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## TIME AND CULTURE: INTERRELATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

ABSTRACT. Włodarczyk Ewa, *Time and Culture: Interrelations and Consequences* [Czas i kultura: zależności i konsekwencje]. *Studia Edukacyjne* nr 35, 2015, Poznań 2015, pp. 167-177. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISBN 978-83-232-2904-9. ISSN 1233-6688. DOI: 10.14746/se.2015.35.9

Time is an inevitable ingredient of any culturally-determined individual and collective experience. Literature on the subject includes a range of theoretical approaches and research reports which prove that time is one of the considerations about culture. Many features that characterise various cultures and many regularities in the cultural functioning and change can be explained and understood by references to the ways of time perception typical of this culture.

**Key words:** time, culture

### Time and its multiple functions

As noticed by Elżbieta Tarkowska,

each phenomenon has its time aspect, some temporal entanglement<sup>1</sup>. Time is thus an inevitable ingredient of any individual and collective experience<sup>2</sup>, and it is understood as “a category of human awareness and a frame of reference for life choices that determines human life<sup>3</sup>.”

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<sup>1</sup> E. Tarkowska, *Czas w życiu Polaków. Wyniki badań, hipotezy, impresje*, Warszawa 1992, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> A. Pawełczyńska, *Czas człowieka*, Wrocław 1986, p. 195.

The interest in time (and academic fascination with these issues) justifies its multiple functions that Edward T. Hall indicated to in his "Dance of life", indicating that time is

a basic organizer of activities, a synthesizer and integrator, a way of handling priorities and categorising experience, a feedback mechanism for how things are going, a measuring rod against which competence, effort, and achievement are judged (...). Time is a deep system of cultural, social and personal life. In fact nothing happens beyond a time frame<sup>4</sup>.

Thinking about time, its meanings and possibilities of experiencing it seems necessary in order to enrich the understanding of the man, world and culture as a result of these considerations, and thus create an additional opportunity for developing the man's personality and human culture – claims Anna Pawełczyńska<sup>5</sup> and then she adds: Just like the way of understanding time co-describes each culture, it also co-describes human personality and attitudes towards life. Becoming aware of these issues makes it possible to better understand the dynamics of human personalities, attitudes and behaviours<sup>6</sup>.

Considerations on the subject of time that have been taken up led to the creation of the theory of time and defining the relations between the man and time, each of which characterises him in its own way, depending on the specifics of a given discipline that serves as the foundation for the given concepts and depending on the assumptions made. Upon the initiative of Julius Thomas Fraser and the International Society for the Study of Time that he founded in 1966, an idea was born to create chronosophy, an integral science about time, based on the integrated achievements of each scientific discipline, thus winning both enthusiasts and critics of that concept<sup>7</sup>.

On the one hand, there are concepts of time and attitudes towards it that are typical of given societies/nations and are immanent elements of their cultures, yet on the other hand time is subjectively perceived, conceptualised, relativised and individually experienced. Depending on the criterion adopted, one can thus talk about biological time (that comprises the space of biological events, is of objective character and can be measured on absolute scales), psychological time (that is a consequence of the course of events as experienced by an individual, thus is of subjective character and is also subjectively perceived, experienced and lived) and social time (that applies to an individual space of psychosocial events, is of objective and subjective charac-

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<sup>4</sup> E.T. Hall, *Taniec życia: inny wymiar czasu*, Warszawa 1999, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> A. Pawełczyńska, *Czas człowieka*, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Tamże, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> E. Tarkowska, *Czas w społeczeństwie. Problemy, tradycje, kierunki badań*, Wrocław 1987, p. 5-6.

ter, and can be measured in a relative way, with subjective scales of social assessment of the course of life)<sup>8</sup>.

In the context of the relations that were mentioned in the title of this paper, special attention will be paid to the relations between culture and time, and the category of social time<sup>9</sup>.

## Culture in sociological considerations

In sociological considerations on culture<sup>10</sup> (and such are the most appropriate for the considerations that are carried out here), the range of interest includes the level of social penetration of culture patterns, the problem of its social spread, dissemination, reception and further acceptance or rejection, patterns of interaction and models of behaviour of individuals and groups, social relations, social roles and their structure. Culture is a social phenomenon, which means that it cannot be treated separately from the society. Sociology is interested in culture above all as a factor that co-defines the course of social phenomena and processes, so it focuses not on culture itself, but on its influence on group life. The sociological analysis of culture is a quest for relations between elements of culture, and phenomena and processes that occur in society.

The issue of the social character of culture phenomena was also taken up by Marian Filipiak<sup>11</sup>, who argued that there is a relation between culture and the man seen as a being that leads a social mode of life, that is a creator and recipient, that shapes culture and expresses themselves in it. There would be no culture if there were no social life. Culture is characterised with being stretched in time and space, and forms a specific symbolic universe for the members of a given group where they are brought up and which influences their self-perception and the worldview, values, norms, emotional reactions, behaviours, assessment of the past and visions of the future.

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<sup>8</sup> The distinction and abbreviated perspective on the essence of the types of time indicated after: A. Adamski, *Psychologiczny wymiar czasu i przestrzeni w ontogenezie człowieka*, Bielsko-Biała 2007, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Considerations on the individual time perspective and the man entangled in three temporal dimensions (past, present, and future) have been omitted here. Those interested in this topic are recommended the following reading: E. Włodarczyk, *Czas jako wymiar i obszar ludzkich działań (perspektywa pedagogiczna)*, [in:] *Pedagogika społeczna wobec zagrożeń człowieka i idei sprawiedliwości społecznej*, eds W. Danilewicz, W. Theiss, Warszawa 2014.

<sup>10</sup> The characteristics of sociological considerations on culture are based on: M. Misztal, *Problematyka wartości w socjologii*, Warszawa 1980. It is impossible here to quote all crucial approaches to culture defined by sociologists; thus, only a general overview is presented.

<sup>11</sup> M. Filipiak, *Socjologia kultury zarys zagadnień*, Lublin 1996, p. 38-45.

The result of the above is a cultural colouring of time and mutual relations between them.

### **Culture and time (and the consequences of their union)**

All societies and cultures “have some attitudes towards time, or the phenomena of lasting, passing away, change and sequence. Answers to these universal problems vary among cultures, are different in specific social frames”<sup>12</sup>.

Barbara Adam proposes the following approach to the relations between time and culture: “Cultural habits create social time, and vice versa, through relations with time people create culture and organise social life”<sup>13</sup>.

We could quote after Anna Pawełczyńska that time is an instrument that serves social life, and thus has to be adjusted to the current needs of a society. Such an approach explains the social relativism of the concepts of time in various eras and societies<sup>14</sup>. One can also assume that changes in the concept of time are an element of transformations in social life, thus the knowledge on changes in the concept of time in a given culture or society can serve diagnostics purposes and become an indicator in the process of understanding all the social and cultural transformations observed<sup>15</sup>.

Literature on the subject includes a range of theoretical approaches and research reports that prove the thesis about the topic of time being a part of considerations on the issues of culture<sup>16</sup>.

Depending on the characteristics of a given nation and society’s culture and historical period, time has been presented as either cyclical or linear. Also called the wheel of time, cyclical time is organised by repeatable, finite sequences of events, whereas linear time is organised by an open and continuous sequence of events (at the same time the cyclical system of time or-

<sup>12</sup> E. Tarkowska, *Czas w życiu Polaków*, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> B. Adam, *Czas*, Warszawa 2010, p. 87.

<sup>14</sup> A. Pawełczyńska, *Czas człowieka*, p. 25-26.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 26.

<sup>16</sup> Examples of analyses related to how culture and historical eras defined their attitude towards time and three temporal dimensions, for example in: Z. Cackowski, J. Wojczakowski (editor principal), *Stosunek do czasu w różnych strukturach kulturowych*, Warszawa 1987; A. Zajczkowski (selected), *Czas w kulturze*, Warszawa 1988; E.T. Hall, *Taniec życia: inny wymiar czasu*; A. Pawełczyńska, *Czas człowieka*; E. Tarkowska, *Czas w życiu Polaków*; E. Tarkowska, *Czas w społeczeństwie*; A. Wierciński (ed.), *O naturze czasu*, Kielce-Warszawa 2004; B. Adam, *Czas*; A. Kwiatkowska, J. Sztuka, *Czas z perspektywy kulturowej: nie zawsze punktualność jest cnotą króla*, [in:] *Życie na czas. Perspektywy badawcze postrzegania czasu*, G. Sędek, S. Bedyńska (editor principal), Warszawa 2010.

ganisation can be an element of the linear system, e.g. the closed cycle of "spring-summer-autumn-winter" that can be reduced to the dimension of one year, to one event out of an open linear sequence)<sup>17</sup>.

There is also a generally accepted division into qualitative and quantitative time<sup>18</sup>, in line with the one discussed above.

The concept of qualitative time belongs to primordial, intuitive categories of thinking. In this approach, time is of cyclical character; it is time of repetitions; it does not order the events that follow one another, but it emphasises the analogy of repeating cycles of events. At the same time, it cannot be measured, but only divided into unequal parts. It can have the shape of a circle or assume the form of a pendulum that leans interchangeably in two repeating, opposite directions.

On the other hand, quantitative time is described as linear, vector, abstract, absolute, homogenous and understood as a consequence of equally measured, undifferentiated units that follow one direction (from past to future), that can be measured with conventionally introduced measure units. This concept was created by European culture, it coexisted with the concept of qualitative time for many centuries, and only the development of capitalism and technical civilisation gave the qualitative understanding a dominating meaning in our cultural circle.

These both ways of understanding time coexist in various cultures and in human life. Quantitative time has an instrumental meaning; it measures measurable values and integrates social actions, whereas qualitative time is an inalienable element of human consciousness and culture, as it is in a way embedded in human life and culture and is indispensable to understand the complexity of the phenomena that occur in the world<sup>19</sup>. This coexistence of two approaches to time is possible because various qualitatively different spheres of human life or actions can be related to them<sup>20</sup>.

Recalling these two types of time is meaningful because

the aims of human life can be relativised and defined with respect to quantitative time – with respect to the feeling of passing that atomises life and makes it static. They can also be defined with respect to qualitative time, or with respect to the consciousness of lasting that unites life and makes human personality more dynamic, and capable of development<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Described after: A. Zajączkowski, *Czas Afryki Czarnej*, [in:] *Czas w kulturze*, selected A. Zajączkowski, Warszawa 1988, p. 30-31; see more also A. Pawełczyńska, *Czas człowieka*, p. 139 and further.

<sup>18</sup> Described after: A. Pawełczyńska, *Czas człowieka*, p. 18-20.

<sup>19</sup> A. Pawełczyńska, *Czas człowieka*, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 184.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, p. 8.

In yet another division, cultures are divided into cultures of clock time (people who live in them respect deadlines and times of appointments, they live according to a Day plan and do not bear ignoring previous arrangements related to dates and times; life and behaviour are dictated and directed by time that is measured by clocks) and cultures of event time (life in them is organised around various events that one takes part in until they reach their natural end and only then is another event initiated; life and behaviours are thus defined by a natural course of events)<sup>22</sup>.

The above-mentioned clock time and event time are identical to the monochromic and polychromic approach to time<sup>23</sup>. The former is time used for performing only one action (sequential behaviours) in a given moment, with a high level of concentration on carrying out this task, with focus on carrying it out quickly, whereas the latter is linked to simultaneously carrying out many actions (synchronic behaviours), going from one to another, and being easily distracted. Some countries and the daily way of functioning of their inhabitants can be matched to one of these two approaches.

Social cultures can also be divided into other three groups: oriented toward the past or present or future<sup>24</sup>. Past-oriented cultures are characterised with considerable attachment to tradition and well-known solutions, dislike for risk, novelty and changes, treating history and past experiences as a context for perceiving the present and understanding the future. Future-oriented cultures look for new ideas and concepts, plan, replace the old with the new, adopt long-term perspectives and are oriented toward development. Cultures that do not treat the past or future as crucial are oriented toward the present; they use the current time effectively, traditions and beliefs are adjusted to the current situation, history is not highly valued because it belongs to the past, they are focused on the present moment and enjoy it, are free from past concerns and do not worry about the future. This seemingly separate division does not mean, however, that cultures possess only one dominating orientation, excluding the others.

Summarizing after Elżbieta Tarkowska:

the concepts of time, patterns of temporal behaviours, values related to time and methods of measuring it express the ways of understanding, experiencing and valu-

<sup>22</sup> After: A. Kwiatkowska, J. Sztuka, *Czas z perspektywy kulturowej: nie zawsze punktualność jest cnotą króla*, [in:] *Życie na czas*, p. 85.

<sup>23</sup> E.T. Hall 1959, described after: A. Kwiatkowska, J. Sztuka, *Czas z perspektywy kulturowej*, p. 88.

<sup>24</sup> Proposed by F.R. Kluckhohn and F.L. Strodtbeck, discussed for example in: E. Tarkowska, *Czas w społeczeństwie*, p. 143; A. Kwiatkowska, J. Sztuka, *Czas z perspektywy kulturowej*, p. 90-91.

ing the processes of change and lasting that are characteristic of a given culture and a given community; in other words, various forms of intellectual and emotional attitude that people have toward the facts of passing and lasting, repeatability and irreversibility, changeability and continuity, sequentiality and simultaneity<sup>25</sup>.

The same author further notices:

changes in the attitude toward time and temporal consciousness are one of the aspects of upcoming changes, and an aspect that is important from the point of view of the process of change itself. The concepts of time, time structure, temporal orientations are an important factor that co-creates changes: it depends on the approach to time and time areas (past, present and future) whether people will act in favour of the changes occurring or being introduced, passively wait for them, or act against them. These categories are an "indicator" of changes that occur and are reflected in the social consciousness. Finally, they are also a result of the changes that occur and transform the temporal consciousness in a substantial way as well<sup>26</sup>.

## Social time

In the context of the above considerations over the cultural patterns of time, one can pose a question about what social time is then. Numerous approaches will be mentioned below, out of which several will be chosen from Polish works<sup>27</sup>.

According to Mieczysław Krajewski, social time is linked to society and its development; it is an attribute of life in its social form. When related to all human activities that is necessary to maintain and develop life in its social form, it allows to capture some general tendencies of changes in the structure of human activity<sup>28</sup>.

Elżbieta Tarkowska adds more features to it and comments that it is

common time for a community, which means it is a process of interactions between its members created by this community; it has been experienced, internalised, shared by all or most members of the community; it has been supported with norms and values; it plays cognitive, communication and regulatory functions; it is a means for building social bonds and shaping the feeling of group identification<sup>29</sup>;

<sup>25</sup> E. Tarkowska, *Czas w życiu Polaków*, p. 32.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> For examples of other approaches in E. Durkheim and his successors (followers or opponents) see e.g. in: E. Tarkowska, *Czas w społeczeństwie*; T. Banaszczyk, *Czas jako kategoria społeczna. Wstępne rozważania socjologiczne o czasie*, Wrocław 1981, p. 14 and further.

<sup>28</sup> M. Krajewski, *Czas społeczny*, Warszawa 1976, p. 6-7.

<sup>29</sup> E. Tarkowska, *Czas w życiu Polaków*, p. 23.

it is instilled in social life, in the world of values of a given society<sup>30</sup>. It is always of a relative character (it is referred to specific events and phenomena, and is different and changeable in various social frames); it is qualitative, inhomogeneous, non-uniform; it can be uneven, with a changeable rhythm, cyclical, reappearing, repeatable<sup>31</sup>. Its group and not individual character is described by pointing to its intersubjectivity, joint experiences and ways of thinking about time, standards and conventions related to time, affiliation of these concepts to the sphere of group representations, a symbolic character and communication functions<sup>32</sup>.

A definition of social time can be found in Barbara Adam's papers:

Social time is body and clock time; it is played and constructed; it is a repetition with changes and without them; it is a reproduction, regeneration and regulation; it is the full past and future gathered in the present; it is a structure, temporality, tempo and rhythmicity; it is history and biography, memory and forecast; it is irreversible, contextual and abstract; it is a process, product and means; it is finite and transcendental; it is a changeable value; it is negotiable<sup>33</sup>.

Three forms of social time have been distinguished by Andrzej Flis and Sławomir Kaprański: linear, cyclical and pendular<sup>34</sup>. In the linear version, human activities taking place in irreversible chain of causes and effects, with principle of accumulation: the present adds something to the heritage of the past and so enriched transmit to the future, which can also be enriched. In the cyclical conception changes constitute further stages of a closed process that always returns to the point of departure – to a new beginning. In the third approach: the present passes according to a script, copying the established order.

According to Elżbieta Tarkowska, each type of social structure evaluates various areas of time differently, uses different time and lives in a different world, which is illustrated and proved by the results of sociological research directed at searching for relations between types of experiencing and perceiving time and social situations, belonging to particular social groups and types of social activity<sup>35</sup>. According to the same author, in the context of the analysis of Pitirim Alexandrovitch Sorokin and Robert K. Merton's approach, the concept of social time is indispensable in research into social

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem p. 32.

<sup>31</sup> E. Tarkowska, *Czas w społeczeństwie*, p. 125.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 127.

<sup>33</sup> B. Adam, *Czas*, p. 119.

<sup>34</sup> A. Flis, S. Kaprański, *Czas społeczny: między zmianą a nieśmiertelnością*, *Studia Socjologiczne*, 1988, 2(109), p. 65-74.

<sup>35</sup> After: E. Tarkowska, *Czas w społeczeństwie*, p. 66.

dynamics and each researcher interested in temporal aspects of social change and social processes should use this notion (instead of or along with astronomic time)<sup>36</sup>. However, one should bear in mind that social life not always and not everywhere proceeds at the same pace and rhythm, and that objective temporal conditions are perceived, conceptualized and imagined differently. This extorts relativity and awareness of the existence of multiple social times that exist in an objective dimension (regularity of social phenomena, pace and rhythm of social life) and in a (socially) subjective dimension (in the sphere of conceptions, meanings and values related to time)<sup>37</sup>.

## Conclusions

In the process of growth and differentiation of cultures, in the development of religious systems and philosophical thought, one can distinguish various ways of understanding time and it is possible to define the meaning of varied concepts of time for the shape of human knowledge and choice of values. By analysing the processes of change that occur in cultures and the rules according to which these changes happen it is possible to discover respective transformations in the concepts of time that are at their bottom. Many features that characterise various cultures and many regularities in the cultural functioning and change can be explained and understood by referring them to the ways of perceiving time, typical for this culture. This would mean that the concepts of time constitute specific, hidden, deep structures of each culture that make it possible to explain their features and specific external regularities that are directly observable – Anna Pawełczyńska<sup>38</sup> notices.

The awareness of this should accompany all the observers of social phenomena, including teachers, who appreciate the significance of the cultural layer of the environment, all the more so because “the way the man understands and perceives time can be treated as a deep hidden structure that explains his visions of the world value choices”<sup>39</sup>. In the context of considerations on the man in a changing social space, the analysis of time issues can

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<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 101.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, p. 121, 131.

<sup>38</sup> A. Pawełczyńska, *Czas człowieka*, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, p. 6.

help bring order to the vision of the world and define one's own place in the world and human society. (...) It seems that viewing human and world issues from the perspective of time gives them appropriate proportions, contributes to uniting seemingly incoherent elements into meaningful wholes and allows for a better understanding of these wholes<sup>40</sup> – Anna Pawelczyńska reassures.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibidem.

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