purpose of life and of community living". Sport in this context can constitute a kind of preventive and therapeutic measure because it provides young people with the opportunity to meet other young people who sometimes come from very different social backgrounds (Franciszek 2015).

## CONCLUSIONS

According to Pope Francis, sport constitutes one of the contexts in which many young people from all cultures and religious traditions "learn how to give the very best of themselves". The experiences of people participating in sports, such as joy, encounter with others, building a community, developing the virtues and learning the rules of conduct, can be helpful in realizing the transcendent values and getting closer to God.

Pope Francis points out that the Church is responsible for the development of sport, understood as a community of people passionate about realizing their plans

and ambitions in competition with others. The Church is present in this community and participates in building its humanistic and personalistic face, however, she is also engaged in practical activities aimed at achieving success in sports, but also in life, in the physical, health, intellectual, social and cultural as well as ethical and spiritual dimensions. Church structures play an important role in this area, but those who carry the most responsibility for sports animation of children and youth, are priests in parishes, who need good teachers and educators, those professionally competent in sports, but at the same time empathetic, open and friendly, loving young people and their sports passions. Just like athletes during a competition, all pastoral leaders should do their best to guide young people through the effort of body and spirit to the desired sports prize, but also to the everlasting one.

Therefore, both athletes and everyone involved in sport, including pastoral leaders should make maximum effort to improve every day. Physical effort in sports serves the purpose of winning a competition, whereas in life, this effort is of a spiritual nature, and here, the ultimate goal of the fight is the everlasting prize of eternal life. There can be only one winner in sports, whereas, in Christian life everyone can be rewarded with the prize of salvation. Competition in sports often brings with it various dramatic events. In this, it is similar with the life of a Christian, which is full of unforeseen and distressing events. Both in sports and in life, championship is determined by the ability to seize one's opportunities, to use one's abilities and talents. In sports, work is aimed at achieving championship, while in life it is aimed at meeting God. Not infrequently, striving for success in sports is an excellent way to achieve the supernatural goal.

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## Kayak Sport Club Olsztyn as a Place to Develop Physical Fitness, Passion and Interests in Children and Teenagers

Kayak Sport Club Olsztyn jako miejsce rozwijania sprawności fizycznej, pasji i zainteresowań u dzieci i młodzieży

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**Abstract:** The aim of the article is to showcase canoeing as one of the forms of spending free time by children and youth, allowing them to develop their interests, passions, and physical fitness. Research on the role played by the KSC Olsztyn Sports Club in shaping the passions of children and youth was carried out by opting for the case study method and the semi-directed interview technique, focused on both the problem and observation.

The research on the issues raised indicated that canoeing is a sport that is an excellent form of socialization for young people. Furthermore, educational values connected with the said type of sport are invaluable. It is a discipline that increases the physical fitness of young people, shapes their character, and has a positive impact on their psyche. Canoeing-oriented training is also an opportunity to establish valuable interpersonal relationships.

**Keywords:** canoeing, passion, fitness, sport, development

**Abstrakt:** Celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie kajakarstwa jako jednej z form spędzania czasu wolnego przez dzieci i młodzież, rozwijającej zainteresowania, pasje oraz sprawność fizyczną. Badania dotyczące roli Klubu Sportowego KSC Olsztyn w kształtowaniu pasji i dzieci, i młodzieży zrealizowano z wykorzystaniem metody studium przypadku oraz techniki wywiadu częściowo kierowanego, skoncentrowanego na problemie i obserwacji. Refleksja nad podjętą problematyką wskazuje, że kajakarstwo to sport, który jest doskonałą formą socjalizacji młodych ludzi, a niesione przez ten rodzaj sportu wartości wychowawcze są nieocenione. Jest to sport, który zwiększa sprawność fizyczną młodzieży, kształtuje charakter, uczy odpowiedzialności i pozytywnie oddziałuje na psychikę. Treningi kajakarstwa są także okazją do budowania wartościowych relacji interpersonalnych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kajakarstwo, pasja, sprawność fizyczna, sport, rozwój



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## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

It has to be stated that the modern youth can be described as a notably varied group of people. Such individuals differ from one another not only with regard to age or gender, but also – when it comes to their fields of interests, values followed, as well as forms of spending their free time. A remarkable percentage of teenagers is engaged in various activities pertaining to their interests after finishing their school day. One has to note that a significant amount of free time is spent by modern youth on watching TV, listening to their favorite music, playing games on consoles or PCs, as well as on meeting with their peers. Nowadays, young people have less opportunities to truly engage in various forms of physical activeness, which is paramount when it comes to ensuring the satisfactory condition of their bodies. Anna Maszorek-Szymala (2021, 15) points out that physical activeness is one of the most efficient ways of preventing civilization-specific illnesses. During the course of childhood and adolescence, the aforementioned activeness should be the source of positive emotions and of experiencing true pleasure. It is also considered to be an excellent way of spending one's free time with either peers or with family members. Teens and children are characterized by their willingness to be dynamic to the greatest extent possible, which can be seen in spontaneous willingness to take part in various physical activities and in factual interest in their varying forms. Children tend to be physically active voluntarily and express enthusiasm. What is more, they quickly learn new motoric abilities (Raczek 2017, 13). The predominant goal of this article is to elaborate on research results pertaining to the role played by the KSC Olsztyn Sports Club with regard to encouraging children's and teenager's passions, as well as to the impact of physical activeness on the quality of overall functioning of modern young individuals. Nowadays, teenagers seek new areas of activeness that would provide them with the so-desired adrenaline rush. It may be that engaging in various sports-related activities supervised by qualified professionals can be perceived as an optimal answer to the needs of young people. This article focuses on the matter of canoeing being a passion that may help the contemporary youth to develop.

The issue of sports-related activeness has been touched upon many a time in the case of education-related examinations. What is more, pedagogues tend to perceive sports as a factor that may to a remarkable extent impact the development of a particular person. Both this article and pieces of research presented therein can be treated as a kind of novelty. It is caused by the fact that it is rather problematic to find examinations pertaining to the impact of canoeing as a sports discipline on one's personal development.

“Canoeing is a wonderful pastime. Thanks to it, we can experience nature up close, we can succumb to it, or become one with it. While canoeing, one may opt for both physical strength and the power of one's mind. While limiting oneself to strength only, there will be constant difficulties connected to canoe wobbling and to trying to pass certain obstacles. However, when one learns how to properly “understand the water”, decode currents, and find out how the canoe reacts to water, canoeing-specific

trips may become much longer, more satisfying, and easier. What is more, overcoming obstacles faced will then become a pure pleasure” (Jeleń et al. 2011).

## 1. PASSION AND ITS DEFINITIONS

Passion is considered as an important part of one's identity that additionally defines him or her to a remarkable extent. A person who has a passion is unlikely to say: “I am passionate about sports”, but rather: “I am a sportsman” (Litawa 2021, 16). Passion can be defined as “a strong focus on a personally meaningful and valued activeness which is adored and justifies itself by the very fact of its existence” (Curran et al. 2015, 631). It brings with it the willingness to achieve certain goals. “Passion is the basic prerequisite to achieve a higher level in realized tasks, including professional ones” (Melosik 2018, 11). “Some people have passions that are unlikely to manifest themselves outside the sphere of their own experiences. Such individuals derive a notable pleasure and joy from their activities. It may be stated, however that their passion is limited to ensuring pleasure to themselves. Nevertheless, there are people who want to change the world while making their dreams come true” (Bołtowiec and Jankowska 2019, 97). Joanna Frask (2021, 9) points out that one of the most efficient resources of a person, allowing him or her to develop in a harmonious manner, is the presence of a specific passion. Such passion makes an individual more prone to cogitation (Kopaczyńska 2019, 191). “Pursuing a given passion is the manner of experiencing the world, oneself, one's capabilities, and is a specific form of reflection-based learning” (ibidem).

For most people, passion is the source of a myriad of positive experiences. Individuals tend to engage in actions being closely related to their passions voluntary, with a notable engagement, and with the sense of validity of their actions.

## 2. ROLE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVENESS IN THE LIFE OF A PERSON

One of key elements of a healthy lifestyle is physical activeness, the importance of which in the life of a modern person has been recognized in the context of exacerbating health problems connected with the lack or insufficient mobility (Maszorek-Szymala 2010). Physical activeness is one of key factors responsible for proper physical and mental development of both children and adolescents. What is more, when it comes to mature individuals, it improves health condition and the overall quality of life (Chabros et al. 2008). It is rather terrifying that physical activeness as seen through the prism of Polish society is very low, especially among young people. It is frequently replaced with activities that are connected with remaining immobile for long periods of time: watching TV or playing games on consoles or PCs (Chorzewski 1997). Regular physical activity is one of the most important components of a healthy lifestyle. It serves an important role when it comes to improving and maintaining a desirable level of physical fitness. Fitness achieved during one's school years is rather difficult to maintain throughout life.

The need of teenagers to be active seems to be self-explanatory, especially in the context of their biological and health-related needs. High mobility is the key to the existence and the proper development of the body (Byzdra et al. 2013).

Low physical activeness level of both children and teenagers, as well as the prevalence of sedentary lifestyle are behind the increased frequency of various health-related problems in the said age groups. It is worth pointing out the obesity epidemic, type 2 diabetes being diagnosed in increasingly younger individuals, as well as other problems that may translate directly into proneness to cardiovascular system diseases (Zawadzka et al. 2015). Therefore, the need to popularize various types of sports among young people is becoming increasingly important.

### 3. CANOEING

Canoeing classes allow teenagers to experience a myriad of positive emotions. Canoeing is a sport that grants excitement. It is connected with risk, as well as it requires physical fitness and good orientation (Maćkowski and Bodnar 2018, 19). It is also a discipline that shapes one's character. "Taking care of the available equipment develops responsibility, accuracy, and trustworthiness. A small canoe perfectly shows how important it is to keep all the things in order and how crucial it is to be equipped with a proper clothing or life-jacket" (Maćkowski and Bodnar 2018, 20). Cooperation among canoeing aficionados participating in various clubs and being at varying ages grants the possibility of establishing valuable interpersonal relations. The said sports discipline requires creative and innovative methods of solving unusual problems, which makes it possible for minors to work on developing their identity (Konopczyński 2006, 157). The necessity to cooperate with the team, to respect the experience of the coach, and appreciate the beauty of the nature surrounding the trip participants are key advantages of the discussed form of psychical activity. Young people spending their free time in canoeing clubs actively participate in various kinds of exercises and trials throughout the year, regardless of weather conditions. Both children and teenagers take part in water-based exercises, they swim, hike in the mountains, as well as exercise in the gym. It all allows them to show and shape both their ambition and perseverance.

When it comes to canoeing, a coach is one of key figures, as his or her task is to take advantage of the willingness of young people to participate in physical activeness and to use their remarkable energy reserves, as well as to cultivate in them the passion they feel towards this particular sport. The coach should be a respected figure, but also – a person providing support in critical situations, allowing participants to come to terms with and to adapt to new tasks. Young people starting their adventure with kayaking often have certain problems with keeping balance while inside a canoe. What is more, they do not want to traverse deep waters, being afraid of falling into it and getting wet. In the discussed scenario, the coach should give the beginners some time to observe their older friends, to learn new skills, as well as should motivate them to take up new challenges. Spontaneity and natural approach are among the most desired

traits in canoeing coaches. In order to become a proficient canoeist, one has to be strong, determined to achieve certain goals, and motivated. One of training elements, especially when it comes to young canoeists, are strength-based sports, which give them the opportunity to get rid of physical tension and improve their self-control mechanisms. Canoeing is a type of sport that allows for performing versatile, yet very efficient movements. Exercises that are closely related to this discipline develop physical fitness and improve such personality traits as: perseverance, determination, composure, and courage (Cholewa and Szepelawy 2005). "Canoeing classes take part in highly specific and remarkably dangerous conditions. That is why, they have to be preceded with the explanation of safety rules and ways of behaviour while swimming. Such principles also have to be followed without exceptions" (Cholewa and Szepelawy 2005, 28). Therefore, a notable responsibility for the health and safety of participants lies within the coach. His or her role is to plan spots where classes can take place, predict possible weather conditions, as well as to check the equipment and clothing of the participants. The coach must also equip children or teenagers with basic knowledge pertaining to safety rules (Bigiel 2005, 25). Boys and girls deciding to try their luck with canoeing should predominantly be able to swim very well, be able to get into and get out of their canoes, be capable of reaching the shore in any conditions, and always remember to wear their life-jackets before entering canoes (Dedo 2003, 93-94).

Conducting canoeing classes for children and teenagers requires both organizational and practical skills. The coach must be familiar with all methodological issues related to conducting such type of classes and ensure the safety of the entire group. It may be that such requirements make this type of sports activities rather rare.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY OF OWN RESEARCH

Research on the role of the KSC Olsztyn Sports Club in shaping children's and teenager's passions, as well as on the impact of physical activeness on the quality of overall functioning of modern youth was conducted between November 2022 and March 2023. Kayak Sport Club Olsztyn is a public benefit organization that organizes general classes for children aged 8-12. The club, under its current name, has been functioning since 2001. It was established in 1954. Therefore, it can be stated that it is a sports-based organization that has a remarkable history. The club is one of 81 units of such kind in Poland that has been maintaining and managing its own canoeing section. The aspect that makes the KSC Olsztyn stand out among other organizations is the openness to young people, willingness to organize classes for children from various societal backgrounds, excellent cooperation with the socio-economic environment, and praiseworthy achievements of the members of the club in question.

A case study method was used to gather key empirical material (Stake 2009, 623), within the scope of which an analysis of the importance of physical activeness of children and teenagers taking part in sessions organized by Kayak Sport Club in Olsztyn was conducted. The research issues had the form of the following questions:

What is the role of canoeing in the life of a young person? How does sporting activity affect the mental and physical health of young people? Is canoeing becoming a passion of young people. If so – in what way? The research was conducted by means of opting for a semi-directed, problem-focused interview (Rubacha 2016), as well as observing children and teenagers during their trainings. Interviews were conducted in training rooms, predominantly with children and teenagers aged 10-16, but also – with their coaches. Instructions were prepared for the interviews, which reflected the research problems. When it comes to the observation-oriented phase, it was based on observing and analyzing children, teenagers, and the coach during training sessions. The examination was embedded in the concept of symbolic interactionism in the interpretative paradigm.

Within the scope of the research, a purposeful and formalized sample was taken advantage of, as said sample included children, teenagers, and coaches being members of a specific sports-oriented organization, namely – Kayak Sport Club Olsztyn. Statements of the examined individuals were combined with codes, which were specific for individual people and used during the analysis of the empirical material. Notes were also taken during the observation phase. This paper is interpretative in character and it is connected with the fact that during the analysis, basing on interactionism, the interpretation of the reality of the respondents was reproduced on the basis of their statements, using the descriptive method of text interpretation. The results obtained in the course of the analysis are presented in the article in a selective manner. They constitute a compact narrative, combined with fragments of the respondents' statements.

## 5. SPECIFICITY OF THE SAMPLE

Individuals who took part in the examination were children and teenagers aged 10-15, regularly taking part in training sessions organized by the Kayak Sport Club Olsztyn, being a sports-oriented organization. The participation in the examination was voluntary. Interviews/talks were conducted only with children and teenagers who had agreed to take part in the research process. Five boys and a coach took part in the interviews. During the examination of the research material, the statements of the examined individuals were coded. Individual participants were assigned codes specifying their gender (CH – a boy) and age (for example: CH – 12). The coach was assigned a separate code (T). Outcomes of examinations discussed in this article are presented in a selective manner.

## 6. ROLE OF CANOEING IN THE LIFE OF YOUNG PEOPLE

When it comes to KSC in Olsztyn, both boys and girls aged 8-12 can take part in organized sessions, because – as stated by the coaches – it is the best developmental period when it comes to both learning and improving skills connected with canoeing. There are also older individuals, who started their sports-oriented

adventure in the aforementioned period in life. During training sessions, young people learn technical basics, so especially – how to enter a canoe, as well as how to move forwards and backwards. Each training session starts with a greeting (both children and teenagers learn proper, elegant behavioral patterns during trainings). Afterwards, there is a 20-minute warm-up session that frequently has the form of running or jogging. If the weather allows, the participants use canoes to swim, otherwise, they exercise in the gym. The thing that distinguishes the discussed sports club from the competing ones is the fact that children and teenagers take part in the sessions when they want to. What is more, during trainings, they are not forced to do anything. Training sessions are organized daily, from Monday to Sunday. There are members who train every single day, as well as those who attend classes twice or three times a week. Some members are children and teenagers, for whom participation in trainings is not enough, but they also want the possibility of meeting with peers and the coach. A coach often becomes an authority figure for young people and a person who has an impact on their lives. In addition to sports activities, he or she tries to instill most important values and principles that are worth following in life in children and teenagers.

*A coach must become an authority figure for the youth, in order to be able to not only help them develop their passion for sports, but also – to teach them basic values, principles, and behavioral patterns. (T)*

Under the supervision of the coaches of KSC Olsztyn, young people predominantly learn punctuality.

*We leave, for example, at 4:30 P.M. and if someone is even five minutes late, such a person cannot participate in the training. I am responsible for my group. No underage person can swim on his or her own without the supervision of an adult. (T)*

Participation in training sessions makes it possible to improve discipline, as the group has to follow certain rules set out by the coach. Nevertheless, the youth can also work on their self-reliance. Children and teenagers take part in competitions and summer or winter sports camps many times during a given year. There, they learn how to function in a group of peers. They can also become remarkably more independent and self-reliant by preparing meals, adjusting their clothes to weather conditions, and taking care of their hygiene. During such trips and camps, young people also have the opportunity of exploring various interesting places in Poland, at the same time broadening their horizons.

Canoeing coaches are typically canoeists with remarkable experience who can share their knowledge with others. Professional support, as well as a notable knowledge pertaining to the particular field are not only educational in character, but also allow to create a coach-sportsman bond that is based on honesty and trust. The said bond is the basis for working with teenagers. When they respect and trust the coach, they can come to him or her with their problems, as well as thank him or her for his or her work or engagement.

*The modern youth is very varying as a group. There are numerous open teens, but there are also some introverted ones. However, it happens to me quite often that some of them come to me to talk, share their problems with me, or simply exchange opinions, which shows that they trust me, but I also think that they simply like me. They sometimes give me some drawings or their other creations, which is very nice of them. (T)*

KSC Olsztyn has been cooperating with the Municipal Addiction Prevention and Therapy Team for many years. Training sessions are one of elements of the preventive program, the aim of which is to limit the probability of occurrence of hazardous behavioral patterns among children and teenagers, which currently are mainly connected with spending too much time using various technological devices or taking advantage of the Internet in an improper manner.

*I have been working with teenagers for many years and I have been observing various societal situations. As of currently, I do not meet teenagers overusing alcohol, drugs, or other substances of such kind. The most troublesome issue of the current generation is the excessive or improper use of the Internet. I frequently come across situations, in which two people sitting next to each other do not talk in real life, but rather communicate by means of an online application. (T)*

Time spent in the club is, for the members, the time devoted to improving their physical activeness, working on their canoeing-specific techniques, and meeting with peers. During the training sessions organized, there is no possibility of using phones, which aims at showing young people other, more attractive forms of spending their free time.

## 7. IMPACT OF SPORTS-RELATED ACTIVENESS ON BOTH PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH OF TEENAGERS

Canoeing is a discipline that is worth recommending, as swimming with the use of paddles requires remarkable motor skills – both fitness and coordination-based (Rynkiewicz and Rynkiewicz 2009, 5). Canoeing is often considered a sport for life, positively affecting human functioning. During training, the physical development of young people is ensured, as they train to maintain a proper body posture, strengthen muscles, and work on the precision of their movements, coordination of their body, as well as maintaining balance while in their canoe. The development of technology comes hand in hand with the overall worsening of motor abilities of young people. Participation in any form of sports-based activity is paramount and indispensable part of their development. The participants of the sessions organized by KSC in Olsztyn clearly stated that they were happy to be able to train there and expressed their willingness to take part in organized undertakings.

*I like coming to training sessions, mainly because I like to be on the move and to exercise. What is more, canoeing is a sport that has some appeal to it. Once you start training, it is hard to stop. I have been training for 5 years and I really like it. (Ch – 14).*

Canoeing is a sport that grants both children and teenagers numerous positive emotions, excitement, and adrenaline rush, but it also shapes their willpower and positively affects their mental resilience. Young people learn how to overcome their weaknesses and how to deal with difficult – or sometimes even extreme – situations. Experiences obtained during training sessions help them improve their durability and physical strength but boost their mental well-being as well.

The quicker the children start canoeing, the more likely they are to achieve remarkable successes in the future.

*We strongly encourage children aged 8-9 to start training in the club, because this is the best development period when it comes to improving their motor skills and starting to learn canoeing. Sometimes young people aged 13-14 come to us and want to join the club. This is a period when they have to put much more work and effort to learn basic skills related to technical aspects of canoeing (T).*

An early start of a sports-based training is important due to the existence of periods that are characterized by increased susceptibility to training-specific stimuli. The earlier the training starts, the longer the possibility of shaping the body and mental attitude of a sportsman-to-be. Canoeing can positively impact mental health of both children and teenagers. Training requires a lot for work and sessions frequently take place in unfavorable weather conditions, such as rainfall, extreme cold, or strong wind. All of those improve strong will and build resilience to stressful situations. Swimming in a single-spot canoe teaches a person taking responsibility for his or her actions. Training sessions and competitions in two-spot canoes help to work on cooperation-related skills and taking responsibility for actions of both individuals involved.

## 8. CANOEING – A TYPE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OR THE PASSION OF YOUNG PEOPLE?

Passion is defined as a great love for something (Szymczak 1998) and is related to intellectual involvement, often carried out regardless of “cold, hunger” or other discomforts, with certain hopes and the sense of great fulfillment (Łysakowska-Wencel and Wencel 1998). Robert. J. Vallerand (2012, 3) defines passion as an activity that a given person likes to be involved in and that grants him or her personal satisfaction. It is considered to be an important activity a person devotes his or her time and energy to.

*I have been training for 5 years and I am a canoeist. I take part in competitions and often win some medals. This sport is my passion, so I devote all my free time to training. (Ch – 14).*

While observing canoeing trainings the members of the club participated in, one could easily say that sports was their true passion. They trained with a remarkable engagement and willingness, regardless of weather conditions. Despite numerous school-related responsibilities, additional tasks, exams, and

other duties, they participated in training sessions every single day. It shows how important regular trainings, meeting with other sportsmen, and people sharing the same passion are for young people.

*I participate in training sessions every day because I like spending time at the club. I like exercising and swimming. It gives me great pleasure. I have been training for about two years and I cannot imagine spending my free time any other way now. (Ch – 13).*

Canoeing is a sport that has a remarkable impact on both the life and development of young people. It is one of the most demanding and difficult sports disciplines, as a canoeist has to frequently overcome the limits of his or her physical and mental capabilities. He or she has to overcome his or her weaknesses that may also be accompanied by problematic external conditions.

## CLOSING REMARKS

Physical activeness ensures a person at any stage of life optimal health condition. Regular exercising is important when it comes to preventing illnesses, improving fitness, as well as boosting well-being as a result of increasing of the amount of endorphins in the blood. Therefore, it can be stated that it improves stress and exhaustion resistance and may prevent societal issues from emerging. Physical activeness allows to relieve emotional tension in a natural way, whereas the desire to achieve sports-specific success motivates a person to change socially undesirable behavioral patterns (Zimna-Walendzik and Szatko 2012, 68). Engaging in sports and performing physical activities daily becomes a must. PE classes, as well as trainings organized after school are great methods of ensuring both children and teenagers the required amount of physical activeness.

Canoeing is a sport that offers numerous advantages: emotional and cognitive ones, health-related and educational ones, as well as the ones connected with the possibility of acquiring new skills. Thanks to canoeing, the youth can explore new places, learn to respect cultural achievements, and gain new abilities. Canoeing teaches young people how to behave in difficult and stressful situations, how to cooperate in a group, and how to develop physically. The provided results of interviews conducted among young people participating in canoeing training sessions and coaches indicate that canoeing is considered a sport worth further popularization, mainly due to its educational values and the fact that it grants the opportunity of spending one's time with peers in a pleasant yet developing way. There is the need to popularize not only canoeing, but also other types of sport among children and teenagers. Nowadays, they spend an excessive amount of time in front of the screens of various devices and have limited opportunities for physical development, which may negatively impact their physical fitness.

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# The Power of SweetNess? The Infantilisation Process of Japanese Youth. *Kawaii* and *Otaku* Subculture in the Perspective of Visual Anthropology

## Potęga słodczy? Proces infantyilizacji japońskiej młodzieży. Subkultura *kawaii* i *otaku* w perspektywie antropologii wizualnej

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**Abstract:** This paper presents the original Japanese *otaku* youth subculture, initially associated with young boys, and the *kawaii* (cute/sweet) culture, whose close relationship with young girls has been underlined in social science studies. The contemporary *kawaii* culture has been present in Japanese aesthetics and popular culture for many years, supported by the government program “Cool Japan”. Both psychologists and sociologists observe that the adorable cuteness of the *kawaii* culture, encountered in commercials, animated films, comics, toys, street fashion, popular music and even a peculiar manner of speaking, causes and perpetuates infantilisation of the Japanese youth. There is a new generation who are afraid of entering adulthood. The ubiquitous presence of the *kawaii* culture in contemporary Japanese society has been interpreted using the methods of visual anthropology, defined by some scholars as visual ethnography.

**Keywords:** subculture, infantilisation, Japanese youth, *kawaii*, *otaku*, visual anthropology

**Abstrakt:** Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie oryginalnej japońskiej subkultury młodzieżowej *otaku* związanej początkowo ze światem młodych chłopców oraz kultury *kawaii* przez badaczy społecznych wskazujących na jej związki z młodymi dziewczętami. Współczesna kultura *kawaii* jest obecna w japońskiej estetyce i kulturze popularnej od wielu lat, wspierana przez rządowy program „Cool Japan”. W opinii zarówno psychologów, jak i socjologów, urocze i słodkie *kawaii*, widoczne w reklamach, filmach animowanych, komiksach (mangach), zabawkach, modzie ulicznej, muzyce, a nawet specyficznym sposobie mówienia, powoduje proces infantyilizacji młodzieży. Pojawia się kolejne pokolenie, które obawia się wejść w dorosłość. Kultura *kawaii* została poddana próbie interpretacji z wykorzystaniem metod antropologii wizualnej, przez niektórych autorów definiowanej jako etnografia wizualna.

**Słowa kluczowe:** subkultury, infantyilizacja, japońska młodzież, *kawaii*, *otaku*, antropologia wizualna



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## INTRODUCTION

Most associate Japan with the technological revolution and the introduction of the consumerist lifestyle that emulated the American model. Attempts to discover what lies behind the facade of that modern society were made years ago by an American researcher Ruth Benedict in the study *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*. As a cultural anthropologist, she set out with the premise that even “the most isolated bits of behaviour have some systematic relation to each other” and that one thus can comprehend the most bizarre instances (Benedict 2016, 21). As a seasoned social researcher, she observed that one of the misfortunes of the 20th century was that we still go along with vague, prejudiced and stereotyped views about other nations because no attempts are made to try and learn about the culture, habits, and values that guide other peoples. Hence, she concluded that “the lenses through which any nation looks at life are not the ones another nation uses. It is hard to be conscious of the eyes through which one looks. Any country takes them for granted, and the tricks of focusing and of perspective which give to any people its national view of life seem to that people the god-given arrangement of the landscape.” (2016, 22).

The term *kawaii* derives from the word *kawayushi*, dating back to the 12th century. Originally, it meant “pitiful” and “poor”, but from the 16th century onwards it would denote “loved” and be used to refer to children and small creatures (Okayama & Ricatti 2008). Nowadays, *kawaii* has many meanings, including childlike, cute, innocent, honest, weak, and inexperienced (Kinsella 1995). The term was most often applied to children or women who, because of their delicacy, evoked pity, but at the same time appeared charming and lovely. In the modern period, the term began to denote things or attributes that were sweet and evoked friendly feelings. The English “cute” seems to be its closest equivalent, although this, too, is not an accurate translation. “The origin of *kawaii* should be sought in women’s culture, from the ‘fashion for cute writing’ to behavioural models. At present, *kawaii* is not limited to the female domain; it can also be employed with respect to men and boys. After all, by the 1980s the associative scope of *kawaii* had already expanded so much that it even included the emperor himself” (Janczarek 2017, 162).

Present in Japanese aesthetics and popular culture for many years and initially aimed at girls, the modern *kawaii* culture has undergone quite an evolution. It has transitioned from an independent subculture linked to the romantic manga market, comics and video games to an official culture supported by one of the government schemes. Thus, by the end of the millennium, “the term had evolved into a universal, hyperbolic superlative to be used by the young in body and spirit alike, representatives of all ages, genders and orientations: *kawaii* had become a Platonic ideal of innocence and acceptance” (Alt 2021, 126). As Japanese popular culture expert Matt Alt underlines, attempting to define the meaning of *kawaii* would be “pure folly” but, despite this caution, we will attempt to get to the core of the matter by exploring the origins, the essence, the generational inspirations and the contemporary impact of *kawaii* on both Japanese and international popular culture.

## 1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Nowadays, it is not the lack of information but its surfeit that presents a problem; therefore, it is crucial for the researcher to skilfully select the information obtained (Google search engine shows 315 million results for *kawaii*; the term is covered in an extensive Wikipedia entry). In order to enhance the examination of pertinent literature, field research utilising visual anthropology (also known as visual ethnography in various publications) was carried out in Tokyo during the autumn of 2022. This is because visual depictions such as images, photographs, and films – which are the fundamental languages of visual arts – serve as significant sources of information on social reality, including analyses of the younger generation (Kunat 2015).

Contemporary youth subcultures are manifested mainly through distinct symbols one encounters in street fashion, hairstyles, as well as in comics, anime, video games, films, advertising and the style of interiors designed specifically for young users (bars, cafés, shops, etc.). For this reason, visual anthropology was opted for as a method of inquiry since it constitutes a valuable source of knowledge, oscillating between art and science. Visual anthropology (ethnography) is considered by researchers as a paradigm that integrates various procedures for acquiring, analysing and interpreting visual data. At present, two currents are discernible in the field; on the one hand, it is interested in the means that an anthropologist may use to study foreign cultures, including photographs and films in the first place. On the other, it involves the study of the visual products of the “visible culture”, which in the 21st century has obtained its own unique visual aspects linked to the development of new social media (Rethinking 1997; Olechnicki 2003; Sztompka 2005; Pink 2008; Nowotniak 2012).

As Sarah Pink (2008, 34) argues, visual ethnography is a modality of experiencing, interpreting, and representing a culture or a community, while the theoretical and methodological premises of visual ethnography draw on the research tradition of image anthropology. While in Japan, that author gathered substantial photographic material documenting the presence of *kawaii* in the public space, whose interpretation will be attempted further on.

## 2. *KAWAII* – YOUTH CULTURE OF SUBCULTURE? THE DILEMMAS OF DEFINITION

The term *kawaii* gained increasing popularity in the 1980s and 1990s, “when the girl subculture flourished in Japan” (Bator 2014, 198). While some scholars describe *kawaii* as an original culture or aesthetics (Burdzik 2015), it is just as often presented as a distinct youth subculture (Kansal & Rakshit 2020), not unlike the *otaku*, i.e. devotees of Japanese popular culture in the shape of manga, anime, video games, and films about giant monsters, which have their precursor in Godzilla. Otaku serves “to describe one of the most robust subcultures to have emerged in Japan, although sociologists dispute whether ‘subculture’ is a fitting term for a group that is ostentatiously apolitical, inward-focused and openly unopposed to anything” (Bator 2014, 165).

Just as the *kawaii* phenomenon was initially associated with a subculture of young girls – only to become much more than a cultural niche today – *otaku* was intrinsic to the world of boys. Following the first generation of *otaku* born in the late 1950s and early 1960s, subsequent generations of *otaku* emerged, while the originally local subculture gained an international dimension, “opening up” over time to the world of young girls. According to Joanna Bator (2014, 167-168), *otaku* differ from other anime and video game enthusiasts in that they subordinate other areas of life to their passion and live in a world of virtual fascinations. Cited by Bator, the German sociologist Volker Grassmuck stated that the *otaku* draw radical conclusions from the promises of the age of technology, consumption and communication, believing that one can be the master of the world and everything can be bought, whereas face-to-face communication is unnecessary now that the internet and mobile phones have been invented. Should the *kawaii* culture be approached in a similar fashion? Before defining the historical context of its emergence, it may be worthwhile to determine the extent to which this phenomenon belongs to a specific youth culture, fitting well into the abundant and varied palette of youth subcultures.

The understanding and definition of the term “subculture” is debated in scholarly literature since it is often informed by the categorisation created by authors within their academic discipline. Witold Wrzesień finds that subcultures are a peculiar subject of interest for social sciences, “they have been and continue to be defined differently, which often makes their analysis difficult, but at the same time illustrates well the complexity of the issue and the wealth of the inner worlds that arise within them” (Wrzesień 2013, 37). Characteristically, taken colloquially, subcultures have usually been associated with social pathology, maladaptation, and attitudes that challenge and reject the established norms or encourage low-quality participation in culture (Sokołowski 2012). The very etymology of “subculture” already contains an element of inferiority and lesser value since “sub” in Latin means “under”, i.e., something that is beneath culture, ranks decidedly lower, is less valued, and is thus inferior to “true” culture (Pęczak 1992, 3). In descriptive terms, subculture denotes a segment of social life and its culture that is discerned according to an ethnic, professional, religious, or demographic criterion (Filipiak 1993, 13). The phenomena that the term encompasses include specific forms of conduct, social and religious movements, as well as music, song lyrics, certain customs, clothing, and symbolic and everyday objects (Wertenstein-Żuławski 1993, 19). It may be assumed that a subculture involves manifesting particular behaviours and communicating professed values, which, in a certain way, channel the discontent of those belonging to a given subculture.

The sociologists who study subcultures assert that they are evinced through a specific language, a separate system of information and communication, peculiar attire and hairstyles, and a manner of spending leisure time and frequenting specific venues. Meanwhile, representatives of subcultures argue that culture is the property of all societal groups and everyone is entitled to contribute to it. Therefore,

subcultures cannot be ignored, disregarded, or their existence overlooked as a component of the entire culture since they enrich it with new trends that often tend to be embraced by popular or even elite culture (Dyoniziak 1965; Hebdige 1979; Jędrzejewski 1999; Piotrowski 2003; Muggleton 2004; Preis 2005; Rychła 2005; Sokołowski 2007; Bąk 2008; Chaciński 2010).

The internal diversity of subcultures, compounded by the continual emergence of new representations, prompted a need to formulate a typology. As early as in the mid-1960s, Ryszard Dyoniziak (1965, 34) distinguished three types of youth subcultures: the typically criminal subculture, developing in well-integrated communities, the subculture of conflict, whose high member mobility is offset by general instability, and the withdrawal subculture, also known as the double-loser subculture, which brings together young people who do not have the opportunity to achieve success lawfully. The typology developed by Marek Jędrzejewski (1999, 87) is more extensive and more accurately reflects the contemporary reality of youth subcultures, among which the researcher distinguished: alternative and ecological-pacifist subcultures, subcultures of (social and moral) rebellion and escape, as well as creative subcultures in which the young seek development through artistic self-creation, functioning in an independent cultural circulation. The latter is a form of self-improvement and self-actualisation based on the principle of independence from professionals – established cultural creators.

Given the above, Japanese *kawaii* qualifies as a creative subculture; its influence is visible, especially in Japanese comics and animated films (manga and anime), offbeat fashion trends, music, and video games. However, its influence has long transcended the realm of youthful fashion and fascination, becoming a part of Japanese popular culture that receives official support under a government scheme. Nowadays, *kawaii* is no longer an exclusive subculture of young girls and women, as its aesthetics has become so predominant in Japan's social and cultural landscape that it is increasingly regarded as an intrinsic cultural heritage of the Land of the Cherry Blossoms. This process has been protracted and seen many pivotal moments, but it has inevitably resulted in infantilisation that affected not only the Japanese youth, considering that nominal adults (persons over the age of 18) display behaviours characteristic of adolescence, such as reading comic books, watching cartoons (anime) or playing video games (Barber 2008; Świąty dzieciństwa 2016).

### 3. CULTURAL INFANTILISATION. AN OVERLOOKED SIGN OF THE TIMES?

Social scholars noticed some time ago that speaking (and writing) about the traditional division of societies in developed Western countries (including the USA, Japan, and Australia) based on biological age is slowly becoming an anachronism. The process of infantilisation intensifies, being noticeable in the psychological, sociological, cultural, linguistic and biological domains. Many modern adults have embraced it as a means to escape reality, an expression of refusal to participate

in real, challenging and problematic life. It serves as a “medicine” that relieves stress and helps nurture the so-called inner child. By participating in a special kind of culture, reading literature, watching films and television series, and following the “adolescent style” in terms of clothing (such as the aforementioned Japanese *kawaii*), one can “return to the realm of childhood”. This gives rise to special, open time-spaces, fuelled secondarily by artefacts in the form of photographs, advertisements, or special objects (which will be analysed in greater detail later on in this paper). As for the main causes behind infantilisation and the adolescent reluctance towards entering adulthood, one cites departure from the traditional, conservative attitudes or a bid to shun the seriousness and solemnity in everyday life, as well as “the influence of other cultures, such as Japanese, where – in a country of rigid rules – society began to rebel, changing their appearance and lifestyle to a more childlike one” (Jarosz & Kosowski 2019, 112).

In terms of psychological manifestations of infantilisation, adolescents and “young” adults yearn for innocence and show unwillingness to bear the consequences of erroneous actions, which entail refusing responsibility for one’s conduct and constant avoidance of guilt. The process is attributed to the absence of a turning point in a person’s life, a certain rite of passage, or a kind of initiation into adulthood (Dobrołowicz 2016). Although a number of factors are involved, such as changes in the labour market, continuing education after completing a particular major, or the influence of the mass media which promote youth and youthful behaviour, changes in the perception of age categories and the escape into permanent “childishness” are probably also due to cultural infantilisation. However, a “childish” young adult is different from someone who is “childish” as a result of a natural process, e.g., a senior whose senility resembles the world of a child. Instead, infantilisation is more of a deliberate cultural-aesthetic strategy, a refusal to participate in socio-political life, a subcultural manifestation of dissent against the adult world that one finds intolerable.

Thus, culture witnesses gradual infantilisation, whereby “features that were formerly characteristic of the child become a universal and adopted set of values for adults. This set comprises the following characteristics: playfulness, reacting on impulse, emotional instability (...), irresponsibility, lack of long-term interpersonal relations, short-termism, volatility, fluidity, focus on one’s own needs, crossing boundaries” (Bogunia-Borowska 2006, 14). Although psychologist Erik Erikson (1997, 418) argued that “society must early (...) take care of the unavoidable remnants of infancy in its adults”, he probably meant strengthening the defence mechanisms in the adult against the latent fears of their childhood. The driving force behind the phenomenon should be seen in the intensifying processes of cultural infantilisation and commercialisation of childhood. As for the future, traditional social roles are likely to be blurred even further (Jasielska & Maksymiuk 2010).

The *kawaii* and *otaku* cultures did not cause contemporary Japanese popular culture to be puerile, having only reinforced and perpetuated the process. Takashi Murakami, the most internationally acclaimed of the contemporary Japanese visual

artists, observes that it is impossible to understand Japan today without *otaku*. When organising the enthusiastically received 2005 exhibition *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture* in New York, Murakami was surprised to learn that it was seen as a manifestation of the "subculture" associated with Hello Kitty-type creations.

In his eyes, there is no division between popular and high art in Japanese tradition, and the very idea of such a hierarchy comes from the West. The artist and theorist of the "super flat" maintains that "post-war Japan, living in colonial dependence on the United States, did not have the chance to grow up." Considering the category of childishness in relation to political institutions and the psyche of Japanese people, he finds that infantility and powerlessness have been interdependent and reciprocal traits of Japan's "super flat" culture for several decades, in which images of apocalyptic catastrophes, military gadgetry and perverse eroticism go hand-in-hand with the childlike sweetness of Hello Kitty (Bator 2014, 228). Next to Pokémon, the latter is indeed a "flagship" product of the aesthetically cute *kawaii*.

#### 4. *KAWAII* IN POLISH NARRATIVES

One of the first to introduce the *kawaii* subculture into Polish literature was Joanna Bator, a cultural studies scholar with an anthropological bent who sought to experience the Asian world directly and personally through cultural tourism. Her several stays in Japan (2004, 2011) yielded publications that combined cultural and social reflection with elements of analysis and field research: half novels, half reportages dedicated to intercultural communication. Although the author was criticised for highlighting the "weirdness" of certain aspects of Japanese culture and conduct, her books still enjoyed popularity in Poland as an introduction to Japan.

Writing about the Japanese predilection for miniaturisation, Bator noted that things are downsized to make them better, more comfortable or more beautiful, recalling simultaneously that miniaturisation has been accompanied by "*kawaii*-isation" since the 1980s. How does the author define the phenomenon? According to Bator, it consists of Japanese preference to appreciate things that are not only small but also *kawaii*: cute, uplifting and naive. One of these is the size-reduced and condensed *keitai* novel, the mobile phone narrative, dedicated mainly to melodramatic themes. "Novels composed of simple sentences and emoticons are *kawaii*. It is a familiar girl's world, taking on a new form thanks to modern technology. This is not the first time that young Japanese women have set a new trend in an act of collective spontaneous creativity" (Bator 2004, 41).

Such a portrayal was approached by experts as somewhat careless, "unprofessional", and subjective, though it may be justified insofar as it was a sign of the times when Japan remained a distant country for Europeans (including Poles). For this reason, Bator's journalistic account represents a product "packaged in the guise of pseudo-science" (Jabłoński 2016, 58) in which sloppy narratives do not serve to provide information on Japan but merely create a fictional reality while disregarding the facts.

A different perspective on *kawaii* was adopted by Karolina Bednarz (2018), a reporter and translator, a graduate of Japanese Studies from Oxford University, who lived and studied in Japan. Describing “Japan through women’s eyes”, she underlined that the image of the contemporary Japanese young woman or the teenage girl aspiring to be one has little in common with what applied centuries ago. Even little girls are taught that appearance determines their worth. If they are not *kirei*, or beautiful, they should at least be *kawaii*, i.e., cute. Bednarz observes that currently, being cute is much more difficult for young girls than meeting the standards of beauty or appealing looks. “Kawaii is behaviour, the way one speaks, and moves, hobbies, clothes, make-up (...) The fashion for *kawaii* was not created by business. Entrepreneurs merely capitalised on the rebellion of the 1970s teenagers who had no desire to fit in with social norms. Instead of reading the compulsory classics at school, they decorated the margins with hearts and stars, abbreviated words and wrote curlicue syllables, as children do (...). They were playing out their own puerile alter egos” (Bednarz 2018, 39). Girls imitating childlike behaviour became known as *burikko* – “pretending to be children” – while the *kawaii* would come to be regarded as a new subculture, the product of a generation that benefited from Japan’s economic boom of the late 20th century, who were indifferent to everything.

Similar in its expression, American popular culture was propagated via the aesthetics of Disney animated films, cutesy pop music, superhero comics, and women’s romance fiction (love-themed novels of negligible literary value, such as those published by Harlequin). When *kawaii* first appeared, it was initially intriguing and interesting as a new youth subculture, which would probably expire with the next generation and be forgotten, just as the generation of “flower children” – American hippies, British skinheads, punks, the Polish iteration of teddy boys known as “bikiniarze” (Chłopek 2005) or the delinquent-like “gitowcy”, and many other youth subcultures.

Contrary to those predictions, the *kawaii* phenomenon has proved surprisingly enduring, contributing to the infantilisation of successive generations of youth. Is this because “the Japanese *kawaii* aesthetics takes one back in time to an idealised childhood in which there (still) is no place for responsibility, norms or demands” (Bednarz 2018, 40)? Is permanent immaturity, the refusal to face adulthood and responsibility a way for the Japanese youth to find their place in the harsh realities of the 21st century? A brief overview of how *kawaii* developed may offer some insights into this particular social phenomenon of contemporary Japan.

## 5. KAWAII AS JAPANESE EXPORT CULTURE

Over the past decades, products of Japanese popular culture have been exported, sold and consumed throughout East and Southeast Asia. A wide range of such products is in evidence in major cities in the region. Japanese comic books are translated into the local languages of South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, and Taiwan and dominate the comic book market in East Asia. Japanese animated

characters Doraemon, Ampan Man and Pokémon are ubiquitous there, featuring in licensed or unlicensed toys and items. Japanese anime, usually dubbed, is immensely popular; Astro Boy, Sailor Moon and Lupin the Third are some of the animated characters found in virtually every shop selling anime (Otmazgin 2007).

Christine R. Yano, who studied the emergence and development of the character (mascot) Hello Kitty as part of Japanese culture and the governmental “Cool Japan” programme, argues that its international popularity is an aspect of what she calls “pink globalisation”, the spread of goods and images described as cute (*kawaii*) from Japan to other parts of the world (Yano 2013). In interviews she conducted, Yano reveals how consumers use this iconic cat to negotiate gender as well as (supra)national identity. She thus demonstrates that “pink globalisation” enables strangeness to be familiarised, as it combines the intimacy of cuteness and the distance of coolness. What Hello Kitty and its world connote to the audience spans innocence, sexuality, irony, sophistication, and happiness. *Kawaii* is cute, so it is worthwhile being *kawaii* to be equally “cute” and “charming”.

The rebellion against the society of consumerism, against Japan’s aspirations of technological perfection and becoming one of the world’s most developed economies, has somewhat unexpectedly taken the form of an escape from reality into a world of rosy delusion of happiness, childishness, funny kitties and the iconic Pokémon. For the subsequent young generation, duties and responsibilities have ceased to matter while pleasures have become precious (Gordon 2010).

According to Iwona Kordzińska-Nawrocka (2012, 108), the *kawaii* culture comprises people, animals and objects; it may define shapes, behaviour, gestures, words, fashion, clothing, hairstyles, ornaments, comic book characters and the comics themselves, animated films (anime) based on the latter, everyday items, accessories and gadgets. For this reason, one speaks of *kawaii* fashion and products, *kawaii* music and dolls, and stars of films and series. The complexity of the phenomena that the semantic scope of *kawaii* encompasses makes it practically impossible to formulate an unequivocal definition (Amit 2012, 178; Asano-Cavanagh 2012; 2; Miller 2011, 7; Nittono et al. 2012). In order to capture the essence of *kawaii* better, let us now interpret its artefacts using the method of visual anthropology.

## 6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Following the field research conducted in Tokyo, the collected artefacts – in the form of photographs – demonstrate that the *kawaii* culture is intensely present in Japan’s public spaces. Initially disapproved, the subculture of young girls who dissented against the traditional cultural norms and values of contemporary Japan in the making, *kawaii* has become part of the mainstream culture in the Land of the Cherry Blossoms. Despite the lapse of time and the fact certain themes – with their “oversweet” pink aesthetic dating to the 1980s – may have become somewhat unoriginal, it is clear that *kawaii* plays an important role in the country’s culture, continuing to promote Japan.

The preference for cute goods with their adorable *kawaii* design has a positive impact on the economy. The authorities officially support the creators of this culture as part of the “Cool Japan” programme, whose concept was launched in 2002. It originated outside Japan, drawing on an article by Douglas McGray published that year entitled Japan’s Gross National Cool (Valaskivi 2013). However, it is alleged that *kawaii* promotes consumerism and encourages the public to remain immature or nurtures an aversion to adulthood among the Japanese. Another aspect which tends to be censured is that it excessively flaunts sex.

Yuko Hasegawa sees a link between *kawaii* and infantilisation resulting from the changes in Japan’s post-war culture, which may be attributed to a lack of self-confidence. One can understand the concerns voiced by the critics of *kawaii*, who fear its negative impact on the Japanese youth and society. Simultaneously, it must be acknowledged that the love of the “cute beauty” endorsed by *kawaii* is already firmly embedded in Japanese culture since it is present in the advertisements, hoardings, posters, promotional images, or information signage found in public transport (underground, railway, buses), shop windows, visual information systems. It is even featured in the markings and branding of public services, such as the firefighters or municipal cleaning services, whose vehicles are decorated with “sweet characters” to promote their activities and service to the residents.

The same aesthetic is taken advantage of by local businesses: ice cream parlours, cafés, florists, bakeries, beauty and hairdressing establishments, but also owners of private homes who, after all, are not compelled by anyone to place *kawaii* figures on their premises to greet visitors and passers-by. The municipal authority of Tokyo also prefers this form of interaction with the public, using an entertainment formula drawing on comic books, where serious content, announcements and notices are accompanied by depictions of manga characters. A similar mode of communication is used by Japanese politicians running for election, who are portrayed on the election posters alongside well-known popular culture figures.

## CONCLUSIONS

In 2009, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs appointed the “*kawaii* ambassadors” (*kawaii* taishi), including three Japanese popular culture celebrities: Misako Aoki (a model involved in promoting the so-called lolita fashion), Yui Kimura (singer) as well as actress and model Shizuka Fujioka. Their only role was to travel and endorse *kawaii* to young people around the world. In the context of *kawaii*, one also invokes symbolic consumption, a trend which originated in the 1980s, when the Japanese began to pay more attention to the design of the objects they purchased rather than their utility (Burdzik 2015, 160).

Nowadays, *kawaii* is no longer an unwanted product of youth subculture but an important element of mass culture; one may disapprove of it, reject its candy-coloured, “saccharine” aesthetics and infantile substance, but one thing cannot be denied: it has been able to promote Japanese popular culture and, which is its chief

strength, it continues to gain enormous popularity around the world, eliciting exclusive associations with Japan (Korusiewicz 2011).

Researchers of Japanese culture find that *otaku* and *kawaii* resemble practices previously known in the kabuki or bunraku theatre. This culture “undermines the boundaries between the child and the adult, fantasy and reality, consumption and creativity, human and animal worlds, the virtual and the real, the ancient Japan and the present-day land (...), between Japanese Japan and Americanised Japan” (Bator 2014, 205). This subculture bears all the hallmarks of hybridisation, a combination of Japan’s Edo past and the late Showa period (1980s) with American popular culture.

Pursuing the “Cool Japan” programme, the Japanese government has skilfully applied its soft power, betting on an original culture that continues to exert a powerful impact. The world has been fascinated by Japanese culture for many years, and its influence has long since spread beyond Asia. The internet and social networks have helped Japan “cease to be the land of cherry blossoms, geishas and samurais and become the land of cool, the source of Japanese style, under whose label we can buy more or less successful imitations of the urban style from the streets of Tokyo” (Bator 2014, 212).

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## Vision of Church Higher Studies based on Pope's Francis' *Veritatis Gaudium*

### Wizja kościelnych studiów wyższych na podstawie *Veritatis gaudium* papieża Franciszka

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**Abstract:** Universities are constantly undergoing process of intensive transformations. The titular document of Pope Francis shows the current panorama of new challenges regarding the identity and activity of universities. Guided by the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and the experience of the Church gained in recent decades, the Pope points to the “criteria for renewal and revival of the contribution of ecclesiastical studies to Church of missionary outreach”. Reviving ecclesiastical studies, the Pope points to the vital need to give new impetus to scientific research conducted at universities and ecclesiastical faculties. Christian inspiration makes it possible to take into account the moral, spiritual and religious dimensions in research, and to evaluate the achievements of science and technology from the point of view of the integral good of the human person. The point is therefore that Catholic ideals, attitudes and principles should permeate and provide the substance for the various forms of academic activity, according to their nature and inherent autonomy.

**Keywords:** university and ecclesiastical studies, renewal of teaching, cultural challenges, spiritual challenges, educational challenges

**Abstrakt:** Uniwersytet nieustannie podlega procesowi intensywnych przeobrażeń. Tytułowy dokument papieża Franciszka ukazuje aktualną panoramę nowych wyzwań w odniesieniu do tożsamości i działalności uniwersyteckiej. Papież, kierując się nauczaniem Soboru Watykańskiego II i doświadczeniem Kościoła zdobytym w minionych dziesięcioleciach, wskazuje na „kryteria odnowienia i odrodzenia wkładu studiów kościelnych w Kościół wychodzący na misję”. Ożywiając studia kościelne, dostrzega żywą potrzebę nadania nowego impulsu badaniom naukowym prowadzonym na uniwersytetach i wydziałach kościelnych. Chrześcijańska inspiracja pozwala uwzględniać w badaniach wymiar moralny, duchowy i religijny oraz oceniać zdobyte nauki i techniki z punktu widzenia integralnego dobra osoby ludzkiej. Chodzi zatem o to, by katolickie ideały, postawy i zasady przenikały i wypełniały różne formy działalności akademickiej, stosownie do ich natury i właściwej im autonomii.

**Słowa kluczowe:** uniwersytet studia kościelne, odnowa nauczania, wyzwania kulturowe, wyzwania duchowe, wyzwania edukacyjne



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## INTRODUCTION

The situation of the modern world gives rise to completely new challenges faced by education impacting the tasks related to instruction and formation. Education is perceived as factor of change, it is usually assigned fundamental role in the development of society, creating new social order and triggering development opportunities for both individuals and large social groups. Educational processes that take place in the realities of specific conditions of the contemporary world should contribute to the shaping of new future. The future means chances and opportunities that must be filled with specific content and values. The term education does not refer solely to instruction or vocational training, but also to the formation man as whole. "The problem of instruction has always been closely linked with the *mission of the Church*. In the course of the centuries, she founded schools at all levels; she gave birth to the mediaeval Universities in Europe: in Paris and in Bologna, in Salamanca, and in Heidelberg, in Krakow and in Louvain. In our age, too, she offers the same contribution wherever her activity in this field is requested and respected. (...) The system of education is organically connected with the system of the different orientations given to the way of *practising and popularizing science*, purpose which is served by high-level educational establishments, Universities and also, in view of the present development of specialization and scientific methods, specialized institutes (Jan Paweł II 1985, 733-734).

Pope Francis received rich legacy from the teachings of John Paul II and Benedict XVI on the question of "Catholic" universities as well as universities born out of "Christian inspiration"<sup>1</sup>. Francis emphasizes, "This rich legacy of analysis and direction has been tested and enriched, as it were, «on the ground» thanks to the persevering commitment to social and cultural meditation on the Gospel undertaken by the People of God in different continental areas and in dialogue with diverse cultures. The time has now come for it to be consolidated and to impart to ecclesiastical studies that wise and courageous renewal demanded by the missionary transformation of Church that «goes forth»" (Franciszek 2017a, 3). This "Christian inspiration" of universities is manifested in various forms. The titular document of Pope Francis shows the current panorama of new challenges in relation to the identity and activity of universities. university with Christian roots is space for academic formation, where the creativity of the new People of God triggers changes in every environment, initiative or project. This space

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<sup>1</sup> "We can and should speak of Catholic university in three cases: a) when the university is governed by the «competent ecclesiastical authority», for example by Bishop; b) when it is governed by an «ecclesiastical public juridical person», such as an Religious Institute, and c) when it is governed by other persons but has been recognized by competent ecclesiastical authority based on written document. (...) university can be considered «Christian inspired» if it is not governed by an ecclesiastical authority or by an ecclesiastical public juridical person, nor has it been recognized as Catholic by any competent ecclesiastical authority in writing. Obviously, university of this type, if it truly wishes to act based on Christian (or Catholic) inspiration, should take serious approach to the message of the Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*" (Grocholewski 2013, 29-30).

provides an opportunity to show the light of the Gospel to the world, illuminating with this light the right activity and offering living witness of mature faith. The point is therefore that Catholic ideals, attitudes and principles should permeate and provide substance for the various forms of academic activity, in concord with their nature and their inherent autonomy.

## 1. CONTINUITY AND THE NEED FOR RENEWING THE ECCLESIASTICAL HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

“(…) at the approaching end of our millennium”, it is emphasized in the preamble of the Magna Carta of European Universities, “the future of mankind depends largely all on cultural, scientific and technical development; and (...) this built up in centres of culture, knowledge and research as represented by true universities” (Wielka Karta Uniwersytetów Europejskich 1988, preamble). Therefore, it is necessary to return to reflection on the meaning and future of universities, repeating the fundamental questions about its role in society, about knowledge as common good, about universities’ vocation for openness, meeting, overcoming barriers. It is necessary to make an effort towards synthesis allowing to orientate oneself in world that is not only more and more complicated, but also evidently undergoing constant changes whose cycles and results are unknown. Universities can throw the light on vital issues and thus allow us to gain better understanding of the processes taking place today. In this perspective, Christian-oriented institutions are especially predisposed to help the entire academic world in exploring the mystery of man in order to understand his role as interpreter, guardian and builder of the world, seeker of truth and creator of brotherhood, dialogue and peace (Galantino 2017, 127-128). “(...) today we are not only living in time of changes but are experiencing true epochal shift, marked by wide-ranging «anthropological» and «environmental crisis». Indeed, we daily see «signs that things are now reaching breaking point, due to the rapid pace of change and degradation; these are evident in large-scale natural disasters as well as social and even financial crises». (...) In this effort, the worldwide network of ecclesiastical universities and faculties is called to offer the decisive contribution of leaven, salt and light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the living Tradition of the Church, which is ever open to new situations and ideas. Today it is becoming increasingly evident that «there is need of true evangelical hermeneutic for better understanding life, the world and humanity, not of synthesis but of spiritual atmosphere of research and certainty based on the truths of reason and of faith»” (Franciszek 2017a, 3).

Universities are constantly undergoing process of intensive transformations. The multitude of social needs and expectations towards university education requires that the academic community analyse its current status, future challenges and consider initiatives corresponding to these challenges. The identity crisis of universities is embedded in the identity crisis of modern man, whose sources can be found in various fields of human activity. For this reason, “The primary need today

is for the whole People of God to be ready to embark upon new stage of «Spirit-filled» evangelization. This calls for «resolute process of discernment, purification and reform». In this process, fitting renewal of the system of ecclesiastical studies plays strategic role. These studies, in fact, are called to offer opportunities and processes for the suitable formation of priests, consecrated men and women, and committed lay people. At the same time, they are called to be sort of providential cultural laboratory in which the Church carries out the performative interpretation of the reality brought about by the Christ event and nourished by the gifts of wisdom and knowledge by which the Holy Spirit enriches the People of God in manifold ways – from the *sensus fidei fidelium* to the magisterium of the bishops, and from the charism of the prophets to that of the doctors and theologians” (Franciszek 2017a, 3).

The search for the truth – about the world, about man, the search for answers to the questions people constantly ask, seems to be point of convergence for various fields of science and the creation of true *universitas*. Thus, as Pope Francis emphasizes, “This, then, is good occasion to promote with thoughtful and prophetic determination the renewal of ecclesiastical studies at every level, as part of the new phase of the Church’s mission, marked by witness to the joy born of encountering Jesus and proclaiming his Gospel, that set before the whole People of God as programme in *Evangelii Gaudium*” (Franciszek 2017a, 1). This message is addressed to Catholic universities as well as to all Catholic institutes of higher education that seek to instil in human souls and cultures the message of Christ’s Gospel. Thus, Catholic university is place where scientists, using methods specific to each scientific discipline, explore the reality, thus contributing to the enrichment of the treasury of human knowledge. systematic study of each discipline subsequently leads to dialogue between various disciplines leading to their mutual enrichment. This type of exploration not only helps man in his constant pursuit of the truth, but is also an eloquent testimony, so much needed today, of the Church’s conviction about the intrinsic value of science and scientific research. Research in Catholic university must necessarily include the following elements: a) striving for the integration of knowledge; b) dialogue between faith and reason; c) concern for the ethical dimension of science; d) the theological perspective (Jan Paweł II 1990, 10, 15)<sup>2</sup>.

Universities, even when they present distinct cultural identities, should be able to accept without prejudice all those who wish to join their community of life and research. They should also offer everyone wealth that will not enslave those coming to contact with them but allow for their further development. As Pope Francis states: “Our world has become global village, with multiple types of interactions, where each person belongs to humanity, and shares the hope of better future with the whole family of peoples. At the time same, however, there are

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<sup>2</sup> “For this actually to take place, he invites us «to broaden the scope of reason» thus enabling it to understand and guide the powerful new forces troubling the human family, «animating them within the perspective of that civilization of love whose seed God has planted in every people, in every culture». This in turn will «foster the interaction of the different levels of human knowledge», theological and philosophical, social and scientific” (Franciszek 2017a, 2).

so many forms of violence, poverty, exploitation, discrimination, marginalization, approaches which limit access to fundamental freedoms and create throw-away culture. Within this context, Catholic educational institutions are called to be on the front line in practicing grammar of dialogue, which forms people for encounter, and to value cultural and religious differences. For dialogue itself educates when person relates to others with respect, esteem and genuine listening, and speaks with authenticity, without obfuscating or diminishing their own identity, nourished by the inspiration of the Gospel” (Franciszek 2017b, 23). The first area where the culture of dialogue develops is the active cooperation of students and lecturers in everyday research and scientific work, characterized by common view of reality and sharing life values. Therefore, “Ecclesiastical studies cannot be limited to passing on knowledge, professional competence and experience to the men and women of our time who desire to grow as Christians, but must also take up the urgent task of developing intellectual tools that can serve as paradigms for action and thought, useful for preaching in world marked by ethical and religious pluralism. To do so calls not only for profound theological knowledge, but also the ability to conceive, design and achieve ways of presenting the Christian religion capable of profound engagement with different cultural systems” (Franciszek 2017a, 5).

## 2. PERSPECTIVES AND CRITERIA FOR THE RENEWAL OF ECCLESIASTICAL STUDIES

Development of modern science and the astounding scale of modern scientific research preclude the possibility of providing any simple synthesis of today’s knowledge. There are no modern equivalents of what was once referred to as *summa*, *compendium* or *tractatus*. However, many of the greatest minds in today’s academic world insist on redefining the original concepts of *universitas* and *humanitas* suiting for our times. It the question of the future of truly human culture, open to accepting ethical and spiritual values. The basic values of this culture include: dignity of the human person, sanctity of life, fundamental role of the family, great importance of education, freedom of thought and speech, freedom to profess one’s own religious beliefs, legal protection of individuals and human groups, cooperation of all people for the common good, the concept of work as participation in the work of the Creator Himself, authority of the state, which itself is governed by law and reason. These values belong to the treasury of European culture. It is this tradition that provided the basis for the concept of the human person perceived as the image of God, redeemed by Christ and called to an eternal destiny, endowed with inalienable rights and responsible for the common good of society (Jan Paweł II 1989, 26-27)<sup>3</sup>. As Pope Francis emphasizes:

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<sup>3</sup> “Every university must always preserve the traits of study centre «within man’s reach», where the student is preserved from anonymity and can cultivate fertile dialogue with his teachers from which he draws an incentive for his cultural and human growth. (...) Naturally, and also rightly, the disciplines tend to specialization, while what the person needs is unity and synthesis. Secondly,

“in the face of pervasive individualism, which impoverishes on human level and creates cultural barrenness, it is necessary that we humanize education. Schools and universities only attain their deepest meaning insofar as they are linked to the formation of the person. All educators are called on to collaborate in this process of human growth, with their professional skills and with the richness of the human values they bear, to help young people to be builders of world of greater solidarity and peace. Furthermore, Catholic educational institutions have as their mission to offer worldviews that are open to transcendence” (Franciszek 2017b, 22-23).

Man and his world, or rather the entire universe, appears to researcher and scholar as reality that lends itself to rational description and universal message. Today's scientific language conveys words and images, transmits concepts and projects, theories and proofs of their validity to the growing numbers of people, thus allowing them to develop their culture and their humanity, to benefit from the achievements of science and their specific applications. Man of science is capable of opening up new spaces, to chart new paths in the immeasurable area of what is knowable but hitherto unknown. Scientific knowledge is not an end in itself as it remains at the service of man: of an individual and all humanity. Scientific research and practical application of knowledge gained thanks to it may lead searching minds to accept as true only what lies within the limits of reality perceived by the senses or mathematically verifiable. Even when scientists do not encounter the mystery of the transcendent Absolute, they cannot fail to encounter in their research work the mystery and problem of man, his origin and ultimate destiny, his wonderful possibilities and insurmountable limitations. In this context, it is important to give due place to the reflection on man, his Creator and his purpose. Science and faith meet in the spirit of mutual respect for each party's competence and specificity (Jan Paweł II 1992, 16). Pope Francis, guided by the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and the experience of the Church gained in recent decades, indicates the following “criteria for renewal and revival of the contribution of ecclesiastical studies to Church of missionary outreach” (Franciszek 2017a, 4)<sup>4</sup>:

a) the enduring and priority criterion is contemplation and spiritual, intellectual and existential introduction to the heart of the kerygma (*preaching – act and content – of the good news about salvation revealed and accomplished by God in Jesus Christ*), that is, the constantly new and fascinating joyful news of the Gospel of Jesus. As

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it is fundamentally important that the commitment to scientific research be open to the existential question of meaning for the person's life itself. Research seeks knowledge, whereas the person also needs wisdom, that knowledge, as it were, which is expressed in the «knowing-living». In the third place, only in appreciating the person and interpersonal relationships can the didactic relationship become an educational relationship, process of human development” (Benedykt XVI 2007, 12-13).

<sup>4</sup> “Closely linked to the Church's evangelizing mission, which flows from her very identity as completely committed to promoting the authentic and integral growth of the human family towards its definitive fullness in God, is the vast multidisciplinary system of ecclesiastical studies. This system has developed over the centuries from the wisdom of the People of God, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in dialogue with, and discernment of, the signs of the times and diverse cultural expressions” (Franciszek 2017a, 1).

Pope Francis emphasizes, every time we try to return to the sources and recover the original freshness of the Gospel, there appear new ways, creative methods, other forms of expression, more eloquent signs, words that make sense for today's world. In fact, every authentic evangelizing activity is always «new» (cf. Franciszek 2013a, 11). This gives rise to special emphasis in formation on Christian-inspired culture, to discover in all creation the trace of the Holy Trinity;

b) the second criterion is dialogue in all its entirety. It is dialogue understood not as mere tactical approach, but as an intrinsic requirement to gain communal experience of the joy of truth and to deepen its meaning and practical implications. Pope Francis, referring to previously developed documents (cf.: *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World "Gaudium et Spes"* – Vatican Council II; John Paul II, *Apostolic Constitution Sapientia Christiana – on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties*, 1979; John Paul II, *Apostolic Constitution Ex corde Ecclesiae – on Catholic Universities*, 1990), encourages promotion of dialogue with Christians belonging to other Churches and Ecclesial Communities and with persons belonging to other religious or humanist beliefs, and to maintain “contact with scholars of other disciplines, whether these are believers or not”, attempting to “evaluate and interpret the latter's affirmations and judge them in the light of revealed truth”;

c) the third fundamental criterion includes inter- and cross-disciplinary approaches implemented with wisdom and creativity in the light of Revelation. What distinguishes the academic, formative, and research approach of the ecclesiastical study system, both in terms of content and method, is the vital and intellectual principle of the unity of knowledge, with simultaneous awareness and respect for its diverse, interrelated, and convergent expressions. This theological and anthropological, existential and epistemological principle has special meaning and should present all its power not only within the system of ecclesiastical studies: ensuring both coherence and flexibility, organicity along with dynamism; but also in relation to today's fragmented and often disintegrated panorama of university studies and the uncertain, conflicting or relativistic pluralism of current beliefs and cultural options;

d) The fourth and final criterion concerns the urgent need to build networks among the various institutions that carry out ecclesiastical studies in every part of the world, establishing the necessary cooperation with scientific institutions in various countries and with those inspired by different cultural and religious traditions. At the same time, it is necessary to create specialized research centres devoted to studying epoch-making challenges facing today's humanity in order to propose adequate and realistic ways of solving them.

Catholic university, by bringing together the unfathomable richness of the salvific message of the Gospel and the manifold, vast areas of knowledge in which this richness is incarnated, enables the Church to establish an enormously fruitful dialogue with people of all cultures. It is in the context of the impartial search for truth, that the relationship between faith and reason is manifested in its essence. Christian inspiration makes it possible for Catholic university to take into account the moral, spiritual and religious dimensions in its research, and to evaluate the achievements of science and

technology in the perspective of the integral good of the human person. The continuous renewal of ecclesiastical studies, therefore, requires clear awareness that through its Catholic character, university is made more capable of an impartial search for truth; search that is neither subordinated to nor conditioned by any particular interests of any kind (Jan Paweł II 1990, 5-7)<sup>5</sup>. As Pope Francis said during his pastoral visit on September 22, 2013 in Cagliari "The university is privileged place where this culture of dialogue is promoted, taught and lived, this culture which does not indiscriminately level out differences and plurality — this is one of the risks of globalization — nor does it take them to the extreme, causing them to become causes of conflict. Rather, it opens to constructive dialogue. This means understanding and esteeming someone else's riches; it means not seeing him with indifference or fear, but as an opportunity for growth" (Franciszek 2013b, 28).

### 3. UNIVERSITY AND CHURCH FACULTIES – SELECTED PRACTICAL INDICATIONS

There are various educational areas: school, family, media, catechesis and others. good school education in childhood and adolescence lays down seeds that can bear fruit throughout life. In this important process, university with Christian roots is also space for academic formation, when it offers an ethical and humanistic perspective on major social problems, influences changes in every environment, in every initiative and project. Both education and formation are oriented to facilitate personal development in all that improves our nature, and what we call good and valuable. It is an opportunity to show the light of the Gospel to the world, illuminating all activity with this light and offering living witness to mature faith. This Christian inspiration manifests itself in various forms. Therefore, as Pope Francis states, "In word, this calls for «changing the models of global development» and «redefining our notion of progress». Yet «the problem is that we still lack the culture necessary to confront this crisis. We lack leadership capable of striking out on new paths». This vast and pressing task requires, on the cultural level of academic training and scientific study, broad and generous effort at radical paradigm shift, or rather – dare say – at «bold cultural revolution». In this effort, the worldwide network of ecclesiastical universities and faculties is called to offer the decisive contribution of leaven, salt and light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the living Tradition of the Church, which is ever open to new situations and ideas" (Franciszek 2017a, 3).

At Catholic university, any activity marked by intellectual honesty and academic seriousness falls within the scope of the evangelizing mission of the Church. This evangelizing mission aims to ensure that the way of thinking, criteria of evaluation and norms of action are rooted in the spirit of the Gospel. Developing own, original

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<sup>5</sup> The perspective outlined in this way "sets out demanding task for theology just as, in their own specific areas of competence, for the other disciplines contemplated in ecclesiastical studies. (...) Theology must doubtless be rooted and grounded in sacred Scripture and in the living tradition, but for this very reason it must simultaneously accompany cultural and social processes, and particularly difficult transitions" (Franciszek 2017a, 4).

proposals, which, although firmly rooted in the Word of God and the Tradition of the Church, can help in solving new problems and become valuable answer to questions posed by various contemporary cultural trends. “Specifically, shared and converging research between specialists of different disciplines represents particular service to the people of God, and especially to the Magisterium. It also supports the Church’s mission of proclaiming the good news of Christ to all, in dialogue with the different sciences and in the service of deeper understanding and application of truth in the life of individuals and society” (Franciszek 2017a, 5). Thus, when we talk about the university community, we refer to “university life”, of which the strictly academic element – classes, learning and exams – is only part. For students, this means experiencing the academic years as time of inner growth, maturing to fundamental decisions, establishing interpersonal bonds; for the university – and especially for the teaching staff – it is an incentive to create real “educational project”, which is to be meeting point of knowledge and life, centre of research and education, bridge between the past and the future. It is constituted as space that allows for critical use of the reason, and at the same time helps to raise the spirit and foster civic awareness capable of resisting the delusions of modernity. This is possible provided that we do not avoid the question of what ideal of humanity we follow when planning our future (Galantino 2017, 133-134).

Contemporary culture is marked by pluralism of attitudes, behaviours and ideologies. In order to establish the most fruitful dialogue with different cultures, we ourselves must be creative. Therefore, commitment to the service of the whole truth appears as requirement of freedom of research, teaching and dissemination of knowledge. Catholic university, by its vocation and the radical nature of its requirements, is truly open in all areas. Nothing in the material world is alien to it, and nothing from the world of the spirit remains outside the sphere of its cognitive interests. The role of Catholic university and ecclesiastical studies consists in going beyond the simple pragmatics of organizing teaching, as well as in transgressing ethical or intellectual pluralism devoid of the elements of the absolute. Ultimately, Catholic university assumes the use of intelligence that integrates the vision of faith. It is precisely this combination that gives research its broad dimension and ensures true freedom of the mind capable of self-criticism and constantly re-defining its position by reference to the original foundation, which is Jesus Christ living in the world and in the Church, as well as to the patrimony of faith authenticated by the Church Magisterium (Jan Paweł II 2003, 827-828)<sup>6</sup>. As Pope Francis emphasizes “In this regard, plans are under way for outstanding interdisciplinary centres and initiatives aimed at accompanying the development of advanced technologies, the best use of human resources and programmes of integration. Ecclesiastical studies, in the spirit of Church that «goes forth», are likewise called to develop specialized centres capable

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<sup>6</sup> “In regard to faculty members at Catholic colleges universities – states Benedict XVI – wish to reaffirm the great value of academic freedom. In virtue of this freedom, you are called to search for the truth wherever careful analysis of evidence leads you. Yet it is also the case that any appeal to the principle of academic freedom in order to justify positions that contradict the faith, and the teaching of the Church would obstruct or even betray the university’s identity and mission” (Benedykt XVI 2020, 95).

of deeper dialogue with the different scientific fields. (...) Ecclesiastical studies will thus be poised to make their specific and unique contribution of inspiration and guidance, and will be able to articulate and express in new, challenging and realistic way their proper task” (Franciszek 2017a, 5). Development of interdisciplinary research is conducive to the search for truth in all fields of knowledge, its discovery and dissemination, helps to overcome obstacles to perceiving man in his spiritual, ethical and transcendent dimensions. It also means meetings and confrontations among universities, contacts with other academic and formative institutions, with research centres including those dealing with theology. The truth about man is discovered along with discovering the truth about the world in which he lives. It is the duty of the man of science not only to discover this truth, but also to reflect on it as well as on its countless and varied expressions.

The reflection that the Pope invites us to is also reflection on the dimension of transcendence. It is impossible to exclude it from the areas where the determinants of humanity are explored, new social trends are studied and the foundations of the future are laid. The world, characterised by growing interdependencies in the area of economy, culture and communication, desperately needs “centres of thought” characterized by creativity and responsibility, centres of research and confrontation capable of meeting the emerging tasks, places open to new challenges and at the same time faithful to their source vocation. In this situation, one of the most urgent challenges facing today’s societies concerns the necessary verification and thorough revision of the formation processes offered to new generations. Scientific involvement is not only an activity concerning the intellectual sphere of man. university fulfils its own goal when, by employing both creative and scientific measures, it facilitates the development of an individual in specific community, releases that individual’s comprehensive spiritual potential, potential of the mind will and heart, in other words, leads to the formation of the whole man. In order to achieve these goals, university must apply appropriate tools, continuously modernize its methods, so that it can enjoy recognition in the world of culture, maintain its credibility and make contribution to science that would meet the expectations of the world of culture and the Church (Galantino 2017, 126-128)<sup>7</sup>. Pope Francis introduces new perspective, which can be summarized in the statement: “the mission of the Church is to go forth.” In this context, he emphasizes that “Ecclesiastical studies cannot be limited to passing on knowledge, professional competence and experience to the men and women of our time who desire to grow as Christians, but must also take up the urgent task of developing intellectual tools that can serve as paradigms for action and thought, useful for preaching in world marked by ethical and religious pluralism. To do so calls not only for profound theological knowledge, but also the ability to

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<sup>7</sup> “The university is part of the fight for man’s humanity. From the fact that it is called university or college, nothing yet follows for the cause of man. Yes, universities can even produce – it is bad expression, brutal expression – universities can develop series of learned, educated people, however, it is not the question of that, the point is whether the university has released this enormous spiritual human potential of man, through which man realizes his humanity” (Jan Paweł II 2010, 173-174).

conceive, design and achieve ways of presenting the Christian religion capable of profound engagement with different cultural systems” (Franciszek 2017a, 5). It is an invitation to start process, undertake some action. At the same time, the Pope warns against becoming only traditionalists of the roots and encourages to draw from them in order to grow, move forward, fulfil one’s life and take responsibility in society.

## CONCLUSIONS

Church universities and faculties can become privileged actors in the dialogue between faith and culture of our times. As Pope Francis emphasizes “The revival of ecclesiastical studies entails the pressing need to give new impulse to the scientific research conducted in our ecclesiastical universities and faculties” (Franciszek 2017a, 5). For Catholic institutions of higher education, this means that if research and teaching which are part of the ecclesial community life, and which are conducted in the modern world undergoing rapid and profound changes, are to shape culture in Christian spirit, they must constantly strive for new ideas in the field of science, employ appropriate tools and constantly modernize the employed methods. Hence the special responsibility of Christian scientists and Catholic schools of higher education to contribute to removing serious imbalance between the general culture and the deepening of the faith. “This means an encounter between faith, reason and the sciences with view to developing new approaches and arguments on the issue of credibility, creative apologetics which would encourage greater openness to the Gospel on the part of all. When certain categories of reason and the sciences are taken up into the proclamation of the message, these categories then become tools of evangelization” (Franciszek 2013a, 132). The evangelical ideal of the Beatitudes may still provide an inspiration because it arouses admiration and expands human capacity to exist, to act, to contemplate, and to create. In this perspective, academic institutions of Christian inspiration are especially predisposed to become centres for developing their own, original proposals, which, although firmly rooted in the Word of God and the Tradition of the Church, can help solve new problems and provide valuable response to the questions posed by various contemporary cultural trends.

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## Educational Thought and Activities of Fr. Alfonso Maria Fusco for Socially Neglected Children

Myśl działalność wychowawcza ks. Alfonso Marii Fusco na rzecz dzieci zaniedbanych społecznie

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**Abstract:** Educators all over the world face the phenomenon of social neglect of children and young people. This phenomenon gives rise to manifold complex problems related to education and socialization of young people, which call for implementing appropriate remedial strategies. The article presents reflection on the educational activities of Alfonso Maria Fusco, an Italian priest, educator and social activist whose life and educational work bring to the fore his original and timeless idea that inspired him to take various initiatives for the good of children. The article can serve contemporary teachers and educators as an important point of reference in the search for valuable pedagogical practices that can significantly enrich their knowledge and educational competences. Moreover, the article inspires educators to undertake educational and preventive initiatives aimed at making the educational space free from the so-called risky behaviours that may emerge in the lives of children and adolescents.

**Keywords:** children, youth, upbringing, education, prevention, faith, social exclusion

**Abstrakt:** Wychowawcy na całym świecie spotykają się ze zjawiskiem zaniedbania społecznego dzieci młodzieży. Generuje ono życiu młodych ludzi wiele złożonych problemów charakterze edukacyjnym socjalizacyjnym, które domagają się odpowiednich strategii zaradczych. Artykuł prezentuje refleksję nad działalnością wychowawczą Alfonso Marii Fusco, włoskiego duchownego, wychowawcy społecznika, którego życie aktywność wychowawcza pozwalają odkryć oryginalny ponadczasowy zamysł, który inspirował go do podejmowania różnych inicjatyw na rzecz dobra dziecka. Zawarte artykuły treści mogą posłużyć współczesnym nauczycielom wychowawcom jako ważny punkt odniesienia poszukiwaniu wartościowych praktyk pedagogicznych, które sposób istotny mogą wzbogacić ich wiedzę kompetencje edukacyjne. Ponadto artykuły postulują się podejmowanie przez pedagogów inicjatyw wychowawczych profilaktycznych mających na celu czynienie przestrzeni edukacyjnej wolnej od tzw. zachowań ryzykownych, które mogą się pojawić życiu dzieci młodzieży.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dzieci, młodzież, wychowanie, edukacja, profilaktyka, wiara, wykluczenie społeczne



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## INTRODUCTION

The child is commonly perceived as an exceptional young person, still untainted by destructive influences of the world, full of hope and trust, sincere, creative, naturally just, and spontaneous, who is the hope of every society. Integral development of children manifests all the beauty and growth of new life that overcomes countless obstacles and barriers on the way to its self-fulfilment (Echavarria 2008, 63-69). Children usually do not hide behind mask, but are true to themselves, and in their selflessness and openness to the world, they can sincerely manifest their amicable attitude towards other people. In adults, children inspire universal love and positive attitudes, higher feelings and the willingness to devote and sacrifice oneself for their good. Children and the childhood period are therefore not just an ordinary phase of human being's development, but special, autonomous value per se, the most beautiful phase in every person's life, which should be especially protected (Pomykała 1991, 152).

While observing children in the process of their development and realization of their individual potential, adults begin to understand that it is their task to support this process in both the micro and macro social dimensions. It depends on adults whether children will be provided with proper social, biological and cultural conditions to be able to achieve maturity in all dimensions of their human existence. The very concept of "child", which is defined as "human being in the period of development, from the moment of birth to the end of the growth process" (Okoń 1998a, 82), reveals the whole truth about children, firstly, that they are human beings (as much as adults); secondly, that they are in specific phase of life, which is characterised by intense and integral development (Salamucha 2013, 18). Experience, however, shows that child-human being - person "is not able to modify his or her «nature» in any other way than with the participation and help of others, which means that children can achieve full development of their personal life only in community. (...) The birth of human being, his or her upbringing, growth and achievement of human perfection within the limits available to man are only possible within various forms of social existence" (Krąpiec 1998, 289).

Emphasizing the humanity of children as well as the obligations resting on the community towards them constitute today an important starting point in the sphere of protection and respect for children's rights, but also in the area of concern for the so-called child well-being, which in its essence comes down to guaranteeing children everything that serves their successful development and upbringing (Magier 2013), so that in the future they may realize their personal potential and become what they are supposed to become in accordance with their human nature. Moreover, it should be emphasized that children's development may be obstructed by manifold adverse factors that they cannot overcome on their own, therefore children require special care and assistance from people who take responsibility for them, including parents and teachers, and in broader sense, the entire society (Kelm 2000; Salamucha 2013). However, no group can claim the right to dominate

or subjugate human person, much less to limit, manipulate or instrumentalize the process of child's development that takes place in various communities in which such young person grows, develops and is brought up (Echavarria 2008). Only parents, as those who bestowed on child the "gift of life", have both the right and the duty to play the main role in the process of development and formation of their child as person, creating the most favourable conditions for it.

The family, therefore, constitutes the natural environment in which the process of child's growth and upbringing takes place. It is the family that, regardless of culture, religion, and confessed values, has the greatest impact on young person. Children growing up surrounded by the loved ones who provide them with support, can develop their disposition and temperament, build their self-esteem and acquire appropriate competences as regards important social roles that they will be able to undertake and fulfil in the future. Nowadays, it can be noticed that the family is experiencing many difficulties related to the ongoing civilization changes. Therefore, there are many situations when children and young people are neglected and cannot be provided with proper care and upbringing from their parents and relatives (Łuczyński 2018). Wherever family fails to fulfil its role towards its offspring, it may be necessary to place children in foster care. In order to prevent such solution, more and more attention is paid today to supporting dysfunctional families according to the principle that "by helping the family, we help the child". In this way, families may, with appropriate support, fulfil their parental tasks (Pietruszka 2015). Thus, children living in dysfunctional families are offered various forms of daily support provided by, e.g., community centres, clubs, educational centres, nurseries, etc.

Many outstanding thinkers and social activists pointed out the importance for society to raise young people in well-functioning family, and in the event of this family failing to fulfil its role, to replace or "supplement" it. Among them was also an Italian priest, educator and social activist, Alfonso Maria Fusco (1839-1910), who, seeing how many children and youth were marginalized and socially excluded, spared no effort to address their needs and take care of their future. His involvement in helping young people focused on the idea of integral development and upbringing of those under his care and compensating for their educational deficits so that they could get prepared to take on the responsibilities of adult life. Therefore, it is not without reason that he was called Father Bosco of the South of Italy (Tedesco 1994, 23). Against the background of the society of that time, Alfonso M. Fusco stood out for the exceptional depth of his spiritual life and at the same time his understanding of social issues. Fr. Fusco laid particular emphasis on respect for human dignity, including responsible upbringing of children and youth. He was convinced that the spiritual and material good of society could best be achieved by caring for the integral development of the young generation; because it was this generation that was to bear the burden of responsibility for social and religious matters in the future (Ricciardi 2016). Therefore, Fr. Fusco undertook many initiatives just to create optimal conditions for the development and upbringing of the youngest,

to whom he ultimately devoted his entire life. Consequently, in order to ensure proper implementation of his educational assumptions, he established religious congregation of the Sisters of St. John the Baptist, along with number of care and educational institutions where the sisters fulfilled and still continue to fulfil with great dedication their educational duties (Łacka 2015).

In view of the above, there seems to arise an urgent need for pedagogical reflection on social activities of Alfonso Maria Fusco and revival of his educational idea, that can provide many contemporary educators with inspiration and model of integral upbringing and education of the young generation. Taking effective actions in this regard would also aim at adopting and implementing his assumptions regarding the care, upbringing and education of children to the contemporary educational programs, thus strengthening the school's formative foundations. Taking into account the need to protect children and ensure their successful development, it is worth considering Fr. Fusco's educational proposal, which even today may help create favourable conditions for children and young people to facilitate their integral development and upbringing.

## 1. THE ISSUE OF SOCIALLY NEGLECTED CHILDREN

The numerous threats that can currently be observed in the area of upbringing the young generation prompt reflection on the problem of social neglect of children and youth (Dziewiecki 2003). New ideologies that are emerging today, promote nihilism, ubiquitous subjectivism and cognitive relativism, and in extreme cases also undermine the role of traditional social environments as well as educational and care institutions. The family, which naturally protects the child's well-being, can also become the object of such alarming influences (Łakoma 2014, 20-21). It is not only the structure of the family that has become subject to adverse changes, but also the quality and style of family life, which in turn means that the family today is substantially weakened and, in many cases, unable to effectively fulfil its educational obligations (Pietruszka 2017). The negative phenomena faced by the modern family include poverty, unemployment, addictions, marital conflicts, emigration for work. All those phenomena affect the family's living conditions, thus giving rise to various, often negative, situations affecting the upbringing of the youngest family members (Pietruszka 2015).

The above-described symptoms of difficulties faced by families also significantly change the quality of family bonds and relationships and cause parents to cease to be role models for children. This situation leads to the disruption or breakdown of the so-called intergenerational transmission, which involves the exchange of important values and moral principles as well as socially accepted behaviours. In home devoid of an atmosphere of family warmth, relationships become uncertain, and selfishness comes to the fore. Children suffer from acute sense of loneliness and lack of interest on the part of adults. They are often treated as objects and become victims of manipulation, neglect, and violence on the part

of their closest family members (Doniec 2011, 30). The family's failure to fulfil its educational and upbringing role not only threatens respect for the "child well-being", but also aggravates the functioning of entire societies. Family dysfunction and pathology inevitably lead to child neglect, creating an opportunity for the emergence of new deviations and disorders in the social functioning of children.

In order to get to the core of the child neglect problem, it should be explained first that "social neglect" itself is broad term that appears in relation to inappropriate treatment of given group of people. However, it is particularly used with reference to children deprived of love and care of their parents (Baron 2014, 13). It is usually applied in situation when adults harm children which leads to negative mental, physical and social consequences (Łuczyński 2018). In the common understanding, child neglect means lack of responsibility on the part of parents or legal guardians for children as well as for their integral development and upbringing. This exposes children to the feelings of loneliness, deeply experienced stress and frustration, leaving painful and permanent mental scars. As consequence, such children are often defined as "difficult" by nature, i.e., those who experience difficulties, e.g., in social adaptation (Okoń 1998b, 83). It should also be noted that the issue of child neglect is closely related to the emergence of the phenomenon of social orphanhood, which leads to the need for state intervention in the child's life. Often, contrary to the truth, neglect and its consequences are attributed to children themselves, as if they were responsible for their situation. Blaming children leads to their being labelled and stigmatized which in turn often prevents them from obtaining adequate assistance.

The consequences of child neglect manifest themselves in all spheres of children's lives, but they particularly affect their social relationships, which tend to lack certainty and stability. In addition, children may experience difficulties and failures at school and often come into conflict with the law (Wach 2014). They also often manifest lack of discipline and reluctance to cooperate with educators. Such young people feel that they are not needed by anyone and therefore suffer from low self-esteem. tendency to antisocial behaviour becomes norm, while attempts to establish relationships or face and solve problems often do not bring results (Bałandynowicz 2009, 85). When discussing problems related to children's social development, it is necessary to mention the issue of developmental abnormalities. Due to the fact that young people grow up in an environment that is not conducive to integral growth, there is an increased number of those having specific needs. Hyperactive children with attention deficit, dyslexics, behavioural problems, children with autism and other deficiencies require individual care. This makes them feel alienated in the school environment or in the playground (Zaremba 2016, 79-80).

Adverse consequences of child neglect depend largely on children's age, gender, sensitivity and other personality traits. Children who experience pain due to rejection often have an inferiority complex, lack self-confidence, and have no interests or higher needs. Neglected children become passive and apathetic, or, on the contrary, tend to act impulsively, violently and recklessly. These children

also tend to escape into the world of imagination and dreams, which makes them seem absent (Sikora 2011). With age, such children may develop, for example, neuroses, addictions, aggression, pessimistic thinking, difficulty concentrating, and various types of failures. They are not capable of systematic work; they get easily bored and fall behind in their studies. Neglect makes young people reluctant to establish appropriate relationships with their peers, and over time they begin to manifest risky behaviours (Wach 2014). It sometimes happens that, being victims of violence, they also use aggression against their colleagues, which is why they have no friends and become alienated. Such children may also develop syndrome of learned helplessness. They do not worry about life plans, live in the moment and show lack of understanding as regards the need to abide by moral and social norms (Łuczyński 2018, 198-207).

Growing up in dysfunctional family disturbs the optimal course of socialization of its youngest members. Such children fail to develop valuable skills such as trust, independence and creativity. neglected person, despite reaching adulthood, often expects support and is unable to function independently. Such people's lives may be dominated by "syndrome of sense of temporariness and cultural and axiological indeterminacy, and above all, loss of life priorities and lack of self-determination" (Konopczyński 2009, 46). Moreover, in their adult life, they may struggle with the problem of initiating and maintaining interpersonal contacts. As consequence, they will not be able to create permanent bonds based on feelings. Moreover, they receive deformed model of family life and may fail in the future in fulfilling their roles as mothers or fathers (Izdebska 2015, 17-18).

The above-presented threats posed by child neglect are just few out of all factors that determine the entire human adult life. It seems of utmost importance to prevent this type of phenomena because it could help young people change their current situation. However, this process usually takes very long time, because changing the way people think about themselves and their life priorities requires courage and support from adults (Konopczyński 2009, 51). It is also comforting that children who have experienced neglect may still show great potential for the so-called normal development in difficult conditions, i.e., the ability to overcome the failures and obstacles they have experienced. Educators who are full of respect, supportive and open, who will try to strengthen children's developmental "imperative", can help break the circulating stereotypes that bad childhood must always lead to disturbed adulthood.

## 2. THE CHARACTER AND EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT OF ST. ALFONSO MARIA FUSCO

Among Christian educators, Fr. Alfonso Maria Fusco appears as man sensitive to every type of human destitution as it was his desire that even his shadow might do good. He was born on March 23, 1839, in the middle-income family of Giuseppina and Aniello Fusco, in the South of Italy, in the small town of Angri. The boy's father

owned large farm which allowed him to support his family, while Alfonso's mother took care of the house and raised the children. The boy's deeply religious parents prepared Alfonso to serve in the Church from an early age (Corsi 2010). The Fusco family, being financially well off, could afford to hire private teachers to educate their children. Religious upbringing and initial education of the children in the Fusco home was handled by their mother, who was very committed to the issue of passing on the faith in the family. Over time, Alfonso additionally took lessons from clergy and in newly established school (Garofalo 1978).

Undoubtedly, Alfonso was child provided with great care, and his childhood was the time when the foundations of his future priestly vocation were formed. The boy had the opportunity to develop integrally according to his age, he received his First Holy Communion at the age of 7 and was role model for his peers. He was calm, sensitive boy, bit shy, but determined in pursuing his goals (Gremigni 2010). In 1850, young Alfonso Fusco was sent to the so-called minor seminary, where he began regular education, which provided him with an impulse to pursue his priestly vocation. The years spent in the seminary were period of acquiring thorough knowledge. As student, Alfonso distinguished himself with his diligence in completing his assignments, systematic work and above-average piety. Also noteworthy is the fact that he had no conflicts with his peers, on the contrary, he was well-liked and respected by all (Garofalo 1978, 8-18). Moreover, from the beginning of his stay in the seminary, Alfonso manifested practical sense of service and activity in the Church. Learning was difficult for him, and he had to put lot of effort into studying, but due to his diligence, he was always well-prepared. In the seminary, he consistently pursued the goals he set for himself: he wanted to become priest to save weak and defenceless souls for whom no one cared.

He was ordained priest in 1863 and took up the pastoral tasks which he was assigned for. However, the young priest saw the need to create institutes that would take care of the upbringing of children and youth living on the streets, often left without care, simply abandoned and forgotten (Tedesco 1994, 18-19). The most important motive for his activities in the field of upbringing and education was deep spiritual experience (dream), which inspired him to act with great strength. He said: "When was still seminarian, had dream of Jesus who said to me: «Alfonso, you are chosen to found congregation of sisters which you will call the Nazareth Sisters and two orphanages, for boys and girls (Garofalo 1978, 149). The ground is already prepared; you only need to build it. As soon as you become priest, you should do this»" (Garofalo 1978, 23). Father Fusco was constantly looking for opportunities to complete this task. The need to create place to stay for street children had long been acknowledged in Angri. Father Fusco decided that he would be the first to open his own home and start taking in the neglected and abandoned children he met while passing by the places where they gathered (Tedesco 1994, 22). Fusco cared about their material needs, provided them with sense of security, respect and love, and gave them the opportunity to acquire knowledge and learn profession. He had recurrent thought about establishing women's institute, which

would certainly bring rapid progress in working with children and youth. Father Fusco, remembering the integral development and upbringing of his charges, organized the so-called "Luigini" oratorio, place where young people could spend their free time having fun together, playing team games, learning to sing and reading pious texts (Vassalluzzo 2001, 95-96). This work founded by Fr. Fusco did not meet with the approval of the local community. However, the priest was not discouraged from undertaking further educational and social initiatives for the benefit of his charges.

In 1876, continuing to implement his plans, Fr. Fusco with the help of wealthy widow from Angri, opened an "orphan's home" where he gathered children deprived of families or shelter (Tedesco 1994, 28). He was helped in running the house by certain pious woman, Maddalena Caputo, who wanted to devote her life to serving the poor and sick. They were soon joined by many other women who also wanted to devote themselves to working for socially neglected children (Vassalluzzo 2001, 98-99). Just two years later, Fr. Alfonso founded the Institute of the Sisters of Saint John the Baptist, whose apostolate focused on providing comprehensive care and help to the poorest children and those without parental care. The newly established Institute cared about the integral upbringing of children and their education, and although it was not an easy period in political terms, the work of Fr. Fusco quickly went beyond the borders of Angri and over time began to spread in other countries in Europe and the world (Vassalluzzo 2001, 109). Father Fusco died in the reputation of holiness on February 6, 1910 (Garofalo 1978, 200), making last request to his spiritual daughters to take care of the development of the congregation and continue to care for poor, abandoned and neglected children (Vassalluzzo 2001, 119). In 2001, Fr. Alfonso Fusco was declared blessed, and in 2016, he was counted among the saints of the Catholic Church.

### 3. EDUCATIONAL AND CARE ACTIVITIES OF FR. FUSCO

thorough analysis of conferences, letters, the rule that Fr. Fusco proposed to his spiritual daughters, as well as his homilies and notes reflect the ideas and character of his pedagogical thought (Corsi 2010). Being practitioner, Fr. Fusco often indicated in his reflection specific points and recommendations that educators should strive for when working with children and youth. According to Fr. Fusco, it was love that should form the real basis of true educational relationship. He claimed that pupils, if they are to adopt certain values and be able to implement them in their lives, need to feel loved, safe and accepted. Building intimacy was the foundation of his educational concept because it was conducive to building friendly relationships between educators and students. That is why, Fr. Fusco wanted to create family-like educational environment for his pupils, for the best possible development of the educational bond (Cian 2001, 204-206).

An important issue for Fr. Fusco was religious education. According to his pedagogy, spiritual and mental development should complement each other. In

his educational activities, he did not try to convert anyone, nor did he usurp the right to impose on other people's consciences. Perhaps, that is why, he became an authority for young people who felt his keen interest in their life situation, and at the same time his respect for the freedom and dignity of each of them as person (Pantano 2016). In contact with his pupils, Fr. Fusco listened more than he spoke, rather served than demanded obedience. At the same time, he taught children that love requires sacrifice, because he himself was able to patiently endure all humiliation and adversity. Guided by the logic of faith, he trusted that God could bring good out of even the most difficult situations (Corsi 2010, 66). Father Fusco assumed that the cause of human poverty lied in people's incompetent use of the resources at their disposal. He repeated many times that society that does not care about future generations deprives itself of its future. In the name of this concern for young people, he postulated the need to create primary and vocational schools where young people could acquire knowledge and learn profession appropriate to their talents. In this way, Fr. Alfonso wanted to oppose the growing trend of marginalization and social exclusion of children from poor families, who often had no opportunity to learn (Tytko 2014).

However, the matter of utmost importance was for Fr. Fusco family upbringing. He believed that pedagogical activities are most effective when carried out within family home and it is where they should originate. He was convinced that education of children should start as early as possible, already in childhood, so that children could internalize "goodness" and "bear good fruit" in the future. According to Fr. Fusco, mothers play significant role in raising children. He claimed that one of the main tasks of mothers should be to instil in their children the desire to live according to generally accepted social and religious norms (Corsi 2010, 16). Fr. Fusco knew that in the institutes founded by him, family upbringing would depend mainly on the formation of the sisters. Therefore, he carefully prepared future sisters for the role of spiritual mothers and educators. He advised them to pay particular attention to:

- providing care and showing interest to girls as they are most exposed to negative influences of their surroundings;
- imparting sound moral and religious principles to pupils, through testimony and example of their own lives;
- participation of pupils in housework as special type of training in hard work and conscious approach to responsibilities (Fusco 2009, 20).

Father Fusco also paid attention to proper upbringing of his pupils, especially girls. Good manners were to be kind of showcase of the houses he created. For him, propriety constituted this area of development, within which pupils may test whether they could overcome their own limitations. An important message of Fr. Fusco's pedagogical thought consists in propagating the need to develop certain strategy encompassing the future of pupils. In his idea of upbringing, Fr. Alfonso was supporter of forward thinking and long-term planning (Pantano 2016). In his opinion, prudent educator rather than focusing on authoritarian management of

children, should concentrate on developing their so-called own resources (personal potential), which will determine their successful future. Besides, Fr. Fusco attached great importance to the quality of teaching and upbringing. He did not tolerate lack of competence or negligence on the part of teachers. He believed that people responsible for shaping future generations should be role models in all areas and have the best possible preparation (Corsi 2010, 29). He himself tried to be an authority and role model for his pupils, always offering them help and advice. As he emphasized, early childhood is the time of the most important preparation for life. The role of adults who are role models and authority for children is of primary importance here (Corsi 2010, 29). Thinking ahead, Fr. Fusco was convinced that every young person, even if he or she experienced great trauma or harm, if properly guided, could and should bear "good fruit." In his reflections, he often emphasized that the conditions in which children live impel them to engage in criminal behaviours: theft, vagrancy, begging. He argued that greater benefit for society would be to propose coherent system of supporting "street children" who should be provided with proper care and free education (Ricciardi 2016). The idea that particularly guided his actions was to create place where pupils could freely and without concern for accommodation or food, learn profession. In this way, their fate could be changed (Gremigni 2010, 12). Not only did he want to provide his charges with shelter and peaceful childhood, but he also wanted them to learn to make responsible choices and be able to choose the best possible path in their adult lives.

Multidimensional activity of Fr. Fusco for children can be included in the mainstream of integral education, where significant role is attached to the promotion of spiritual values, but never in isolation from holistic view of children's development and needs. That is why, Fr. Fusco always paid attention to building real image of human being, both in terms of his or her capabilities and limitations. He recommended that educators should guide children in way that would allow them to internalize good habits (Fusco 2009). In his pedagogy, he did not want to "mould" his pupils, but believed that children's natural, good tendencies should always be carefully strengthened, and their feelings respected. However, bad features should not be exaggerated, but rather reduced through individual dialogue and kind support offered to children in their work on their character (Gremigni 2010, 89). He also recommended to educators to teach their pupils that every person should realize that all human natural talents must serve the good and the life lived in truth, freedom and respect for other people.

It was the great desire of Fr. Alfonso that his pupils, through integral development, should become adults prepared to make sacrifices, sensitive to human harm and responsible for the goods that will be bestowed on them (Gremigni 2010, 14). He particularly cared about the internal and cultural development of the girls entrusted to his care, as he wanted them to gain education and have the opportunity to acquire knowledge on an equal footing with boys. He often stated that daughters who receive appropriate intellectual and Christian upbringing become blessing,

source of happiness and peace for their families, while it is dangerous when girls grow up in an atmosphere of neglect and backwardness (Corsi 2010, 76). He also claimed that lack of education and intellectual development are particularly difficult experience for young women. His position therefore expresses the conviction of the necessity to provide both boys and girls with conditions for integral development and upbringing, as well as protection against egoistic and ideological traps that enslave people and do not allow them to think and act independently. That is why, integral formation of the young generation is this determinant of his pedagogy that can counteract the challenges faced by contemporary societies in the era of rapid civilization changes.

The above considerations on the main assumptions of Fr. Fusco's pedagogy show that he was prudent educator, and the multitude of initiatives and actions he undertook in his life make us realize that he was also man of great courage. His multidimensional activity for neglected children can therefore be included in the trend of integral education, where great role is attached to the promotion of spiritual values, but never in isolation from holistic view of children's development and needs (Ricciardi 2016). That is why, Fr. Fusco always paid attention to building real image of human being, as regards both human capabilities and limitations. In his educational activities, he wanted to prepare young people to live responsibly in the so-called society of tomorrow, in which technological and civilizational progress will dominate all areas of human life. As an experienced educator and observer of social life, endowed with an intuitive insight into the future, he knew that in his educational activities he could not limit himself to the "here and now", he had to work for the future.

#### 4. THE POTENTIAL OF FR. FUSCO'S PEDAGOGY

Reflection on the fundamental assumptions of Fr. Fusco's pedagogy allow us to conclude that this pedagogy is still relevant today as his system of help and support for socially neglected children and youth contains, in its essence, Christian, universal and timeless program of reaching out to young people with the message of love. This love is of formative nature and it, on one hand respects human freedom and dignity and, on the other, is capable of lifting young people from moral and material decline, by providing them with appropriate conditions for their integral development and education. Showing respect to young people and offering them adequate support, which Fr. Fusco always encouraged, seems to be one of the basic needs that should also be safeguarded to the young generation today. In his opinion, young people at every stage of their development need the certainty that they can find "allies" among adults who are always ready to help them. He also emphasized that the awareness of being protected allows them to open up to cooperation and thus helps them achieve their autonomy (Corsi 2010, 19-20).

Another valid message of Fr. Fusco was that guardians should not make any distinctions among children. He firmly opposed any attempts to divide them

into good and bad, capable and incapable, i.e., better and worse. He wanted to approach each pupil with the same commitment, in kind and straightforward manner (Gremigni 2010). Moreover, Fr. Fusco claimed that children's questions should never be left unanswered, and what is more, children should never be ignored when they try to communicate with and enter the circle people whom they regard as role models. This dialogue between educators and pupils has very positive impact on their mutual relationships as well as on the development of their emotional bonds. Children grow up in positive atmosphere, they discover the world and the processes that govern it with the help of someone they trust the most at this stage of their development (Corsi 2010, 20).

In the pedagogy of Fr. Fusco, we can clearly find the preventive and prophylactic traits that can inspire contemporary educators and teachers, as he wanted to protect minors from the negative influence of the social environment often dominated by immoral and pathological behaviours. At the same time, he fully realized that it was not enough. For Fr. Alfonso, taking the children off the streets was only temporary measure. The long-term goal was to prepare pupils for an honest and responsible life in society (D'Antuoni 1898, 69-81). In achieving this goal, he required his colleagues to respect three important elements that constitute the foundation of effective educational work. The first is faith in man, created in God's image and likeness. The second element necessary in the upbringing process is to look at history as teacher of life. Thanks to this, educators will not repeat the mistakes of the past and will better use the new resources for the benefit of their pupils. The third and last element is to be the joy experienced in everyday life and full commitment to the pupils (Lecce 1989). This approach to education allowed Fr. Alfonso to create "timeless" foundations for education that take into account the integral development of the person. In his reflections, he came to the conclusion that lack of concern for upbringing and false, reductionist vision of man can lead to erroneous solutions in the formation of young people. Therefore, he postulated the need for an individualized approach to those under his care to bring out the best in them, for themselves, their families and the community in which they lived. He wanted to shape young people into free, responsible adults, who can think and decide for themselves (Ricciardi 2016).

In his writings and speeches, Fr. Fusco asked all adults for an authentic testimony of living in accordance with ethical and Christian principles. All this was meant to provide children with role models so that they could strive to follow in their footsteps by imitating them. At the same time, he argued that it is always necessary to pay close attention to those entrusted with the care of the youngest. He particularly emphasized the requirement of personal, moral and social maturity of the educator responsible for children (Fusco 2009). He knew well that young people devoid of moral backbone and good example on the part of adults, when fearing rejection from their peers and the world, would be more likely to abandon the idea of leading righteous life (Corsi 2010, 26). Fr. Fusco once again became prophet far beyond the scope of his times. similar trend can also be seen today.

Without stable values, people tend to act against themselves and thus harm not only themselves, but also the society in which they live. Father Alfonso claimed that only the experience of wise educational love can protect young people from such state of affairs (Tytko 2014).

According to the ideas of Fr. Fusco, social and moral education of person should rest on the belief that all young people, regardless of the time and place in which they live, have “mission” to accomplish, mission that has been entrusted to them by Providence. Therefore, in his understanding, education and upbringing of young people means supporting them in discovering and realizing their personal potential (Ricciardi 2016). Therefore, each pedagogical activity should have as its goal teaching and upbringing, both moral and civic, in accordance with the principles of integral development of the person. Realistic approach towards his pupils allowed Fr. Alfonso to create model of integral pedagogy, valuing the person in every dimension. His pedagogy therefore reflects desire to enable children’s harmonious development. Therefore, it is very important issue to compensate for any educational and emotional deficits in children. Additionally, according to Fr. Fusco, children’s free time, should be subject to some organization, maintaining appropriate proportions between rest and learning, recreation and duties. However, the overarching thought that binds all educational activities in Fr. Fusco’s pedagogy is to draw children’s attention to the need to be guided by values and faith in life. Fr. Fusco was sure that Christian formation, i.e., the preparation of believers who are convinced and consistent in striving for their own sanctification, is the element of educational work that should be present in all previous ones. Children’s openness to God is undoubtedly the most difficult requirement, especially in the situation when they experienced abuse and lack of love at home and in their immediate social environment.

The above-presented overview of current challenges and ways of implementing the ideas of Fr. Fusco’s pedagogy in the modern world brings to mind two main thoughts. The moral formation program created by the priest, based on the Christian concept, still retains its validity. In order to grow and develop properly, young people should be given an opportunity for comprehensive development. Starting from basic education, we should strive to build foundation for cultural and vocational education. In this respect, the most important thing is to discover in the pupils their talents and strengths, bestowed on them by the Creator, which reveal themselves and may bear good fruit. Fr. Fusco’s ideas find their implementation in the works of his spiritual daughters – sisters of Saint John the Baptist as well as of many lay people who undertake various initiatives as well as care and educational works for the integral upbringing and education of the most neglected and abandoned children and youth. The charisma that Fr. Fusco propagated in the world, also embraces supporting adults who found themselves in crisis situation and who often need assistance and bit of love.

## CONCLUSIONS

From the very beginning, the idea of full dedication to poor and abandoned children was the greatest desire of Fr. Fusco. The Apostle of Angri, brought up in the spirit of Christian love of God and man, was searching for innovative, ambitious solutions, based on the principle of accompanying pupils in their integral development and upbringing. According to him, the way out of difficult situation could only be achieved through social support and the kindness of people endowed with sense of empathy. Taking care of young people deprived of shelter required determination to oppose social inequalities. Approaching the deprivations faced by orphans with love and attention contributed to emphasizing the important role of the educator in the process of such children's development and upbringing.

Fr. Fusco, as an experienced educator and priest, knew that the presence of adults who were deeply involved in the lives of those under their care was simply necessary. The help he provided to the children he met in his life was also substantive, always aimed at the "good" of young people both in its temporal and supernatural dimensions. He believed that such an approach may limit the educational distance and create deep bond and intimacy between educators and pupils, turning them into allies in the common cause of education and upbringing. Father Fusco wanted to be father to his pupils and was treated as such by them (Corsi 2010, 59-60).

Father of Orphans, as Fr. Fusco was often called, proposed new model of working with neglected children. It was supposed to rely primarily on the feeling of closeness and understanding of pupils by adults. At the same time, he emphasized that the educator should be role model. It was the educator who was supposed to be an authority who allowed children to learn appropriate behaviour to grow and integrate more closely with society. As realist, he knew that in the matter of education one had to reject all determinism. Therefore, he tried to break stereotypes according to which neglected children have no real chance to overcome their shortcomings and deficiencies. At this point, the Father of Orphans addressed especially all people who have in their hearts the desire to dedicate themselves to educational work. He constantly reminded them that they were responsible for the children entrusted to their care. He emphasized that they should take care of every wronged child to infuse hope and comfort into children's life so that they can regain the joy of life and develop successfully (D'Antuoni 1898, 45).

The above reflection on the main ideas of the pedagogy of Fr. Alfonso Maria Fusco shows his great concern for effective educational influence, which in its essence consists in allowing children to realize that they have in their hearts an intrinsic desire for happy life. Truth, love, freedom and joy are values that protect pupils from reducing their needs and aspirations only to the material sphere, to "having something". Opening to what is good and noble leads to the awakening of higher desires, flowing from the core of the human person where conscience comes to the fore (Lecce 1998, 3). This is place where "being someone" means working on

oneself, undertaking mental and physical effort, and organizing one's aspirations. Simultaneously, individual development of pupils should be accompanied by growth in social relationships. Children, while learning responsible love towards themselves, will also act maturely towards others and avoid attitudes that could hurt other people and, at the same time, block the path to building their own successful future.

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## Salesian Schools as Inspiration for Modern Education. *Review of: Funkcje społeczne szkół salezjańskich Okręgu Szkolnym Wileńskim okresie Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej by Łukasz Kalisz*

**Szkoły salezjańskie inspiracją dla współczesnej edukacji.**

**Recenzja książki Łukasza Kalisza pt. „Funkcje społeczne szkół salezjańskich Okręgu Szkolnym Wileńskim okresie Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej”**

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Monograph by Łukasz Kalisz, *Funkcje społeczne szkół salezjańskich Okręgu Szkolnym Wileńskim okresie Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* [Social function of Salesian schools in the Vilnius School District during the Second Polish Republic] published by the University of Białystok Publishing House (Białystok 2021, 257 pages), highlights the significant role of Salesian schools in the history of Polish education and points to timeless educational solutions implemented in them. The publication is the outcome of the author's extensive research conducted in numerous archives and libraries in Poland, Lithuania and Belarus such as the Salesian Archives of the Provinces of Krakow and Warsaw, Lithuanian Central State Archives and Lithuanian State Historical Archives in Vilnius, Central Salesian Archive in Rome, Private Archive of Artur Liashneusky in Minsk (Kalisz 2021, 227-231). The monograph combines historical, social, and educational perspectives.

Salesian education has occupied special place among the scholarly interests of Łukasz Kalisz, PhD, assistant professor at the Department of History and Theory of Education at the Faculty of Education of the University of Białystok from the very beginning of his scientific career (Kalisz 2021, 235). This is clearly illustrated by the scientific publications which comprise the following positions: *Okoliczności powstania Niższego Seminarium Towarzystwa Salezjańskiego Reginowie okresie II Rzeczypospolitej* [The circumstances of establishing the Minor Seminary of the Salesian Society in Reginów during the Second Polish Republic] (2017), *Kościół św. Jana Bosko Kurhanie 1934-1945. Historia pierwszego Polsce kościoła ku czci założyciela księży salezjanów* [Church of St. John Bosco in Kurgan 1934-1945. The history of the first church in Poland in honour of the founder of the Salesian priests] (2018), *Biskupi wileńscy*



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*wobec zgromadzenia salezjańskiego okresie II Rzeczypospolitej [Vilnius bishops towards the Salesian congregation during the Second Polish Republic]* (2019), *Dzieła dobrotworne dla chłopców Różanymstoku [Charitable works for boys in Różanystok]* (2020).

The researcher's early scientific work in the field of Salesian education was focused on the preventive system and modern social rehabilitation facilities run by the Society of Saint Francis de Sales. With scientific development and obtaining funding from the National Science Centre, Kalisz expanded his research into new, previously undiscovered areas, focusing on the search for sources and on conducting queries in Polish and foreign archives. The reviewed monograph is the outcome of several years' research supported by thorough analysis of source materials on this topic. The author divided them into three main categories: monastic documents, documents of the Curia of the Vilnius Archdiocese and documents of the Vilnius School District Board of Education (Kalisz 2021, 17). The researcher collected very extensive and exhaustive range of both qualitative and quantitative data (the work's bibliography includes: 107 archival units, 33 official documents, 187 scientific studies and articles).

It should be noted that Łukasz Kalisz reached numerous unpublished and unused historical documents that had not yet been subjected to scientific analysis. As he points out in the introduction to the monograph, hitherto studies on this topic, although prepared on the basis of rich source materials, for obvious reasons failed to include documents deposited in foreign archives, such as those of Lithuania and Belarus, whose collections have until recently been unavailable to the public (Kalisz 2021, 14). The data carefully collected by the scientist provide significant input into the history of the development of Salesian schools in the Second Polish Republic, underline their role and importance for the society, as well as shed new light on many facts related to the dynamics of the development and operation of Salesian educational institutions in the Vilnius School District.

A definite advantage of the publication is its focus on the Vilnius School District, as this specific area called for more extensive elaboration in pertinent literature. Another advantage is the fact that the researcher simultaneously compared schools run by the Society of Saint Francis de Sales with those founded and run by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Such retrospection and an in-depth depiction of the activities of Salesian schools bring to the light their value against the demands of the reviving post-war education in Poland.

Salesian schools, i.e., Catholic private schools run by the Society of Saint Francis de Sales and the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians have made permanent mark on the history of education in Poland. Their history, presented in the first and fourth parts of the first chapter, is further vividly expanded upon in other parts of the reviewed work (Kalisz 2021, 108-111, 136, 200, 211-215). At the end of the 19th century, when Salesian schools were first established on the territory of the independent Second Polish Republic, they provided an important addition to state schools, educating children and young people in accordance with

the idea of shaping them into good citizens and honest Christians in line with the thought and works of the Italian priest John Bosco (1815-1888). The said priest was the creator of an ingenious pedagogical system based on three pillars, i.e., reason, religion, and love. It was preventive system which involved educational assistance, excluded physical punishment, and provided pupils with the atmosphere of family home. The presented publication offers thorough and reliable account on both the creator of the new educational methods as well as the teaching and educational practice of Salesian institutions.

The book consists of six mutually complementary chapters, each of them containing several, i.e., from three to seven, logically interrelated paragraphs. Already on the outset, the monograph attracts the reader's attention with its clear language. The work is complemented by an introduction, conclusion, and summary in English, Russian and Lithuanian. At the beginning of the book there is table of contents and list of abbreviations, and at the end the book contains bibliography and lists of photographs, maps, charts and tables, as well as indexes of names and places. The entire study consists of 257 pages and in its structure, content, and aesthetics it is well-thought-out composition of harmoniously linked issues. The collected factual material, maps prepared by the author himself and the included photographs make the work valuable source of information about Salesian institutions in the interwar period. It is, moreover, the first such publication describing Salesian institutions in Vilnius, Dworzec, Reginów, Kurhan, Laurów and Polepie.

In the introduction, Łukasz Kalisz provides clear outline of issues selected for the analysis. The author lists the basic assumptions of his scientific investigations (justification for undertaking the research, its goal, time frame, geographical and administrative area), and discusses the scientific output of other scholars who conducted similar research and published works devoted to the history and activities of Salesian congregations. Referring to this rich literature, he provides an analysis of archival material that have not yet been used so far and justifies his choices.

The first chapter of the presented monograph outlines the history of establishing the Society of St. Francis de Sales and the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the female equivalent of the Society. Kalisz briefly reminds the readers about Saint John Bosco (the founder of the Society) as well as about the pillars of the preventive system he created and introduced into pedagogy. The author likewise provides information about Maria Dominika Mozzarello (1837-1881), the initiator of Salesian homes for girls. The rest of the chapter depicts the beginnings of the Salesians' activity on Polish territories before the country's independence in 1918, against the background of the contemporary historical and social conditionings. It also presents the rich legacy of Saint John Bosco's successors whose thoughts and achievements found so fertile ground in Poland.

The most extensive, 68-page second chapter outlines the administrative division of the Society of St. Francis de Sales during the Second Polish Republic and the development of the institutions of the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Poland. Next, the chapter presents the structures of

the Church and discusses the consequences of adopting the provisions of the 1925 Concordat which specifically defined the procedures for developing the activities of religious congregations in Poland, with particular emphasis on the Vilnius School District, which also concerned the Salesian Society. The remaining part of this chapter, focused on determining the research area resulting from the administrative division of the country into school districts. The author put particular emphasis on detailing material property of both male and female Salesian congregations including information on the size of facilities used for educational, upbringing and pastoral work. Kalisz refers the reader to his earlier works, in which he discussed Salesian institutions in Różanystok and Supraśl located in the Vilnius Archdiocese, but outside the Vilnius School District, around which the reviewed work is focused. The second chapter was also enriched with valuable original maps with precise point symbols of Salesian establishments. It is worth noting that these graphics may provide material for future scientific works on similar topics.

The third chapter is quite concisely developed part of the publication, focusing mainly on the position of Salesian schools in the structure of state education and on presenting brief characteristic of these schools. The readers may learn that most of them were primary and vocational schools as well as minor theological seminaries. The author further depicts the Society's efforts to establish more institutions adapted to the current educational system. The chapter also points to legal acts related to the organization of state education in the Second Polish Republic.

The fourth chapter of the work concentrates on the general and vocational education in Salesian schools. The detailed presentation of topics from the Salesian schools' curricula together with the timetables of classes, including extracurricular ones, takes the reader to the times of pre-war Salesian education. The author provides detailed outline of the teaching process, emphasizing the role of workshops in the vocational education of pupils that played crucial role in their preparation for specific professions. The conclusions and tips included there would be worth using even today in contemporary educational systems. This chapter also highlights the Salesians' great concern for the school library resources, especially textbooks.

The fifth chapter of the monograph is devoted to the school community, i.e. teachers and pupils of Salesian schools. First, the author tries to specify the number of pupils and describes in detail their social situation (most of them were orphans or came from poor families) as well as health condition. He also includes description of medical care and hygiene in schools and in the adjacent dormitories, and touches on the achievements of young people and the future fate of graduates. The provided facsimile certificates of completing vocational school and of passing the apprenticeship exam, allow readers to get acquainted with authentic documents from 1932. The rest of the chapter contains (in descriptive and tabular form) valuable information regarding the state of the teaching staff, teachers' education and qualifications, and the conducted teaching and craft activities. The readers can gain an insight into initiatives and actions taken by teachers to support the achievement of educational goals, but also showing their concern for the moral and religious development of their pupils.

The last, sixth chapter is the culmination of the previously discussed issues. It relates to the methods and forms of work with young people, passing on the system of values in school and out-of-school practice, and refers to the theoretical foundations of preventive education contained in the first chapter. The author presents the assumptions of the theory of education implemented in Salesian schools against the background of the educational ideals of the Second Polish Republic. significant part of the chapter is devoted to extracurricular educational activities and their role in developing in pupils the sense of belonging to the school community, which may still prove valid today. Łukasz Kalisz points to the lasting bond between tutors and school graduates as natural outcome of the implemented system of Salesian education. An important aspect of this part of the work, which can provide inspiration for modern educators, are the author's reflections on dealing with negative behaviour of pupils in Salesian schools as well as the parts devoted to former Salesian pupils. The chapter ends with presentation of the Salesian Past Pupils' Association in Vilnius.

At the end of the work, the author summarizes the previously presented research results, multidimensional scientific considerations and tries to assess the functioning of Salesian education in the Vilnius School District of the Second Polish Republic. His scientific reflection leads to the conclusion that Salesian schools in the researched area fully performed their social and religious functions, playing, as they still do today, an important role in the system of youth education. Salesian schools were characterized by an integral approach to the upbringing and education of young people, by which they have earned themselves an excellent reputation in the eyes of the state authorities and local community. It was emphasized that the development of Salesian congregations was possible thanks to people of good will who, fascinated by Fr. John Bosco decided to donate their property for educational purposes or devote themselves to the work aimed at promoting Salesian ideas in their environment.

An extremely important part of every scientific work is the bibliography. In the reviewed publication, Łukasz Kalisz distinguished archival sources, published documents, studies and articles, as well as netography. It should be emphasized again that the author reached out for primary sources that had not yet been studied by Salesian historians. He carefully listed individual archival units on pages 227-231. Similarly, in the second part of the bibliography he provided detailed list of the years, numbers and positions of the used Journals of Laws and Official Journals: the Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland, the Official Journal of the Vilnius School District Board and the Official Journal of the Minister of Religious Denominations and Public Education. In view of the above, it seems rather incomprehensible why he failed to include similar specification of magazines. In the case of such study, it would be advisable to show adequate collections of interwar press or, more generally, press from that period. In the introduction, Łukasz Kalisz writes: "The source base is also expanded by pedagogical, historical, and religious magazines published in the Vilnius School District, as well as national periodicals. particularly

analyzed “Il Bolletino Salesiano”, bulletin published continuously since the times of Fr. John Bosco. The first Polish version of the “Biuletyn” was published in 1897 under the name “Wiadomości Salezjańskie”, and later: “Pokłosie Salezjańskie”, “Nostra”, “Biuletyn Salezjański” and the currently published “Magazyn Salezjański Don Bosco” (Kalisz 2021, 20). Ten yearbooks of “Pokłosie Salezjańskie” were used in the publication: 1925 (No. 12), 1928 (No. 1, 2, 10), 1929 (No. 11), 1930 (No. 6, 7-8), 1932 (No. 7-8, 10), 1933 (No. 6), 1935 (No. 6), 1936 (No. 1, 6, 11), 1937 (No. 10, 12), 1938 (No. 1, 11). In addition to this periodical, the author also used other magazines published in the researched period, such as: “Kresy” 1923 (No. 17), “Kurjer Warszawski” 1928 (No. 136), “Oświata Wychowanie” 1929 (Issue 4), 1933 (No. 2-3) and “Wiadomości Archidiecezjalne Wileńskie” 1933 (No. 13-14).

It was in Vilnius that the Catholic press was born, providing an important source of information on the rich history of this region. Jerzy Zajęc conducted extensive research on Vilnius press studies of the interwar period (Zajęc 2019, 379). His work broadly presents the literature that shaped the socio-religious awareness of the faithful in one of the five church provinces in Poland during the interwar period. Therefore, it would be worth expanding the studies and bibliography of the discussed publication in this respect, showing separately the used scientific studies and broad collections of periodicals from the discussed period.

It must be emphasized that the above comments in no way undermine the importance of the reviewed work. The publication by Łukasz Kalisz has high scientific and educational value. It constitutes detailed guide to the social and educational activities of both male and female Salesian institutions in the Vilnius School District in the interwar period. In-depth analyses of materials, reflections and scientific conclusions of the author provide the reader with realistic description of the achievements of Salesian congregations.

The publication is the first document in the literature of Polish pedagogical thought that shows in comprehensive way the application of the preventive system of Fr. John Bosco in the Vilnius region. It is the author's tribute to Salesian teachers and donors who made it possible to provide young people with proper care and education and improve the level of their education in the difficult post-war reality. It can also provide point of departure for reflection on contemporary education and offer new perspective on the educational system of the Polish school in the 21st century.

Careful reading of the study may become the *spiritus movens* for further in-depth scientific research on the history of monastic education in Poland, especially so as it is easily accessible. In addition to the aesthetically published (sewn-bound) printed version, the reviewed work has been published open access (<https://doi.org/10.15290/fssoswodr.2021>). It also has DOI identifier (10.15290/fssoswodr.2021), which may facilitate its quick access and dissemination, particularly that the issues selected by the author seem to be still relevant today and, being adequate for the upbringing of modern person, constitute an important source for contemporary pedagogy.

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