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THE FREQUENCY AND DETERMINANTS OF PARTICIPATION IN SELECTED CULTURAL FORMS - THE RESULTS OF RESEARCH

Abstract

During the last dozen of years participation of the Polish in cultural events decreased, as one of the ways of spending free time. It is due to many causes, especially: commercialization of the cultural sphere and limiting access to culture financed from the group consumption fund and progressing process of globalization of cultural values, and especially even stronger effects of international commercial mass culture, which is favored by, among others, technological development, open borders and fashion of adapting western behavioral schemes and consumption of polish consumers. At the same time a significant number of households, because of their deteriorating financial conditions, was forced to limit some of their expenses, and expenses related with culture were among the most frequently abandoned.

The selected results of conducted by the authors survey research of Szczecin's and it's neighborhood's citizens are presented in this article. Their goal was to determine among other: the frequency of citizens' participation in selected cultural forms and factors determining them, receivers' preferences related with the types of cultural events and the repertoire and the sources of information about the program of cultural institutions in Szczecin.

Introduction

The transforming economical system in Poland has caused many transformations, which also covered the cultural sphere. In the current state of civilization development, polish society shows a differentiated level of cultural interests. Undoubtedly a strongly differentiated financial situation of households, a decrease in real incomes of many groups of people with the growing unemployment rate has affected this, but also an individual demeanor of a man and the awakening of cultural needs synergically connected with the education level. Culture, being an idea with many meanings and variously defined in the literature of the subject, is at the same time a broad category, covering many areas, such as, among others: knowledge, beliefs, art, morality, laws, traditions and other intellectual and physical products of human actions, created as the result of human activity¹. Generally one can understand by it a "totality of human material and non-material activities and values and admitted ways of acting, given to other collectives and next generations" (Golka, 1992, page 49-50). One may presume, that

¹ „There is nothing more unspecified than the word culture" wrote in the XVIII century J. G. Herder in the preface to "A thought about philosophy of history", emphasizing the many meanings of this idea. A review of various ways of defining culture can be found among others in: M. Filipiak, Socjologia kultury. Zarys zagadnień; Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie – Skłodowskiej, Lublin 2002, page 14-20.

culture is an important part of social life, as it shapes the postures and actions of individuals and the society through providing esthetic and emotional experiences to people, enriching their experiences and developing imagination, and by this fulfilling the psychological and social needs of a man and developing his personality.

There are new possibilities and challenges before the cultural sector, but also the need to work out a new way of thinking about organization and social and economical role of this sector. In a market-driven economy the culture is being the subject of a direct play of market forces and it becomes an area of not only social politics, but also economical politics, offering its receivers a product of a certain type. This situation means, that institutions providing goods and cultural services, both those financed from public means or by non-profit organizations and those acting according to market rules, should shape their supply offers in a significant range according to the needs and preferences of the receivers. These should be identified through market research as the current, official methods of collecting data on culture within public statistics do not provide an answer to many questions regarding Polish society's participation in culture.

The scope and frequency of using cultural goods and services are determined by many, often related with each other factors, among others such as: available free time resources, level of material existence conditions, individual value system, preferences, pressure of group standards, life style, education, social-professional affiliation, and economical, dimensional and time availability of institutions, facilities and devices regarded as cultural infrastructure. Participation in culture also can be the result of not only the need of intellectual experiences and experiencing esthetic emotions, but also can be motivated by the wish of acquiring social relationships, emphasizing life success and prestige, collecting or increasing personal possessions and getting rich (Bombol, Dąbrowska, 2003, page 146). Quoting a renowned Polish sociologist Jan Szczepański "...in human development fulfilling cultural needs is a central point of interest"(Szczepański, 1981, page 120) it has been concluded that unfavorable transformations of cultural life in Poland in the recent years require deeper empirical identification from this research field. The conducted research, which results are shown below, was to fill this space at least to some extent.²

Research results

Citizens of Szczecin and neighboring cities relatively rarely participate in examined cultural forms. Only every fourth person systematically (7 times in a year and more) participates in theatrical performances and classical music concerts, and these two forms are the most popular in relation to others. On average every sixth respondent visits exhibitions once every two months, vernissages, galleries etc. Only every tenth citizen often takes part in opera and operetta performances. Unfortunately, more than three quarters of people did not participate in an opera or operetta performance during the last year, and almost 65% did not participate in a classical music concert. A little less, 40% of the respondents, did not visit an art exhibition, vernissage, gallery, 37% did not take part in theatrical performances and over 30% did not participate in any cultural events during the last year (see table 1).

Unsettling is on the other hand, that the respondents have rated the significance of

² These researches were conducted by the authors in: February - March 2004 in form of direct questionnaires and they regarded participation in selected cultural forms, i.e. theatrical performances, opera and operetta, classical music concerts, art exhibitions, vernissages, galleries, etc. Two respondent groups were covered and separate questionnaire forms had been prepared for them, and some of the questions were repeated in both questionnaires. Survey 1 was conducted among 300 randomly selected Szczecin's and neighborhood's citizens. Survey 2 covered 300 performances' viewers (intentional group selection) in selected cultural facilities: Due to both the size of the trial, the way of selecting for research, as well as the technique of collecting data used, the researches are representative and may be the basis for generalizing the results.

participation in the above presented cultural forms as medium (answers between 2,63 and 3,73 points in a 1-5 scale, where 1 - means insignificant, and 5 - very important; see table 1 and figure 1). Only every third person regards participation in theatrical performances (5 points) as very important. Every fourth respondent is of a similar opinion in regard with classical music concerts, and in relation with exhibitions, vernissages and galleries - every fifth respondent. Even less, because only several percent of people answered, that participation in opera and operetta performances is very important to them. It indicates, that the needs of participation in culture are treated by respondents as the higher level needs (meaning those, which according to hierarchical order of needs are fulfilled only after fulfilling the basic needs), which may create concerns, that in case of deterioration of the financial status of households, expenses related with culture will be reduced.

Table 1. Frequency and significance of participation in selected cultural forms in % of respondents' answers in general.

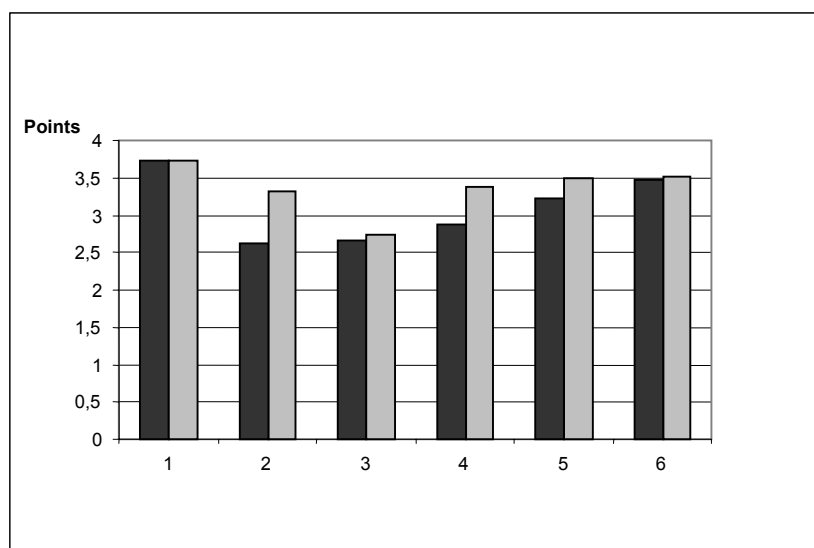
Specification	Never		Once		Twice-three times		4-6 times		7-10 times		More than 10 times		Average assessment of participation's significance in the scale of: 1-5 points.		Percentage of people for whom participation is very important	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
1.Theatre	36,6	13,0	22,6	17,0	24,0	28,0	10,0	21,5	3,2	6,8	1,4	13,5	3,73	3,72	29,7	32,2
2.Opera	62,6	51,7	13,6	20,3	7,9	16,7	0,7	6,8	0,0	1,6	0,0	2,9	2,63	3,32	6,1	17,8
3.Operetta	79,2	58,8	13,6	15,4	6,1	15,4	1,1	6,4	0,0	1,0	0,0	2,9	2,66	2,74	6,8	13,8
4.Classical music concert	64,9	36,7	19,7	19,6	11,5	14,8	2,9	10,3	0,7	4,8	0,4	13,8	2,88	3,37	12,5	26,7
5.Art exhibitions, vernissages, galleries	43,4	15,1	22,2	18,6	19,0	31,8	11,5	22,2	2,2	5,1	1,8	7,1	3,23	3,50	17,9	21,5
6.Other cultural events (e.g. pop music concerts)	30,1	20,09	25,1	13,5	29,7	24,1	10,0	15,8	2,9	6,4	2,2	19,3	3,48	3,52	19,7	25,7

Where: A – respondents of the first group (citizens of Szczecin and the neighborhood)



B - respondents of the second group (participants in performances/shows)

Source : results of researches

Figure 1. Average assessments of participation's significance for respondents in selected cultural forms in % answers in general.



Where:

-  Citizens of Szczecin and neighborhood
-  Shows' participants

1– theatre; 2 – opera; 3 – operetta; 4 – classical music concert; 5 – art exhibitions, vernissages, galleries; 6 – other cultural events

Source: researches results.

Seldom participation, or not participating in culture, in respondents' opinions is the result, above all, of the lack of time (66% of answers) and no money (53% of answers). As the next cause of such a state the respondents listed:

- limited access to information regarding artistic events in the city - 28% of answers,
- difficulties with transportation or great distances from the place of living - 17%,
- no interest in such a way of spending free time – 12%,
- low number of premiers – 12%,
- inappropriate repertoire – 10%,
- not the highest artistic level of performances – 9%,
- inappropriate hours of the shows – 8% of answers.

To more frequent participation in theatrical performances, opera and operetta the citizens would be encouraged the most by lower ticket prices (61% of answers) and participation of famous polish actors and directors in performances (40% of answers). For almost 30% such a incentive would be discounts for frequent theatre visitors or students, pensioners, annuitants, etc. Every fourth respondent would be drawn to such performances by guest performances of other polish or foreign groups. On average for every sixth person a greater amount of premiers, but also greater activity of the institution of culture in providing information about performances and possibilities of purchasing the tickets would encourage to participate. 14% indicated a lighter repertoire, and 3% the necessity to differentiate days and hours of shows. At the same time nearly every tenth citizen (confirming his answer to one of the previous questions) confirmed, that he is not interested in participating in such shows at all and that rather nothing would encourage him to change his mind.

At the same time, emphasizing the role of economic predispositions, almost 60% of Szczecin's citizens declared, in the case of their income's growth, a tendency towards more frequent participating in performances. Only 12% answered, that this factor would not have a significant effect in their participation in culture (see figure 2).

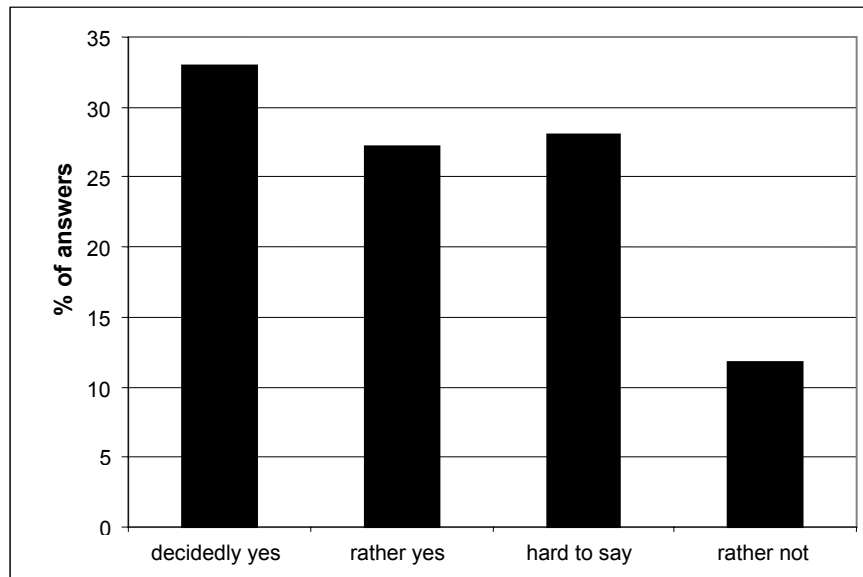
On the other hand the analysis of answers of people participating in performances allows to make a presumption, that actually economic aspects are not that important, if it is about the participation in shows. Thus indicating the lack of money and high ticket prices may in many cases be treated as an excuse and the simplest explanation for not participating in culture. The price is only in the sixth place among the factors that determine the choice of a particular cultural event by people participating in shows - only 25% of respondents said it had been one of the most important criteria for selecting performances. A grater attention is paid to :

- event type (concert, operetta, puppet theatre, opera, etc.) - 45% of indications,
- repertoire type (drama, comedy, modern play, classical music, etc.) - 40%,
- review of the show in media - 35%,
- names of the actors taking part in the performance - 33%,
- opinions of other people, who have already seen the show - 32% of indications.

On average every fifth participant of a specific show had selected it for it's date or based on the director's name. Relatively lesser significance in this case have such criteria as:

show's promotion and its prestige (7% of answers), possibility of acquiring cheaper tickets (5% answers), possibility of being (4%) and using a group entry organized by workplaces, schools, etc. (3% answers).

Figure 2. Respondents' tendency towards more frequent participation in culture in the case of income growth in % in general.



Source: researches results.

About the fact, that cultural events tickets' prices are important, but not the most important from the participation in culture point of view, also tell the answers to the question about the evaluation of the tickets' price level by their participants. The majority, 74% thought, that it is mediocre, and 25% though of it as high. At the same time in case of a 20% rise of the prices of shows, at least 41% respondents would limit their participation in such shows. Only 5% of spectators would abandon such a way of spending free time.

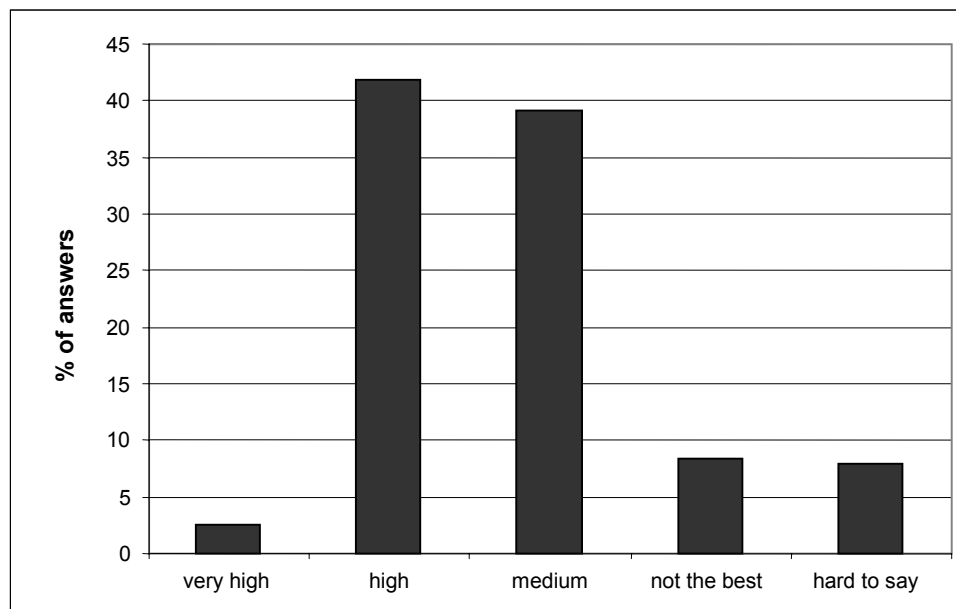
As it was mentioned before, institutions operating in the culture market wanting to draw receivers must offer them a product compliant with their needs and preferences. The most preferred by spectators repertoires are:

- comedies – 66% answers,
- drama – 49%,
- opera – 24%,
- operetta – 24%,
- avant-garde shows (so called „performances”) – 23%,
- ballet – 16%,
- pantomime – 8%,
- puppet shows – 6%,
- concerts - 6%,
- cabarets – 1% answers.

Apart from the type of products offered by cultural facilities, an equally important issue is their quality of perception from a subjective spectators' point of view. Mostly participants of cultural shows in Szczecin quite well appreciate their level (see figure 3). Almost 45% respondents believes, that it is high, including almost 3% thinking, it is very high. Another 39% believes, that the level of cultural shows in the city is mediocre. Only 8%

of participants expressed a negative opinion and the same amount had nothing to say about that.

Figure 3. Evaluation of the level of cultural events in Szczecin by their participants in % of answers in general.



Source: researches results.

A greater activity of cultural institutions in passing on information regarding shows organized and their promotion may in a significant way contribute to increasing the number of spectators and listeners. The most important source of information regarding the cultural offer of institutions of Szczecin is the press - 56% of answers. Almost 37% in this field uses information placed on posters, leaflets and other advertisement materials. Not much less (35%) browses through repertoires published by particular cultural facilities. Almost every third respondent gets information about particular cultural events from their friends. Also grows the significance of Internet, as the source of information about the cultural offer - in this case 31% of respondents use WWW pages. Every fourth citizen receives such information from television and radio.

Summary

During the last dozen of years participation of the Polish in cultural events decreased, as one of the ways of spending free time. It is due to many causes, especially: commercialization of the cultural sphere and limiting access to culture financed from the group consumption fund and progressing process of globalization of cultural values, and especially even stronger effects of international commercial mass culture, which is favored by, among others, technological development, open borders and fashion of adapting western behavioral schemes and consumption of polish consumers. (Bombol, Dąbrowska, 2003, page 146-147).

At the same time a significant number of households, because of their deteriorating financial conditions, was forced to limit some of their expenses, and expenses related with culture were among the most frequently abandoned.

Participation in cultural events also requires having a sufficient amount of free time. A

constantly growing part of the Polish society complains about it, especially the better educated and with higher incomes, living in big cities, the group which - as research shows - most often participates in cultural events. In such a situation the significance of those leisure forms grew, that are cheap and easily accessed, which in practice means democentric and passive forms, especially such as: watching TV, listening to radio, conversations with family members and social life in small groups. At the same time the needs in the field of participation in culture were regarded by Polish households as medium important, but also as the worst fulfilled in relation to other needs groups (Burlita, Witek, 2002). One might await, that as the financial situation of households improves, at least a part of people will increase their frequency of being in theatres, opera, operetta, in concerts, etc..

Conducted research proves, that on average only every fourth - fifth citizen (mostly people with above than high school education) relatively often (at least 7 times a year) goes to theatres, opera, operettas, classical music concert and to exhibitions, vernissages, etc. It is also important, that only a dozen percent of respondents decidedly answered, that they are not interested in participation in such events at all and that there is nothing capable of encouraging them to do so. There still is a significant group of people rarely participating in performances, shows or concerts, towards which the cultural institutions should undertake active and thought through actions in order to increase their participation in culture. They should be not only economic incentives (lower ticket prices for people frequently going to theaters and learning, pensioners, annuitants, etc.), but also actions related with selecting an appropriate (compliant with the needs and preferences of the receivers) repertoire, drawing known actors and directors to participate in performances and providing information and promotion of specific cultural events, especially based on public relations actions, that are supposed to create interest of journalists and the public opinion (Morelli, 2002; Scheff, Kotler, 1997). Cross-promotion is worth mentioning, incorporating culture's subjects into marketing actions, several congeneric to culture crafts.³

The price is also important, though it is worth emphasizing, that its significance in mix - marketing in the case of culture is not dominant. The main segment of culture's participants (newly developing medium class) is rather driven by other than the price criteria. Probably a higher significance may be: the willingness to vary free time, entertainment and pleasures, esthetic and intellectual experiences, but also the willingness to emphasize the affiliation to a certain social group and turning attention to the achieved social position and a corresponding life style. Participation in culture may be one of the discriminants of achieving a higher social position, which is decided not by personal values, but by access to certain goods and institutions, among which culture should occupy an important place.

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³ An example of such actions is promotion of supporting each other, books and movies about Harry Potter, or Enya's cd, which was successful only after it had been used as the soundtrack of "The Lord of the Rings".

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