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ACTIVITIES OF CULTURAL CENTRES DURING THE COVID-19 EPIDEMIC IN POLAND

Cultural centres are institutions that conduct diverse social and cultural activities in a community—a town, village, or a district. They often deal with promoting the culture of viewing a region as a “little homeland.” They are sometimes combined with sport and recreation centres. The legal basis for the operation of these institutions can be the legal act on organising and conducting cultural activities,¹ the legal act on local government² or the legal act on the education system.³ Then, in the first case, we are dealing with a cultural institution, in the second one—with an organisational unit of a council office, and in the third one—with an educational institution. Depending on the legal status of a given institution, the principles of its operation differ. Namely, only cultural institutions have legal personality, while the other two formulas under which cultural centres operate are the budgetary units without legal personality.

At the end of 2019, there were 4,255 cultural and community centres and clubs in Poland. The largest number was in the Małopolskie (Lesser Poland) Province (459), with the lowest number in Lubuskie (Lubusz) Province (84). Most of them are rural facilities (63.2%). The vast majority (92.8%) was of the public sector, with the community government organising the operation

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¹ The legal act dated 25 October 1991 on organising and conducting cultural activities (Journal of Laws of 1991, no. 114, item 493 as amended).

² The legal act dated 8 March 1990 on local government (Journal of Laws of 1990, no. 16, item 95 as amended).

³ The legal act dated 7 September 1991 on education system (Journal of Laws of 1991, no. 95, item 425 as amended).

of 90.7% of the total public institutions.⁴ In 2019, the facilities organised 243.8 thousand events for 37.5 million participants, running 27.4 thousand associations/clubs/sections gathering 575.5 thousand members. Most of the associations/clubs/sections organised arts and technical activities (6 thousand). The highest number of participants were concentrated in senior clubs/universities of the third age (senior citizens) (122.4 thousand members).⁵ The institutions conducted a total of 6.6 thousand courses, with the course graduate status obtained by 101 thousand trainees. Dance lessons were the most popular (20.4% of the total number of courses), followed by foreign language courses (19%). At the end of 2019, the institutions housed 16.2 thousand artistic groups with the dance groups gathering most members (4.3 thousand). Out of the total number of 276 thousand members of the artistic groups 64.9% were school children and youths; every fifth member was a person older than 60.⁶

TEMPORARY FREEZING OF THE ACTIVITIES OF CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Since March 2020, this rich activity of cultural institutions has been put to a difficult test due to the unprecedented steps taken to stop the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in Poland. The crisis team in participation with the Minister of Culture and National Heritage decided to temporarily close the cultural institutions from 12 March 2020: starting from philharmonics, to operas, to operettas, theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries, art galleries, and art education institutions, to the cultural centres.⁷ Appropriately, the voivodes issued local law regulations concerning temporary suspension of organising art and entertainment events in their relevant areas,⁸ such as — for

⁴ URZĄD STATYSTYCZNY W KRAKOWIE (ed.), *Działalność centrów kultury, domów kultury, ośrodków kultury, klubów i świetlic w 2019 roku. Informacje sygnałne* ([Warszawa]: Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2020), 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷ “Rządowy Zespół Zarządzania Kryzysowego podjął decyzję o odwołaniu imprez masowych,” Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji, accessed 10 March 2020, <https://www.gov.pl/web/mswia/rzadowy-zespol-zarzadzania-kryzysowego-podjal-decyzje-o-odwolaniu-imprez-masowych>.

⁸ Voivode is a representative of the Council of Ministers and the superior of the government administration in a province; see Art. 152 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997 (Journal of Laws of 1997, no. 78, item 483 as amended) and the legal act dated 23 January

instance — the ordinance issued by the Voivode of Lublin.⁹ The legal basis was in this case Art. 37 para. 2 of the legal act dated 25 October 1991 on organisation and conducting of cultural activities, which states that a voivode can — inter alia — prevent epidemics by ordering a suspension, for a necessary period, of the organisation of art and entertainment events in the territory of the province or some of its area.¹⁰ Soon enough, similar decisions were made at the community levels. For example, the President of Bielsko-Biała suspended the public access to facilities like the Bielsko-Biała Cultural Centre and the Municipal Cultural Centre and their branches,¹¹ the voivode of Gdów community recommended, among others, cancellation of all cultural events and closing cultural facilities,¹² while the voivode of Szerzyny council ordered the cancellation of all events and classes for residents, which were organised by the community units, including cultural events.¹³

The Minister of Culture and National Heritage also recommended that cultural institutions and art education facilities cancel all business trips abroad, especially those related to participation in large mass events (fairs, exhibitions), and scholarship trips, in particular to countries with high coronavirus incidence.¹⁴ At the same time, he asked the directors of institutions to develop assumptions for their functioning in the event of an increased epidemiological threat in a given community, confirmed by the announcements from local authorities and local sanitary and epidemiological service, and recommended that these plans be limited to activities necessary to maintain the continuity of the institution's operation.¹⁵

2009 on province and the governmental administration in a province (Journal of Laws of 2009, no. 31, item 206 as amended).

⁹ Ordinance by the Voivode of Lublin dated 11 March 2020 on suspension of organising art and entertainment events in Lublin Province (Journal of Laws of Lublin Province of 2020, item 1802).

¹⁰ The legal act dated 25 October 1991 on organising and conducting cultural activities (Journal of Laws of 1991, no. 114, item 493 as amended).

¹¹ Instruction no. ON.0050.970.2020.ON by the President of the City of Bielsko-Biała dated 11 March 2020 on undertaking preventive actions related to the epidemiological risk associated with the spreading of coronavirus.

¹² Instruction no. 38/2020 by the Voivode of Gdów Community dated 11 March 2020 to counter the spread of COVID-19 coronavirus.

¹³ Instruction no. 23.2020 by the Voivode of Szerzyny Community dated 11 March 2020 on cancellation of events organised by the Szerzyny Community.

¹⁴ “#Koronawirus: Zawieszenie działalności instytucji kultury i placówek szkolnictwa artystycznego,” Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego, accessed 11 March 2020, <https://www.gov.pl/web/kultura/zawieszenie-dzialalnosci-instytucji-kultury-i-placowek-szkolnictwa-artystycznego>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

FINANCIAL TURBULENCE

Restraining the activities of cultural institutions from the very beginning caused challenges of various natures, especially financial ones. Among other things, the issue was raised of remuneration for employees of the institutions closed due to the coronavirus. The most comfortable situation was for those employed under an employment contract, who, in accordance with Art. 81 of the Labour Code are entitled to an idle time pay in a situation where their facility has been closed by the employer.¹⁶ The problem, however, is that the majority of people from the cultural industry are employed on a commission based contract. "It is a kind of social contract," said Adam Łoniewski, director of the Community Centre in Łask. "Children and the audience pay us for classes, and we pay employees for the hours they work with us, being in a way a guarantee of the fulfilment of the mutual obligations. However ... as early as March, as a result of the lower payments and cancellation of concerts, our financial lungs began to feel the first effects of 'acute respiratory failure'."¹⁷

What made the situation even more complicated, was that the community centres are usually only partially financed by the councils. The remaining part of the money must be earned by the centres themselves from their operation. For this reason, the inability to organise commercial events caused by the epidemic caused many a sleepless night for the facility managers. The proportion of the problem is illustrated in a statement by Kazimierz Dudzik, director of the Cultural Centre in Zakliczyn: "The restaurant which operates in our building, is closed and only food delivery service is available. We also publish our local newspaper but we had to reduce the number of pages. Advertisers, due to the current situation, are not too eager to advertise in it, so we have a loss of revenue for this, too. Money is needed to maintain not only the workforce but also the four clubs we manage."¹⁸ To add insult to injury, the Town Council in Zakliczyn made a decision to cut the funds for the cultural centre by PLN 100 thousand.¹⁹ A similar expe-

¹⁶ The legal act dated 26 June 1974 Labour Code (Journal of Laws of 1974, no. 24, item 141 as amended).

¹⁷ "Koronawirus a kultura. Oświadczenie dyrektora Łaskiego Domu Kultury," Siewie.tv, accessed 23 March 2020, <https://www.siewie.tv/artykuly/aktualnosci/11270-koronawirus-a-kultura-owiadczenie-dyrektora-askiego-domu-kultury>.

¹⁸ Sebastian CZAPLIŃSKI, "Kultura pod ścianą," *Tem: Galicyjski Tygodnik Informacyjny* (2020), nr 19: 20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

rience was shared by Janusz Kowalski, director of the Community Centre in Tuchów: “Our annual operation, apart from subsidies from the office of the Tuchów council, also includes revenue from classes for children and youth, revenues from renting premises for the First Communion receptions, birthdays, trainings, advertising income, but also income from the cinema which operates in our facility. We found ourselves in a very mediocre situation. As you know, the cinema is closed and we do not know when it can resume its operation. Every year, the budget of our community centre included an amount of approximately PLN 1.5 million. 33 percent out of this amount was the institution’s own revenues.”²⁰

The difficult situation forced many institutions to look for alternative sources of income. “In order not to lose too much money due to the coronavirus, we intend to launch our on-line store soon, where you can buy souvenirs from Tuchów,” said the director of the local cultural centre.²¹ Institutions operating in the field of culture were also helped by the Anti-Crisis Shield launched by the Polish government, enabling the exchange of unused benefits into vouchers to be used during the year.²² In addition, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage has announced government programs to support culture. One of them was the “Kultura w Sieci” (*Culture in the Network*) scholarship program, organised by the National Centre for Culture with a budget of PLN 80 million,²³ which was used by a number of institutions.²⁴ Also the city of Krakow announced support of PLN 12 million for cultural authors, under a project called “Kultura Odporna” (*Immune Culture*).²⁵

Besides, there were concerns expressed that local governments would create the expected savings in budgets from the cultural institutions. An example is the unsuccessful attempts by the Krakow authorities to change the status of eleven Youth Cultural Centres, first through their formal liquidation, and then by re-establishing them as branches of municipal cultural institutions. The necessity of these changes was justified by “the ongoing

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² “Voucher dla instytucji kultury,” Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego, accessed 27 May 2020, <https://www.gov.pl/web/gov/voucher-dla-instytucji-kultury>.

²³ MINISTERSTWO KULTURY I DZIEDZICTWA NARODOWEGO, NARODOWE CENTRUM KULTURY, *Regulamin programu Narodowego Centrum Kultury “Kultura w sieci”* (Warszawa: MKiDN, NCK, 2020).

²⁴ “Kultura w sieci. Wykaz wniosków rozpatrzonych pozytywnie (beneficjentów),” Narodowe Centrum Kultury, accessed 15 May 2020, https://nck.pl/upload/2020/05/wykaz-wnioskow-rozpatrzonych-pozytywnie_beneficjentow.pdf.

²⁵ “Kultura odporna,” Wydział Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego Urzędu Miasta Krakowa, accessed 31 May 2020, https://www.bip.krakow.pl/?dok_id=124316.

COVID-19 epidemic, and thus—the expected economic slowdown and a decrease in the income of the Municipality of Krakow.”²⁶

CHALLENGES FOR STATUTORY ACTIVITY

However, the main concern was that the epidemic called into question the very possibility of carrying out the statutory activities of community centres. After all, a cultural activity is about gathering people around it. There is no culture without people. Let us then analyse the new contexts of the activities of cultural institutions, the challenges they have faced and the methods they have used to try to overcome them. We will illustrate this only with selected examples due to the limited framework of the paper:

– CANCELLING OR SUSPENDING EVENTS AND CLASSES. For the sake of general safety, many cyclical and non-cyclical projects were cancelled: concerts, performances, exhibitions, vernissages, meetings with authors, artistic classes, the activities of associations, various informal groups, the University of the Third Age (senior citizens) were suspended, and cinemas were closed down. “This year many outdoor events will be cancelled, including the annual Knight’s Feast in Melsztyn, which is very popular every year,” said Kazimierz Dudzik, director of the Cultural Centre in Zakliczyn.²⁷ In Gromnik, for example, the annual Wine and Honey Festival was not held, nor the Veteran’s Day planned for May. “Our intention had also been to organise, for the first time, the Easter Fair which also failed,” explained a representative of the Community Centre in Gromnik.²⁸

– MOVING THE ACTIVITIES TO THE INTERNET. The lack of physical contact with the audience and visitors did not mean a complete cessation of the cultural institutions’ activities. Over time, thanks to the use of the potential of new technologies, more and more institutions transferred their activities to the Internet, organising, for example, virtual exhibitions,²⁹ classes to play

²⁶ Projekt uchwały Rady Miasta Krakowa w sprawie zamiaru likwidacji jednostki budżetowej – Staromiejskie Centrum Kultury Młodzieży w Krakowie, ul. Wietora 13-15 w celu utworzenia w jej miejsce filii Centrum Kultury Podgórze w Krakowie, ul. Sokolska 13, projekt Prezydenta Miasta Krakowa, druk nr 1188.

²⁷ CZAPLIŃSKI, “Kultura pod ścianą,” 20.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ “Wirtualna wystawa – Adam Nidzgorski *Art Brut. Sztuka surowa*,” Miejski Dom Kultury Szopienice-Giszowice w Katowicach, accessed 23 March 2020, <http://mdk.katowice.pl/wirtualna-wystawa-adam-nidzgorski-art-brut-sztuka-surowa>.

instruments,³⁰ art classes,³¹ fitness exercises,³² and even gymnastics for seniors.³³ “We have launched our YouTube channel where we post videos from our activities as well as historical materials,” said Marta Warias, director of the Cultural Centre in Żabno.³⁴ The Internet will certainly not substitute for the experience of physical contact with culture, however it offers other possibilities that are used in an innovative way by some of the institutions.

– INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH THE RECIPIENT. Physical distancing does not have to be synonymous with social distancing, which was acknowledged by cultural workers who did not limit themselves to one-way communication but used the possibilities of the Internet for interactive communication. Examples of such activities were: an interactive theatre performance,³⁵ dance classes during which the instructor and the student could see and communicate with each other,³⁶ or remote competitions for children, such as an art competition.³⁷ Showing teachers and performers in their private homes made the relationship with the audience more intimate. However, it was not always so nice and easy. “We decided to organise online classes but, frankly speaking, they are not as popular as intramural classes. In April, classes for children were free, and from May we had introduced fees,” explained Marta Warias, director of the Cultural Centre in Żabno.³⁸ On the other hand, operating on the Internet is a great opportunity to observe the reactions of the audience to the individual ideas, which would allow managers of cultural institutions to verify their action strategy and future plans.

– REORGANISATION OF INTRAMURAL WORK. The most comfortable situation was for the institutions which, apart from cultural activity, were also responsible for the promotion of the community, thanks to which they did not run

³⁰ “Sekcje instrumentalne CKiP,” Centrum Kultury i Promocji w Kocmyrzowie-Luborzycy, accessed 5 May 2020, <https://www.ckip.pl/sekcja-instrumentalne.html>.

³¹ “Zajęcia plastyczne,” Dom Kultury SMB Imielin, accessed 7 May 2020, <http://www.dkimielin.pl/zajecia-plastyczne/>.

³² “Ladies fitness,” Centrum Kultury i Promocji w Kocmyrzowie-Luborzycy, accessed 27 April 2020, <https://www.ckip.pl/ladies-fitness.html>.

³³ “Gimnastyka dla seniorów on-line,” Bemowskie Centrum Kultury, accessed 11 July 2020, <https://bemowskie.pl/zajecia/gimnastyka-dla-seniorow-on-line/>.

³⁴ CZAPLIŃSKI, “Kultura pod ścianą,” 20.

³⁵ “Interaktywna komedia fryzjerska,” Nowogardzki Dom Kultury, accessed 18 May 2020, <https://ndk.pl/aktualnosci/aktualnosci-ndk/730-w-art-interaktywna-komedia-fryzjerska>.

³⁶ “Zajęcia taneczne online – zapisy,” Dom Kultury w Wolbromiu, accessed 4 May 2020, <https://dk.wolbrom.pl/dom-kultury/aktualnosci/zajecia-taneczne-online-zapisy/>.

³⁷ “Cztery łapy. Tworzymy galerię psych portretów,” Tarnobrzegi Dom Kultury, accessed 1 May 2020, <http://tdk.tarnobrzeg.pl/wp/2020/05/01/cztery-lapy-tworzymy-galerie-psich-portretow/>.

³⁸ CZAPLIŃSKI, “Kultura pod ścianą,” 20.

out of work—this was the case of the Community Centre for Culture and Libraries in Skrzyszów.³⁹ Likewise, the employees of the Community Centre in Tuchów took up editing work on the publications dedicated to their own community.⁴⁰ “We are also working on an album book that would present the culture and education of the community in photos. Hence we focus on projects for which there was no time or money before,” explained the representative of the Community Centre in Gromnik.⁴¹ Other facilities undertook organisation and ordering activities, such as completing the video collection by the Community Centre in Tuchów⁴² or—in the case of the Cultural Centre in Zakliczyn—a forced refurbishment of the premises that suffered a major fire.⁴³ Likewise, although not by necessity, the Commune Centre for Culture and Libraries in Skrzyszów decided to use this difficult time for a refurbishment.⁴⁴

– PARTICIPATION IN THE BATTLE AGAINST THE CORONAVIRUS. There were also institutions that were directly involved in activities aimed at overcoming the epidemic. Employees of the Culture and Sports Centre in Koszyce Małe and the branch of the Centre for Culture and Libraries in Tarnowiec decided to sew masks for the inhabitants of Tarnów, transforming their place of employment into a kind of mini-sewing room.⁴⁵ “From 19 March we have collaborated to support the medical facilities and other units in their battle against the coronavirus (COVID-19). We have been sewing face masks and other necessary protection items for a month now,” reads the website of the Community Centre in Subkowy.⁴⁶ Identical actions have been undertaken by a series of other institutions, including the Community Centre in Kłodawa.⁴⁷

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ “Pomagamy i wspieramy w walce przeciwko COVID-19,” Dom Kultury w Subkowach, accessed 19 April 2020, <https://dk.subkowy.pl/index.php?c=article&id=419&pdf=1>.

⁴⁷ “Ciąg dalszy szycia maseczek,” Gminny Ośrodek Kultury w Kłodawie, accessed 14 April 2020, <http://gok.klodawa.eu/blog/za-nami/990-ciag-dalszy-szycia-maseczek>.

DEFROSTING THE ACTIVITIES OF CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

The third stage of lifting the restrictions related to the state of the epidemic made it possible to gradually restore the activities of the cultural centres.⁴⁸ Therefore, on 22 May 2020, guidelines for the further operation of the institutions were published on the website of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. As they are not subordinate to the minister, and their organisers are the local governments, all decisions concerning their activities are made by the respective managers in consultation with their organisers. The aforementioned guidelines were intended more as a set of good practices and guidelines for managers, employees, associates, volunteers and organisers of cultural institutions, developed on the basis of the experience of state cultural institutions and agreed with and approved by the Chief Sanitary Inspector.⁴⁹

The operation of cultural centres is very diverse across the state and depends on local conditions, possibilities, and the needs of recipients, so they often combine several functions, conducting wide-ranging activities, e.g. educational, exhibition, cinema, concert, or sports events. For this reason, the activities of each facility should be adapted to its individual character and to the epidemic situation in the area concerned.⁵⁰ The recommendations presented by the Ministry aimed at: 1) comprehensive, preventive anti-epidemic action adapted to the current epidemiological situation as well as government regulations and guidelines; 2) minimising the risk of spreading coronavirus in connection with the activities of the cultural centres; 3) ensuring the safety of employees and associates of cultural institutions and their clients.⁵¹

The first group of recommendations concerned the procedures for resuming the operation of cultural institutions. The necessity to maintain the statutory activity to the best possible extent on the Internet was indicated, and to seek and conduct other forms of work that do not require direct contact with the public. Until further notice, the organisation of events for larger groups of people (debates, meetings, concerts, exhibition openings, closings,

⁴⁸ “Nowa normalność: etapy znoszenia ograniczeń związanych z COVID-19,” accessed 16 April 2020, <https://www.gov.pl/web/koronawirus/nowa-normalnosc-etapy>.

⁴⁹ “Wytyczne dotyczące funkcjonowania domów, centrów i ośrodków kultury,” Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego, accessed 22 May 2020, <https://www.gov.pl/web/kultura/domy-centra-i-osrodki-kultury2>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

conferences, outdoor events, reviews, fairs) should be abandoned, except for those that can take place online, and in establishments that conduct exhibition activities, museums, and libraries—the guidelines developed for exhibition galleries, museums, and libraries should be implemented.⁵² Limits were indicated concerning the number of participants and the distance between them during physical activities as well as in the field of artistic and cultural education in open spaces and in closed facilities. It was allowed to conduct individual classes (trainer–trainee) in the field of artistic and cultural education indoors, maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres and subject to the disinfection of all objects with which the participants have direct contact. A recommendation was given to develop the regulations for classes in relation to their specifics and applicable requirements and to ensure, if possible, airing of non-air-conditioned rooms after each class, as well as the service, inspection and disinfection of the ventilation and air-conditioning equipment (if sanitary regulations allow its use), the implementation of more frequent and longer breaks in order to ventilate the rooms mechanically and by gravity, and to consider the possibility of operating without the use of ventilation and air-conditioning equipment in a situation where it is not possible for sanitary reasons. In addition, it was recommended to abandon, until the resumption of the operation of cinemas and theatres, the screening of films and staging theatre, opera, ballet and musical performances indoors, and in the event the restrictions were lifted—apply the guidelines relevant to this form of activity.⁵³

Further recommendations were more sanitary and related the issue of ensuring the safety of employees and associates, ensuring safety in the facility, and proceeding in the event of a suspected coronavirus infection of an employee or client.⁵⁴ In reference to the above, appropriate safety procedures have been developed by the individual cultural institutions, like e.g. Andrzej Bursa Youth Cultural Centre in Krakow,⁵⁵ Municipal Cultural Centre in Działdowo⁵⁶ or the Municipal Cultural Centre in Barcin.⁵⁷

⁵² “Wytyczne dla branż,” Ministerstwo Rozwoju, accessed 29 April 2020, <https://www.gov.pl/web/rozwoj/wytyczne-dla-branz>.

⁵³ “Wytyczne dotyczące funkcjonowania domów, centrów i ośrodków kultury,” Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego, accessed 22 May 2020, <https://www.gov.pl/web/kultura/domy-centra-i-osrodki-kultury2>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ *Safety procedures in the Andrzej Bursa Youth Cultural Centre in Krakow in case of COVID-19 threat* (Kraków: Młodzieżowy Dom Kultury im. Andrzeja Bursy, 2020).

⁵⁶ *Safety procedures in the Municipal Cultural Centre in Działdowo in case of COVID-19 threat* (Działdowo: Miejski Dom Kultury, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

In the situation in which the cultural centres found themselves, no one could sit back and do nothing. The applied quarantine and sanitary regimes introduced at the beginning of the epidemic forced the organisers of cultural events to suspend their intramural activities and to cancel or postpone scheduled meetings. This entailed the necessity to quickly adapt, change plans and revise budgets. Many cultural centres were unable to generate a significant portion of their revenues. While it was easier for the institutions that also promoted their community to find a place for themselves in this new reality, the institutions for example running a cinema found themselves in a difficult situation overnight. This unconventional situation required unconventional reactions, including the creating savings where possible and searching for new sources of financing, which would allow the entities to survive the hard time. In order to fulfil the statutory obligations, the institutions moved their activities online and continued their tasks there. Some also decided to reorganise their intramural work. An additional challenge was certainly coping with the new psychological environment, this was often much more important than the atmosphere created by the change in physical conditions.⁵⁸

During the epidemic, it was probably difficult to identify another sector of social life with a situation comparable to that of cultural institutions. It seems that they faced more problems than, say, schools⁵⁹ which had funds provided, and their managers were not forced to make redundancies. On the other hand, it was probably easier for the cultural institutions to fulfil their mission than for religious communities, the essence of which is based on direct participation in religious practices, as such their members were temporarily released from this obligation, as was the case with the March decision of the Permanent Council of the Episcopal Conference of Poland.⁶⁰ The experiences of the cultural centres from the first period of the epidemic

⁵⁷ Instruction no. MDK.021.18.2020 by the Director of the MDK in Barcin dated 25 May 2020 on the safety procedures in the MDK in the pandemic period.

⁵⁸ Piotr T. NOWAKOWSKI, "Psychologiczno-pedagogiczne aspekty środowiska pracy", in *Psychospołeczne i pedagogiczne uwarunkowania pracy*, ed. Mirosław Czapka (Bytom: Wyższa Szkoła Ekonomii i Administracji, 2005), 42.

⁵⁹ MINISTERSTWO EDUKACJI NARODOWEJ, *Zapewnienie funkcjonowania jednostek systemu oświaty w okresie epidemii COVID-19: raport Ministra Edukacji Narodowej* (Warszawa: MEN, 2020).

⁶⁰ Instruction no. 1/2020 of the Presidium of the Episcopal Conference of Poland dated 12 March 2020.

should allow us to draw conclusions as to how to proceed in similar situations in the future, especially to develop action algorithms that could be used by the managers of cultural institutions and their organisers.

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ACTIVITIES OF CULTURAL CENTRES DURING THE COVID-19 EPIDEMIC IN POLAND

Summary

In connection with the measures taken to stop the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in Poland, from March 2020 the activity of cultural centres was periodically frozen. From the very beginning it caused challenges of various natures, especially financial ones. The inability to organise commercial events has forced many institutions to look for alternative sources of income. Above all, however, the epidemic called into question the possibility of carrying out the statutory activities of cultural institutions. This paper discusses new contexts of this activity, which boiled down to cancelling or suspending events and classes, transferring activities to the Internet, undertaking interactive communication with recipients, reorganising intramural work, and finally actively joining the fight against coronavirus. The stage of lifting the restrictions caused by the epidemic made it possible to gradually resume the activities of the cultural institutions, and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage has published guidelines for their further operation. The experiences of the first period of the epidemic may be a lesson for the future that could be used by those responsible for cultural institutions.

Key words: cultural centres; COVID-19 epidemic in Poland; coronavirus; culture on the Internet; Ministry of Culture and National Heritage in Poland.

FUNKCJONOWANIE DOMÓW KULTURY
W TRAKCIE EPIDEMII COVID-19 W POLSCE

Streszczenie

W związku z podjęciem kroków mających na celu zatrzymanie szerzenia się wirusa SARS-CoV-2 w Polsce od marca 2020 r. aktywność domów kultury uległa okresowemu zamrożeniu. Już na samym początku spowodowało to wyzwania o różnorodnym charakterze, zwłaszcza finansowym. Brak możliwości organizowania imprez komercyjnych zmusił wiele placówek do poszukiwania alternatywnych źródeł dochodu. Przede wszystkim jednak epidemia postawiła pod znakiem zapytania możliwość realizacji działalności statutowej placówek kultury. W artykule omówiono nowe konteksty tej działalności, które sprowadzały się do odwołania lub zawieszenia imprez i zajęć, przeniesienia aktywności do sieci, podjęcia interaktywnej komunikacji z odbiorcą, reorganizacji pracy stacjonarnej, wreszcie aktywnego włączenia się w walkę z koronawirusem. Etap znoszenia ograniczeń wywołanych epidemią dał możliwość stopniowego przywracania działalności placówek kultury, a Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego opublikowało wytyczne dotyczące dalszego ich funkcjonowania. Doświadczenia pierwszego okresu epidemii mogą być nauką na przyszłość, z której mogą skorzystać czynniki odpowiedzialne za placówki kultury.

Słowa kluczowe: domy kultury; epidemia COVID-19 w Polsce; koronawirus; kultura w Internecie; Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego.