A PAGE FROM THE HISTORY OF A CERTAIN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL IDEA: FOLK HIGH SCHOOL AS A PLACE OF CULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE REGION

Cultural education has for decades been one of the fundamental tasks of folk high schools (called also FHS in this text) – interesting adult education institutions of nineteenth-century Scandinavian origin, now known in many countries in several continents. This sketchy paper is focused on the decades of relations between these educational institutions and cultural activity of local communities in which such educational institutions were located, for it seems that grasping such connections can be an interesting contribution to the history of regional/local culture, and the history of folk high schools themselves (see e.g.: Key 1907, p. 408–413; Schröder 1923, p. 97–112, Hollmann 1924, passim).

Among various institutions of adult education FHSs have an interesting organizational and programme formula. They are, obviously, connected with the legacy of the Danish thinker M.F.S. Grundtvig (1783–1872), who in the 1830s provided theoretical background for the new “school for life” (Dam 1983; Bron-Wojciechowska 1986; Ægidius [in:] Byczkowski et al. /ed./ 2003, pp. 19–31). The concept was later developed all over Scandinavia into a wide and important for the communities of that region movement of independent education. It was from Scandinavian countries that the ideas gradually spread to other parts of Europe, reaching, at the turn of nineteenth and twentieth century the territory of today’s Poland, Russia and Ukraine (Studnicka 1910, s. 27–34; Gulińska 1927, s. 65–84). The fact that nowadays folk high schools constitute – some more, some less important – parts of educational systems of a few tens of countries in various continents confirms the universal values of the concept itself (Turos 1983, passim, s. 426–430; Aleksander 1984, s. 112–115; Kulich 2002, passim.).

Folk high schools gradually got involved in implementation of cultural tasks. Cultural education was not one of the most important forms of activity of those institutions from the very beginning of their existence. Originally, the tasks of Danish folkehøjskole or Swedish folkhögskola were specified by their organizers in a slightly different way. And so, in mid nineteenth century in Scandinavia the idea of civil education for peasants attracted many supporters. It was that idea that contributed most to establishing new educational institutions of FHS type. The discussion on creating first folk high schools indicated
great deficiencies of education for peasantry, in particular rather weak condition of public education for people living in rural areas, and their numerous needs in this respect. In Sweden, additionally, the necessity of preparing people living in the country to use their civil rights was pointed out. In Denmark and Finland, the necessity of awakening national awareness was particularly strongly emphasized. All the discussions included the problems of popularization of modern forms of farming, promoting the idea of teetotalism/temperance movement and prevention of the then mass emigration to America (Maliszewski 2010, s. 450–453). It all contributed to development of new educational institutions and growth of their number, which has actually continued till today. Such was the origin of FHSs.

In the light of the above, it can be thus seen that pro-cultural activities did not at that time constitute the main task that the newly established institutions had to face, although one must admit that cultural activity was inscribed into FHS programme assumptions (almost) from their very beginning.

The first folk high schools were established in the very centres of farming settlements, most often in peasants’ houses. The students themselves were responsible for keeping the places clean and tidy. They also took care of repairs and maintenance. Teaching and learning took place in those seasons of the year that did not require too much involvement in farming and household work. Students used to come to school in October or the beginning of November – “after harvesting of root crops”. Classes were provided for five or six months, so that in March of the following year the students could go home, “just in time for spring sowing”. The accommodation for the students in neighbouring homesteads “was arranged in quite a simple way” (Åkerlund 1975, s. 15). The students stayed close to the school as at the beginning of their operation, individual FHSs were not boarding schools, and preparing accommodation required funds that the schools did not yet have. Two-three people stayed in one homestead. Hosting farmers could rarely provide, apart from a roofed place, also heating. So in the evenings, the entire students’ community would gather in a classroom (the only room with heating), where they would read and count together. A wide range of cultural activities was practiced there as well – people would paint, sculpt, rehearsal for FHS theatre performances, etc. It was also there where one of the most important traditions of folk high school was born – namely, singing together. The first, still manually copied song books, appeared. The time spent together created favourable conditions also for conversations between the students and the teachers. The talks were often connected with regional traditions and folklore, and were accompanied by presentations. It was thus something fully following the theoretical (and ideological – in some sense) concept of bishop Grundtvig, who emphasized the necessity of the students (and the staff) spending time together also the end of everyday classes, and the necessity of mutual cultural impact.
It must also be said that in the first years of its existence, folk high school was an institution for men only. However, almost from the very beginning, attempt at establishing courses for women were made. On the one hand, great educational needs – especially in the area of running a modern household, promoting hygiene and good manners were seen, on the other hand, more and more developed base of folk high schools was used for men’s courses for only six months. For the remaining part of the year, it was, practically speaking, empty and not utilized in any way. So the annual work plan of folk high schools was amended by summer courses for women “with the point of gravity in the curriculum on subjects for housewives” (Åkerlund 1975, s. 15–16). The most important among programme content were art classes, handicrafts and folk art. Leonard Holmström – rector of the oldest Swedish folk high school (*Hvilan folkhögskola* in Åkarp) was especially active in the attempts to organize courses for women. But it was not until 1873 that the attempts were successful. There were women willing to participate in the courses and the classes were launched. The following subjects were taught: Swedish language, health issues and – interesting due to the subject matter considered in this paper – literature and singing. The students, who at the beginning “were not very willing to do anything else but needle-work” – as one of the authors mentions – “with time, developed a big interest in poetry” (Ingers [in:] Hedlund /red./ 1950, p. 59). Weaving, which since the first female courses has become a significant symbol of folk high school programmes not only in Scandinavia but also in Poland and other countries, was not neglected, either.

In the 1880s, the programmes tailored for country girls became an everyday reality in folk high schools. Since that time, the FHS school year consisted of two parts – a course for men, which with time started to be called “a winter course” and of “a summer course” for women. Elements of cultural education appeared in both of them – in male courses – mainly during afternoon day room activities, and in female courses – also during classes indicated in the official programme of the school. The amount of cultural content differed from school to school, depending on the teachers and non-school interests of the students. Some of the folk high schools of that time started to collect regional works of art, some began to present their artistic achievements outside schools – to the local communities (such activities in Scandinavia are described by, *inter alia*, the authors mentioned above, namely Jindra Kulich, Enoch Ingers and Eric Åkerlund; and in Poland – by rev. Antoni Ludwiczak (idem, 1927), Zofia Mierzwińska (eadem, 1933), Ignacy Solarz (idem, 1938); and after World War II – e.g. by Lucjan Turos (idem, 1987); Franciszek Midura (Midura et al. (red.), 1996) czy Tomasz Maliszewski (idem 2003 [in:] Żebrowski (red.) 2003, pp. 228–240).

So the connections between FHSs and regional culture became very apparent already after a few decades of their operation. Many tasks in this area were identified. It seems that the things that got special emphasis included the
necessity to build new cultural awareness of the people living in rural areas and the challenges connected with nourishing folk cultural identity, and emphasising the value of local folklore (Ковалевская, 1890).

Very interesting transformations took place in folk high schools at the beginning of 20th century. Folk high schools, to some extent, “went outside” rural areas. Apart from a traditional model of educational institutions for farming community, there appears another type of FHS – folk high school of group of interest: social movement, political party, religious group, etc. They train people to meet the needs of the community that established the school. Individual groups voice their cultural needs in a different way. That is why it is hard to make clear generalizations in this respect. Some of the schools will surely be “entangled in culture”. But there will also be schools which will treat educational tasks in the area of culture in a marginal way or will not take up such themes at all, and instead will focus on other educational tasks: civic education, training leaders of the given social movement, modern farming or housekeeping or e.g. environmental protection. Other institutions of this kind will, on the other hand, put strong emphasis on cultural issues – as, e.g. almost all the folk high schools in the world established by various religious groups. The main mission of some of FHSs will actually be artistic and cultural activity. In Polish territory, the functions connected with animating cultural activities of folk high schools environment will be fairly apparent at that time (Szczepański [in:] Wiejskie uniwersytety..., 1939, pp. 129–140; Turos 1967, s. 210–226; Skalska, Kamper 2001, s. 233–236; Janik [in:] Sapia-Drewniak, Janik /red./ 2010, pp. 129–139).

Other important transformations in the history of FHSs can be seen since the end of the 1960s. And so when individual countries are finishing reforms concerning compulsory education, that is making it longer and available for everyone, folk high schools change their position within the national educational systems. Another, third stage in the history of the educational institutions starts. One of the most characteristic features in that period of FHSs was a significant increase of the number of short courses (lasting just for a few days), with more and more apparent gradual reduction of long educational forms based on boarding type of school.

After the first period, when folk high schools were boarding educational-cultural institutions of rural communities, the second – when they also became an educational form of various communities of interest, since the 1970s – due to re-defining their mission in a public discussion – they started to be folk high schools for all. Hobby classes to meet the needs of active spending leisure time starts to dominate among the short courses mentioned above. A significant part of the offer refers to cultural-artistic activity in a broad sense of the word. It is clearly seen in the programmes of folk high schools all over Scandinavia, but also in the Baltic states, in Germany, Hungary, Poland (Kulich 2002, passim.) or in the projects of establishing FHSs in
Sankt Petersburg environment, implemented in co-operation with Sweden (arkivmaterial: Centre for Adult Educators – Linköping University: St. Petersburg FHS /1996-2001/).

During the last distinguished periods of FHSs operation, some of them begin to specialize in cultural activities. As a French historian, Erica Simon, says, the last decades note, in a sense, reference to the ideas of Grundtvig – the creator of FHS concept (Simon, 1991, pp. 5–11). In some national educational solutions it was even adopted that animators of culture would be educated and trained in that type of schools, which was the case, for example, in Poland a few decades ago (Bron-Wojciechowska, 1977; Kulich 1979, pp. 9–14) and in Sweden – since mid the 1970s till today (Maliszewski 2008, pp. 99–101).

As a result of the historical changes of the place of cultural education in folk high schools, it can be clearly seen that today we have come to the stage of development of that concept of educational work in which the schools can constitute important parts of cultural animation in the region in which that function. It can be seen, for example, in the programmes of the schools operating today in the communities of minorities, Frisian Folk High School in Terschelling Island (Holland) or Kashubian Folk High School in Wizyca (Poland). But not only there... Thus planning modern educational activities connected with cultural activities, individual regional communities in various parts of the world could make use also of that proven in action, effective educational concept.

Let us finalise our considerations on the place of cultural education in the operation of folk high schools in the subsequent decades of their existence with the thought of Władysław Wolert – associate professor of the Free Polish School of Higher Education (Polish: Wolna Wszechnica Polska) on one of the main tasks of that educational institution expressed in his monumental publication on educational work abroad from 1930:

"People should be given true human education which would enable them to participate in the cultural life of the nation and thus would create a really national culture, which would forever be the foundation of greatness of nations and of progress of people" (Wolert, 1930, p. 280).

When Wolert was writing it over eighty years ago he meant the problems of building a fully democratic society in the spirit close to the popular message of John Dewey included in his works, already at that time recognised in progressive European pedagogical circles, in particular in “The School and Society” (1900), „Democracy and Education“ (1916). For he perceived folk high schools (and other non-school educational institutions for teenagers and adults) as a place in which the educationally handicapped peasants (and workers) have an opportunity to awaken in themselves a mature understanding of social life organization and the ideals of democracy through community experiencing of educational activity, of which cultural education was to be an important form. Cultural education seems to be re-gaining popularity and significance nowadays.
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Streszczenie

Karta z dziejów międzynarodowej idei oświatowej: uniwersytet ludowy jako miejsce edukacji kulturalnej w regionie

Słowa kluczowe: dzieje edukacji kulturalnej dorosłych, uniwersytety ludowe, aktywność kulturalna w uniwersytetach ludowych, edukacja regionalna.

Artykuł jest próbą ukazania roli, jaką w działalności instytucji oświatowych typu uniwersytet ludowy (UL) odgrywała edukacja kulturalna na przestrzeni stu kilkudziesięciu lat ich istnienia. W szkicu ukazano, że dochodzenie uniwersytetów ludowych do realizacji zadań kulturalnych miało charakter stopniowy, albowiem pierwotnie stawiano im zadania odmienne – głównie budzenia świadomości obywatelskiej warstw chłopskich. Autor wyróżnia trzy okresy w światowej historii wzajemnych relacji między uniwersytetami ludowymi a edukacją kulturalną: pierwszy – w którym akcentowano konieczność budowania nowej świadomości kulturalnej mieszkańców wsi w duchu agraryzmu (XIX w. i pocz. XX w.); drugi – w którym w wielu krajach pojawił się nowy typ uniwersytetu ludowego – gdzie występowaly grupy interesów, akcentujące zaspokojenie potrzeb kulturalnych swoich środowisk społecznych (do przełomu lat 60. i 70. ubiegłego wieku); trzeci – w którym zaczęły być placówkiami dostępnymi dla każdego (ang.: folk high school for all), realizując różnorodne zajęcia czasu wolnego – w tym szeroką ofertę związaną z kulturą (od lat 70. XX wieku do czasów współczesnych).

Na tle zarysowanej w tekście ewolucji roli edukacji kulturalnej w uniwersytetach ludowych (z przesunięciem jej w czasie na polskim gruncie o ok. 20 lat) widać, jak konkluduje autor, że współcześnie doszliśmy w wielu krajach do takiego etapu w rozwoju uniwersytetów ludowych, w którym placówki te mogą stanowić ważne ogniska animacji kulturalnej w regionie, w którym funkcjonują. Autor zachęca również współczesne społeczności regionalne w różnych częściach świata, aby chcieli korzystać i z tej sprawdzonej w działaniu koncepcji oświatowej, gdy będą planowały własne działania edukacyjne związane z aktywnością kulturalną.

Summary

A page from the history of a certain international educational idea: folk high school as a place of cultural education in the region

Key words: history of cultural adult education, folk high school, cultural activities in folk high school, regional education.
The article is an attempt at presenting the role cultural education played in folk high school type of educational institutions for over more than a hundred years of their existence. It shows the process of gradual involvement of folk high schools in performing cultural tasks. Originally they focused on other things – mainly on awakening civil awareness of peasants. The author distinguishes three periods in the world’s history of the relations between FHS and cultural education: the first one – which emphasised the necessity of building new cultural awareness of residents of rural areas in the spirit of agrarism (19th and the beginning of 20th century); second – during which a new type of folk high school appears in many countries – FHS groups of interest, emphasising meeting the cultural needs of their social communities (since the turn of the 1960s and the 1970s); third – during which they began to be institutions available for everyone (folk high school for all), organizing various types of leisure time activities – including a wide cultural offer (till the present).

The author concludes that the evolution of the place of cultural education in folk high schools sketched in the article (Poland was 20 years behind in this respect) shows that we have reached such a phase of FHS development in many countries that the institutions can constitute important elements of cultural animation in the region in which they function. The author also encourages individual regional communities in various parts of the world to use that proven in action educational concept when they plan modern educational activities connected with cultural activity.