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**STUDENT CULTURE AS A MEANS OF INTEGRATING THE  
ACADEMIC COMMUNITY  
СТУДЕНТСЬКА КУЛЬТУРА ЯК ЗАСІБ ІНТЕГРАЦІЇ  
АКАДЕМІЧНОЇ СПІЛЬНОТИ**

*У статті розглянуто поняття студентської культури як форми інтеграції академічної спільноти. Сконцентровано увагу на одній із форм культурної активності студентів, якою є діяльність театральних колективів, зокрема, Студентського Театру «Цезар». Представлено характеристику діяльності Студентського Національного Театрального Фестивалю «Theatrum orbis Terrarum», що проходить в Ольштині, як приклад інтеграції академічних і мистецьких кіл у національному та інтернаціональному масштабі.*

**Ключові слова:** студентська культура, інтеграція академічної спільноти, культурна активність, студентський театр, театральний фестиваль.

*For as long as man feels the need to act  
and explore his boundaries and possibilities  
- the theater will accompany him on that journey.*

H. Witalewska

**Introduction.** The Latin word «cultura» originally denoted agricultural cultivation («cultura agri»), namely the act of transforming the natural environment into commodities and products for human use. The word «cul-

ture» was first used metaphorically by Cicero who coined the phrase «cultura animi» – cultivation of the soul. Throughout the ages, the term «culture» acquired new meanings and was used in an increasingly broader context.

Czarnowski defines culture as «the entirety of objectivized elements of social heritage which are shared by many social groups and are capable of spreading geographically due to their objective character» [1, 18]. Suchodolski notes that culture is «the overall achievements of humanity which have been socially preserved, accumulated throughout the ages and continuously enriched with new creative works through the efforts of global societies; it also denotes the level of development of societies, groups and individuals in a given historical era which was determined by forces of nature, the level of acquired knowledge, pursuit of artistic activity and different forms of social coexistence» [2, 16].

According to Kłoskowska, culture is «a relatively integrated whole encompassing human behaviors which are shared by different communities and are assimilated during social interactions as well as the products of such behavior» [6, 10]. The cited definitions set the foundations for sociological, psychological and educational concepts of culture as the overall set of human achievements. Similarly to ancient Greece, the concept of culture in education includes upbringing, morality, cultural values and institutions that support the pursuit of those values. In the sociological approach, culture embodies human actions, behaviors, products and ideas. From the philosophical point of view, culture denotes science, technology, art, religious, icons and symbols [10, 233].

The theater is one of the most popular forms of artistic expression. The word «theater» is derived from the Greek «thèatron» and the Latin «theatrum», and it has many meanings. It can represent the building where theatrical plays are staged or an institution which produces them. The theater can also denote an academic discipline, a field of art or a group of artists who give theatrical performances. The theater «is a communication situation which relies on the viewer's and the performers' shared assumption that the past (or future) perceived by the viewer constitutes the present for the performer who usually pretends to be someone else and

somewhere else than the viewer» [8, 5]. According to Witalewska, the theater can have exert an immense influence on mankind «by making the contemporary man a fuller, more rational and sensitive being (...) by educating the human being inside a man (...), by creating “a human being inside every man”» [13, 52–53].

This paper discusses student culture as a means of integrating the academic community. The discussion will focus on theater groups, a popular manifestation of students' cultural activity, in particular the Cezar Student Theater. The «Theatrum orbis Terrarum» National Student Theater Festival in Olsztyn will also be described as a model event which supports the integration of academic art communities in the domestic and international arena.

### **Student culture – cultural participation.**

Student culture emerged upon the foundation of the first universities, and in Poland, its beginnings can be traced back to the incorporation of the Jagiellonian University in 1364. In the 1950s, student culture became an inextricable element of the student theater movement which brought together spontaneous student groups which embarked on various forms of artistic activity, including theater and comedy shows. The contemporary student culture takes on a broader meaning which incorporates the artistic aspect of academic activity groups as well as the axiological aspect as a set of values, norms and principles characteristic of those groups.

In the era of globalization, education is a process during which individuals learn to understand cultural, scientific and technological codes, thereby acquiring the skills necessary to cope in a knowledge-based economy. As a service provider, a university should trace its roots in management, and similarly to other businesses, it should constantly evolve, develop and change to accommodate the growing needs of its customers. Educational and extramural activities promote active involvement and initiative among students. Curricular activities force students to complete a given set of tasks and responsibilities in order to complete a course. In this process, students acquire the skills necessary for future employment, and

they learn to put theoretical knowledge into practice, such as teaching practice. Cultural activities, on the other hand, are initiated voluntarily and spontaneously by various academic groups.

In simple terms, cultural participation involves various interactions with culture in its broad sense. In literature, cultural participation is often associated with cultural activity. According to Grad, cultural activity involves not only behaviors related to cultural participation, but also creative efforts in cultural activities, including amateur art movements and undertakings which enable participants to become involved in cultural activity [3, 30–31]. Cultural participation serves four basic functions which Gajda defines as: expanding our knowledge about the world and promoting our understanding of humanity, multiplying personal experiences by interacting with diverse cultural content, in particular art, generating multi-faceted material for building an individual system of values, and creating a communication platform for people from various cultures and promoting the establishment of bonds between individuals and groups [2, 44–45]. Kamiński identifies five sources of motivation for participation in amateur student groups:

- a) instrumental utility – pursuing an individual’s or a group’s interests and passions;
- b) self-realization – fulfilling higher-order needs, in particular the need for self-realization which motivates humans to acquire information (knowledge) through artistic expression (art) and creative experiences (creation);
- c) interpersonal communication – drawing satisfaction from interpersonal communication in a group. Young individuals thrive on a sense of belonging to (becoming affiliated with) a group which, in some cases, compensates for the need of emotional contact;
- d) compensation – compensating for «deficits» by developing other talents. Artistic groups fulfill an individual’s needs, such as those arising from personal aspirations to become an actor, a musician or a dancer;

e) social activity – student groups' influence the academic environment by popularizing valuable cultural norms and offering exciting alternative leisure activities [5, 327–335].

Students' cultural activity involves deliberate cultural interactions, behaviors manifested in informal social groups (active participation), the pursuit of creative and reconstructive efforts and organization of cultural projects [11, 40]. Cultural endeavors can have a passive or active character, subject to the participants' attitude and sensitivity to artistic values. A passive student is indifferent to culture, he or she does not make premeditated efforts to become a part of the artistic scene, and when exposed to a cultural event by accident, he or she will not develop a personal attitude to its artistic content. An active student consciously and voluntarily searches for cultural events, he or she may attempt to express his or her own creativity, becoming an initiator, creator and co-creator of culture. The culture-forming power of individuals is also determined by their attitude towards culture which can be creative (culture creators), active (co-creating, preserving cultural content), passive (passive participation) and destructive (rejection, negation) [9, 17–18]. Many students claim that the lack of funds and time are the main barriers to cultural participation. Students' individual preferences and predispositions are also important obstacles to cultural involvement, including the lack of specific hobbies or interests, no ingrained habit to participate in cultural events, other preferred types of leisure activities, preference for popular culture, absence of personal predispositions to actively participate in culture, absence of clear goals and objectives and general reluctance to become actively involved in projects [7, 110].

A university's culture-forming function is vital for this discussion. As a carrier of cultural values, a university integrates the student community, promotes the cultural participation of young people and creates various opportunities for organizing and transforming student culture through a wide range of artistic and academic activities in and outside the university. This function is particularly important in schools of social sciences, humanities and arts because active involvement in cultural organizations and events

prepares students for their future careers. Students can pursue their interests and passions by joining academic clubs, centers, associations, formal and informal groups dealing with culture. A formal club is approved by the authorities, and it is generally founded in a university's department, faculty or in a community center. An informal group is a manifestation of incidental activity, it may be organized in a university's faculty or in a dormitory to give support to a particular event or campaign.

### **Good practice.**

The Academic Culture Center Artistic is the hub of cultural activities at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland, and it comprises more than ten organizations, including the Kortowo Song and Dance Ensemble, Jamnik Student Photography Studio, Professor W. Wawrzyczak Choir, Cezar Student Theater and the Academic Brass Band. The center organizes a variety of one-time and cyclic events which draw upon the ideology of the student culture and the values of the student movement, including comedy shows, exhibitions, stage plays, concerts, festivals and student holidays.



*Cezar Student Theater «Veni, vidi...»*

The Cezar Student Theater is part of the alternative theater scene. This theater group deserves special attention because it has a long tradition (it was founded in 1997), it has been very active on the domestic theater scene and has initiated a theater festival. Cezar's main aim is to promote

the students' artistic development and integrate the academic community. Through theatrical art, Cezar searches for various forms of emotional expression, it promotes personal growth and team development by focusing on expression, building imagination and stage sensitivity. Creative team work enables group members to open up, become more aware of each other's needs and experience emotions together. The theater helps its members to develop public self-awareness and creative thinking skills, and it unleashes the group's creative potential.

The communication between the artist and the audience during a stage performance engages the viewer and the actor in a game of «playing theater». The viewer is an indispensable part of the process, and the theater would not exist without him. The viewer can be a passive or an active participant who is engaged in the process deliberately or unknowingly. In some cases, he can become the actor, thus obliterating the viewer-actor boundary. According to Aleksander Hertz, the theater serves a social function through «shared emotions, respect for the same role models, adopting the same customs or esthetic norms. The theater exerts multifaceted effects by addressing different aspects of human personality, satisfying various needs and forms of compensatory behavior, by embodying and expressing different attitudes and expectations» [4, 35]. It instills vital life skills in young people. The theater promotes a sense of belonging to a group, it connects people and facilitates human contact.



*Cezar Student Theater «Unearthly variations»*

The Cezar Student Theater has produced more than 30 stage performances and installations. It gave performances in numerous theater festivals in Poland and abroad, including in Germany, Russia and Sweden. It is during festivals that a theater can most effectively fulfill its role of a community integrator.

The «Theatrum orbis Terrarum» National Student Theater Festival (SOFT), held since 2000, became a regular feature on the local art scene at the university and in the city of Olsztyn. The festival is a platform for the exchange of artistic experiences, and it integrates young people from Polish and European academic centers.

SOFT is a comprehensive review of various student theater genres ranging from movement and dance performances to drama. The festival is not only a competition which promotes healthy rivalry between contestants, but most importantly, it elicits an emotional response from both the performers and the audience. The aim of the project is to overview the artistic achievements of student theater groups, inspire new forms of artistic expression, support the exchange of experiences, integrate the academic community, promote the development of student culture in the local community and alternative theater productions. The festival has been held seven times since 2000, and it has witnessed performances by nearly 100 theater and paratheater groups and more than 500 artists. Admission is free to all presentations and performances held during the three-day event.

The student theater festival fulfills multiple roles. Firstly, every stage performance held during the event addresses important issues, in particular problems that are relevant for the new generation. The actors speak of freedom, man and his attitude towards the eternal truths, they adopt a humorous approach to the daily dilemmas young people face when making new choices. Secondly, the participants have an opportunity to observe the acting skills of their older colleagues, many of whom are professional actors, during performances shown out of competition. Thirdly, the never-ending discussions about plays, acting skills and the exchange of experiences motivate the performers to search for new forms of expression and expand their creative capabilities. Fourthly, the festival integrates the



academic community, not only the actors, but also members of the audience who respond spontaneously to stage performances. Fifthly, the performers are able to express their creativity during various events that are held in different venues across Olsztyn, including stage productions, concerts, recitals, art and photography exhibitions. And sixthly, the festival provides access to youth art without draining the audiences' pockets.

During the closing ceremony, the Cezarki awards are handed out to the best theater groups, actors and directors.



*Cezar Student Theater «Seven I»*

**Conclusions.** The theater provides viewers with an opportunity to directly experience art. It is an adventure which motivates the performers to search for new means of expression and explore new horizons. This journey takes both the actors and the audiences to uncharted, mysterious and magical places. The theater integrates the actors' community, the viewers, and it fosters communication between both groups. In a world dominated by the mass media, direct contact with art takes on a new significance, and the theater disseminates the ideas of humanism and emphasizes the importance of interpersonal communication. The theater's multiple roles are most effectively fulfilled during festivals which bring together performers from various academic communities.

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## РЕЗЮМЕ

**Цезарий Курковский.** Студенческая культура как средство интеграции академического сообщества.

*В статье рассмотрено понятие студенческой культуры как формы интеграции академического сообщества. Сконцентрировано внимание на одной из форм культурной активности студентов, которой является деятельность театральных коллективов, в частности, Студенческого Театра «Цезарь». Представлена характеристика деятельности Студенческого Национального Театрального Фестиваля «Theatrum orbis Terrarum», проходящего в Ольштыне, как пример интеграции академических, художественных кругов в национальном и интернациональном масштабе.*

**Ключевые слова:** студенческая культура, интеграция академического сообщества, культурная активность, студенческий театр, театральный фестиваль

## SUMMARY

**C. Kurkowski.** Student culture as a means of integrating the academic community.

*The article deals with the concept of student culture as a form of integration of the academic community. Attention is focused on one of the forms of cultural activity of the students, which is the work of the theater companies, including the Student Theatre «Caesar». The characteristic activities of the Student National Theatre Festival «Theatrum orbis Terrarum», held in Olsztyn is presented, as an example of the integration of academic, artistic circles at the national and international level.*

**Key words:** student culture, integration of the academic community, cultural activities, a student theater, a theater festival.