School as an institution, organization, social system

Anna Górka-Strzałkowska

CONTACT: *Anna Górka-Strzałkowska, PhD, The Maria Grzegorzewska Pedagogical University, Szczesliwicka 40, Warsaw, Poland, e-mail:* agD80@aps.edu.pl

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Abstract:

The article describes the school as an institution, a social system and a learning organization. Regardless of whether we analyze school as an institution, a system, an organization, an arrangement, most important are the functions it performs. Taking into account the tasks it has to perform it is possible to distinguish its basic, regulatory and auxiliary functions. In the scientific literature and in practice, the primary school functions include education, upbringing and care. School is considered a very important element of the social system. It influences all young people and performs specific functions. It is understood as one of the basic elements of society, being an important component of the community, and the life activity of children and youth. School is an institution that enters into everyone's life. It is a social institution shaping values, attitudes and life orientations. The school as a learning organization is one of the visions of schools of the future.

1. Introduction

Florian Znaniecki wrote that 'the institution of the school developed partly in accompaniment with and partly in contrast to the everyday environment in which prospective members of society operated/functioned' (Znaniecki 1973: 176). In history of education textbooks, the prevailing theory was that the beginnings of the school should be seen in primeval customs, involving the so called initiation. It would have entailed adult supervised youngsters going through specific trials whilst separated from the rest of their community in order to master the skills necessary for adulthood. According to historians, ancient and medieval clerical colleges, and schools for knights and the bourgeois, were more akin in template to modern schools. Even more similar types of school institutions were developed during the Renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment. School has existed since the dawn of humanity. Stanisław Kowalski stated that 'the concept of school gradually became enriched and diversified, and it continues to enrich and diversify itself in the course of historical development of the education system' (Kowalski 1974: 209).

In many publications the genesis and the essence of the school was considered from a sociological perspective. This meant that contemporary school was shaped as a result of the development of industrial societies. Thus, industrialization was one of the main forces driving the development of education. Social changes related to urbanization led to an increase in the society's aspirations. Education became an important factor of change in community movements, expressing itself in the flow of young people from the countryside to the city, and between different classes and social groups. Torsten Husen, sharing this view, stated that the majority of primary schools in the 19th century Europe were 'not schools in the full sense of the word' (Schulz 1996:184-185). In support of his opinion, he cited the following arguments:

— traditional schools did not require systematic participation; some rural children attended on a limited number of days per year;
— the age of starting school education was treated flexibly; the children of working parents did not complete their obligatory schooling because they started paid employment earlier;
— the educational model consisted of the less talented students learning from the more talented ones;
— there were no teaching programs or methodological guidelines; children were taught in the same class according to a program suited to the prevailing state of affairs;
— the size of the school was influenced by urbanization; 50 years ago a primary school student went to an institution with less than 100 students;
— together with the development of schools and the growing number of children and young people, the number of teachers and other education employees increased;
— the goals of the school broadened while the educational, tutelary and didactic tasks grew and continue to grow; new personnel began to appear: psychologists, social workers, nurses;
— the expansion of the functions of educational institutions resulted in the increase of coordinated tasks, resulting in the increase of administration personnel;
— school management became standardized and reliable.

Tests and examinations were introduced as control measures. For supplementary purposes, programs, textbooks and other didactic materials appeared. The result of such arguments is the claim that schools are the product of the last 150 years (Husen 1979: 36-39).

The concept of school has many meanings. In this paper I will present its twofold character: institutional and structural.

2. School as an institution

Above all, school means 'a specific, in terms of program and organization, form of cultural transfer, implemented in modern society through specialized teaching and learning activities'. The personalities of children and young people are formed during the process of getting to know and assimilating the elements of modern society. In this sense, school simply means' school education', which is 'a specific form of social practice, involving the intergenerational transmission of advanced elements of culture on a wider scale'. Interpreted in this way, school can be distinguished from other institutions of modern society, such as public administration, health care and church. In turn, it can also be distinguished from family education (Schulz 1992: 55-56).

When analyzing school education as a social institution, we must inevitably consider questions of upbringing. What is this based on? In what categories is it described? Where is its place and what role does it play in the whole of the collective life? Institutional analysis is the foundation and the necessary starting point in the study of educational events, regardless of the scale and complexity. In the analysis of the school as an organization, references to an 'internal' nature dominate and concern the mutual relations between the individual elements of the system: teachers, pupils, educational goals, educational program, and applied technology. Summing up, a functional diagram is more convenient for analyzing school as a social institution, whilst an organizational approach seems more appropriate for analyzing it as a center of socialization. However, despite the differences between the institutional and organizational approaches, close links also exist. School education, as a form of cultural communication, is not possible without the existence of schools as complex organizational systems. On the other hand, schools as complex systems were created in order to impart the resources of modern culture on a mass scale. Schools as organizational institutions form the basis for all the processes and activities required for a school education (Schulz 1996: 188-189).

In another sense, school can mean a social group, a social system, an organizational system. Referring to school as a social group, we mean a special center of socialization. It is a target group, a formal organization, a complex system of activities within which the school's program of didactic and educational activities is implemented (Schulz 1992: 56-57).

School developed as a 'result of two interdependent processes: the transformation of individual pedagogical work into a group one, and the transition from an elite (privileged) to a mass (universal) education system' (ibidem: 61). It is an organization in which pedagogical work is group oriented, and consists of imparting elements of modern culture addressed to the entire student community (Schulz 1996: 193).

School is said to be a specific 'instrument' that is supposed to turn out a certain type of 'product', namely a young person capable of playing certain social roles. The perception of school as an instrument corresponds to the basic facts related to an institution that has to fulfill specific tasks and goals. As well as being able to realize many other values, school, like all cultural creations, belongs to the human world and satisfies specific human needs. Among other things, it can satisfy the need for knowledge which manifests itself in the pursuit of truth, self-realization (in which the good is man himself), and in co-existence, attainment of prestige and standing, recognition, and the safeguarding of one's own existence through material benefits. It is also involved in the implementation of socially significant ideas such as the feeling that one is useful to society (Gołaszewski 1977: 7-8).

On the one hand school has been repeatedly criticized as an educational institution, where its 'anachronism at the stage of post-modern development (society without school)' was highlighted, while on the other hand, it was appreciated as a carrier of progress, for its professionalism in the role of an intergenerational intermediary between adults and children. In pedagogical literature, however, one can find important premises showing that school continues to be a very important institution in the society of the future. Above all, the school is an environment that enables specific groups of children and young people to meet for educational purposes to realize their aspirations, and to fulfill their intellectual needs and interests. It prepares adults for specific social, professional and personal roles, and is a place that meets human needs. The school is an institution of social trust, introducing children and youth into social structures. As an intentional environment, it combines a caring and educational atmosphere with the principles prevailing in adult life (Ratajka 2009: 21).

3. School as a social system

When we refer to school as a social system, we mean both the students and the teachers. The pedagogical works of Roman Schulz and Tadeusz Gołaszewski, describing the school as an institution or an organization, only took one of the groups into account, either students or teachers, and drew attention to didactics, upbringing and organization. A systemic approach, on the other hand, as a principle treats teachers and students equally as a group.

Using the term school as a social system, I will begin by explaining the concept of the social system. In the social sciences, a system is understood as 'a set of elements organized in such a way as to be able to function in cooperation with all components (Kotarbiński 1970, Zieleniewski 1979). When speaking of it, I mean a certain whole consisting of different parts' (Gołaszewski 1977: 13-14).

A social system is 'an arrangement of various roles that create an intrinsically integrated whole, where social roles overlap, while within it they are interdependent and subordinate to the implementation of specific values to the system as a whole' (Parsons 1951, in: Gołaszewski 1977: 14). In the opinion of Julian Radziewicz, for the school to be considered as a system object, it should satisfy the following conditions:

1. A system is a collection of elements
2. This collection can be considered as a whole.
3. This collection is internally integrated, its elements are related to each other, and they form relations.
4. The whole is separated from its surroundings.
5. The creation of this whole, and its functioning and behavior is a purposeful process.
6. The whole takes up a specific place in the hierarchy.

Taking into account all of the above mentioned conditions, one can definitely analyze the school as a system. This is beyond doubt, because education is a collection of elements, which include: schools, school classes, students, and teachers. It is separated from a series of institutions functioning in society. It has many examples of internal ties combining schools into the schooling system (legal regulations, administrative and management bodies). It implements conscious and purposeful activities consisting of establishing, maintaining and modifying the work of schools (Schulz 1996: 195-196).

School as a social system has an external-purposeful, internal-purposeful, external-instrumental and internal-instrumental function. The first of them is externally-purposeful, based on achieving general social goals; internal-purposeful integrates the school community. The external-instrumental function adapts to external conditions, and the internal-instrumental function is aimed at maintaining the social structure and discharges tensions. However, the social system is not the only one that functions at school. Additionally, the

following can be listed: the didactic system, (the set of goals and teaching methods); the pedagogical system (as a set of aims and methods of education), cultural values (which include scientific knowledge, participation in culture, moral values), the administrative system (the school's organizational structure), and the economic system (based on the availability of material resources). These systems overlap and are interdependent.

The school social system is a system of school roles for both teachers and students; it is grounded in human attitudes, beliefs, habits, motivations and expectations. The tasks are carried out with the help of a team of people whose conduct is regulated (Gołaszewski 1977: 14). The school's social system is divided into five sub-systems; these in turn are divided into:

1) student community
   a) school class
      — class as a whole
      — study group
      — didactic team
   b) student self-government
   c) student organizations
   d) informal student groups
2) teaching body
   a) management
   b) teachers' council
   c) socio-political teacher organizations
   d) informal teacher groups
3) administration
   a) school secretariat
   b) technical staff
4) parents
   a) parents' committee
   b) parents' conferences
5) local community
   a) local community as a whole
   b) school welfare committee.

Such a school structure is to serve the efficient functioning of the school, to fulfill its tasks in specific didactic-educational and social situations. Didactic and educational situations are defined as interactions regarding the transfer of information, checking the degree of the acquired knowledge, rewarding and punishing, managing the behaviour of an individual, a group or a team. Social situations are, above all, cooperation, competition or conflict (Gołaszewski 1977: 18-19).

The subsystems (teachers, students) belonging to the social school system are relatively independent, but their goals include many contradictory elements. Taking the school as an example, we see the following. School is a place where a young person should begin to slowly undergo the process of becoming independent without the participation of members of the family community. At the same time, the family should as a priority take part in these activities in order to give the child a sense of independence and responsibility for itself.

Therefore, the school, in order to gradually bring about the independence of its pupils, must create conditions that make them independent of their educators. However, nothing is ever straightforward. All the contradictions and the many tensions or discrepancies are associated with authentic school life. In spite of this, such situations are solvable and very often they are the driving force in the further development of the school. Therefore, all reforms were and will be constructive, especially in the organizational structure of education.

On the other hand, as regards social structure, it is possible to present the positions of several pedagogues who dealt with school with this in mind (Gołaszewski 1977: 10-11).

The first of them, Florian Znaniecki, stated that the only place for education theory was in the field of sociology . However, this inclination was not accepted (Znaniecki 1973: 28). Znaniecki introduced systemic approaches in his sociology of education. He called social actions, social relations, personality and social groups 'closed systems'. On the one hand, he recognized a certain characteristic of the modern school – the depersonalization of the teacher-student relationship. In his opinion, such social contact can become

increasingly impersonal, short-lived. On the other hand, he drew attention to the danger of depersonalization, noting especially that the outcome of the educational process was primarily determined by the relationship between the educator and the pupil. In his *Sociology of Education*, Znaniecki spent one chapter describing the school as an institution. He pointed to the dialectic nature of the school system (school sometimes realizes goals that are not accepted by the local community). Discussing the thesis that 'the psyche of children and adolescents is different from the adult psyche, he imposed a demand that the school should not be an institution preparing for maturity as such but one creating conditions for the prevailing maturation process' (Gołaszewski 1977: 27-29). This meant that the school would be a living environment for the children such as they are. Describing his reservations and doubts, Znaniecki showed how they may be resolved, thus creating his concept of the school of the future. In it he proposed breaking up the traditional monolithic and insular nature of the entire education system. In his vision, the students would be torn out of the school environment and would join the adult world by participating in the teacher's cultural activities (Gołaszewski 1977: 27-29). Znaniecki saw each school as a separate space and task. Today, this space fits into social life and creates it. This researcher argued that 'every school is a social group made up of teachers and students. As a result, like any group in general, it is an isolated system' (Znaniecki 1973: 178). It is into this arrangement that students bring family traditions, local interests, and social divisions. It is overlapped by various experiences, with the peer group as their source. They are most discernible in the classroom and in contacts between the students.

Zygmunt Mysłakowski (1964) assumed that education should be understood as an instrument that ensures that society maintains cultural continuity and at the same time prepares its members for participation in culture. In his opinion, education is a social process because it takes place in groups of children and young people. Such groups develop their own social life, while the teacher is responsible not only for the individual development of each student, but also for the relations that prevail in individual school groups. Education is a 'social force', the school is a tool of social selection that contributes to the creation of specific groups. Mysłakowski's reflections draw attention to the many contexts determining didactic-educational processes (social, axiological, political), to internal-systemic contexts (school subsystems) and also to external contexts (the value system functioning in the local community) (Gołaszewski 1977: 31- 32).

Józef Chałasiński's dissertation, expanded by the threads of investigative research, is a continuation of Znaniecki's approach. The empirical grounds were based on cultural relations in the USA and in the Polish countryside. Chałasiński believed that the basic function of a school was the social function, because it prepared young people to perform certain roles in society. He emphasized the separation of children and young people from the family environment. The school had become an institution opposed to the family, in an instrumental sense 'a tool for organizing society'. At school, as a social system, classes were treated as social groups. There are much better conditions for organizing educational processes in a group than in an individual approach to each student. Chałasiński assumed that the school, together with family groups, creates a didactic-educational system (Chałasiński 1958).

The concept of educating for the future and the concept of creativity are the most important of Bogdan Suchodolski's mantras. He considered 'education that prepares people to participate in the reconstruction of their own civilization' as the most valuable. The aim of education is to prepare people for social and professional tasks in such a way that their personal and cultural development is stimulated at the same time. Suchodolski proposed to closely combine standard didactic and educational activities with extracurricular activities. He wanted to introduce various activities to schools, the implementation of which would have an impact on the development of social life (Gołaszewski 1977: 35-36).

Stanisław Kowalski warned against the stereotypical understanding of the school, regardless of the size and type of the environment (village, city, industrial areas). He assumed that the subject of research into social relations at school was the school class. In his opinion, getting a full diagnosis of the didactic and educational process required treating the school as a whole.

Heliodor Muszyński's theoretical and research interests concerned socio-moral education. From his point of view, the scope of research is not limited to just the school class but includes all the groups functioning in the school environment as well. The author defined a group as a type of community that arises within school. Muszyński also introduced the concept of the 'style' of group management in relation to the didactic and educational processes at school. Muszyński considered the motivation of the group, which allowed for the realization of specific educational goals as an educational success (Kowalski 1974: 57). He treated the school

as a 'cybernetic system', listing the following features: the purposefulness of creation to obtain predetermined effects, community, organization, openness, complexity and probability (Muszyński 1971: 285). The 'school community' was supposed to be the controlling value for research concerning interpersonal space, while 'probability' refers to the temporary dimension of activities, to the 'anticipatory features and values of the functioning of the school organized here and now with a view to later' (Dymara 2009: 216).

Zbigniew Zaborowski considered the fully conscious influence of the educator as one of the most important factors shaping the 'constructive structure' of relations in the classroom. In his opinion, if such influence is consistent and tactful, fosters the awakening of self-governance among students, and involves setting cooperation requirements, then it will contribute to the proper development of correct educational relations in the classroom. He considered identification with the class and the social role of the student as fundamental virtues. Zaborowski believed that the educator played a key role in the shaping of social relations. At the same time, the educator was treated anonymously, impersonally as an 'educational machine' operating faultlessly, effectively and functionally (Zaborowski 1964: 28).
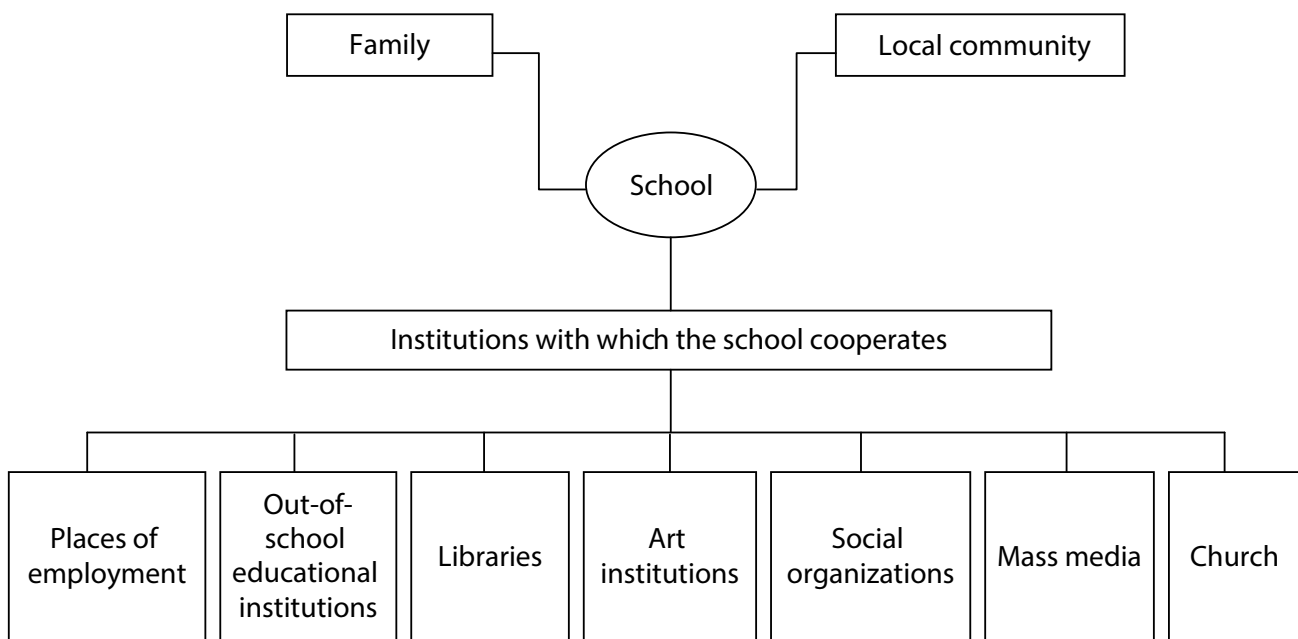

Diagram 1. The social context of the school according to Tadeusz Gołaszewski

Source: Gołaszewski (1977: 299).

In Aleksander Lewin's works there is a close relationship between the educational system of the school and the social system. A system is defined by the author as 'a structure integrating and coordinating the activities of various elements that will facilitate the achievement of the intended goals'. Speaking of the system, Lewin meant a separate entity, playing a specific role in social life. He believed that a school is not only an academy, but also a place of life for young people, where the student community is formed. In his opinion, 'socialization' is a social activity, based on the actual participation of young people in school and non-school life (Lewin 1972).

School as a social system fulfills its functions when it maintains a relationship with society both in a non-institutional sense and with public institutions. The education of every child is not only the concern of the school but also the whole of society, meaning parents or out-of-school teaching and educational institutions.

Speaking about the school in a social context, one can mention the following elements of the educational environment: the family of a child attending school, the local community in which the school is located, and institutions with which the school cooperates or which the students use. In order to better understand the social context of the school, I have presented diagram 1.

Educators and educational sociologists in their work argue the theoretical necessity of school and family cooperation, but in practice the situation looks somewhat different. The school realizes that, both in the

didactic and educational process, the family is an irreplaceable, decisive educational factor for the child. However, quite often parents do not acknowledge that which later influences the formation of children's personalities. Their arguments are various, lack of time, helplessness in the presence of difficulties or overprotection (Gołaszewski 1977: 300).

According to Edmund Trempała, the systematic, planned cooperation of the school with the environment is, for the time being, a postulate rather than accepted practice (Trempała 1969).

Tadeusz Gołaszewski presented a rather thorough analysis of the school. Speaking of a model, he meant "a collection of ideas concerning the goals and principles of the school and its organization that ensure the most effective achievement of goals, and the forms of action required to satisfy perceived social needs" (Gołaszewski 1977: 104). In the draft of the school model, he identified seven main elements, such as: organization, social relations, management styles, methods of achieving individual goals, distance, school solidarity, morale of students and teachers. Gołaszewski, analyzing the model of the school, showed the relationship between the social space of the school and the physical space. He created a three-tier structure in which he listed:

— individual space, separated due to the situation of an individual in the population;
— institutional space, separated by the types of behavior in specific areas of the institution, which is a given school;
— interpersonal space, in other words the space of direct relations and personal contacts, characterized as a result of social activities that occur in many forms within comprehensive education (Gołaszewski 1977: 221). Below, I present a diagram showing the relationship between these spaces in school.
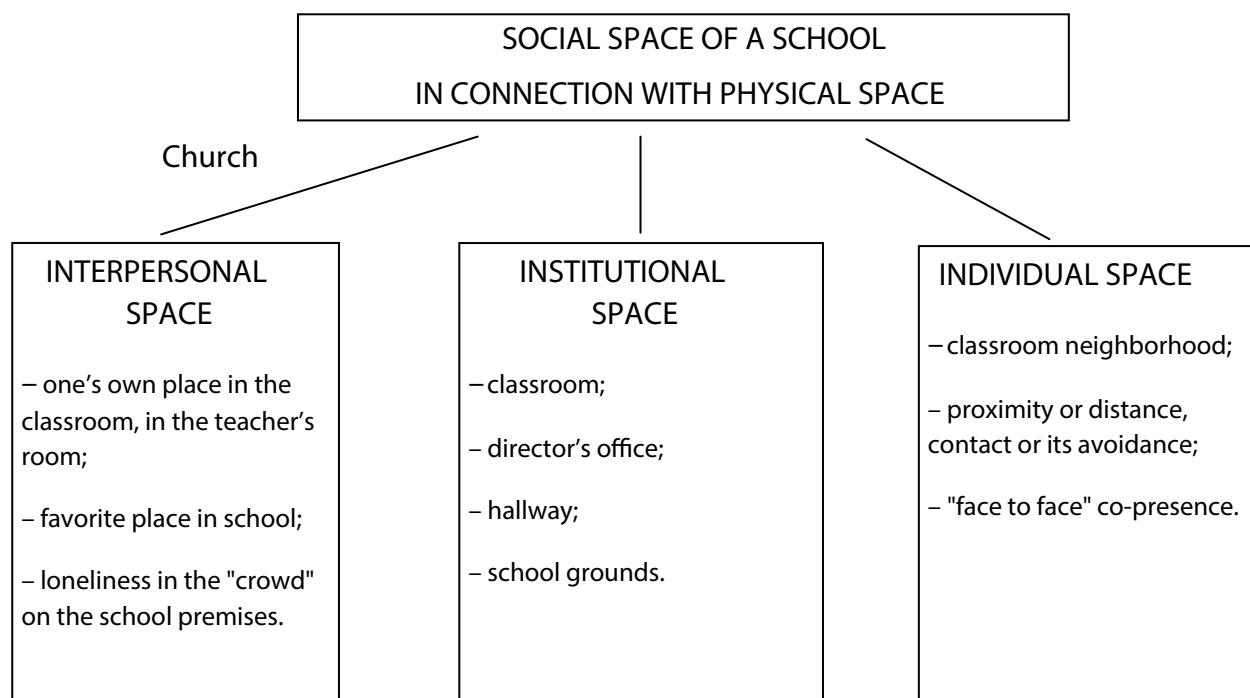
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│         SOCIAL SPACE OF A SCHOOL         │
│    IN CONNECTION WITH PHYSICAL SPACE     │
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INTERPERSONAL SPACE	INSTITUTIONAL SPACE	INDIVIDUAL SPACE
– one's own place in the classroom, in the teacher's room;	– classroom;	– classroom neighborhood;
– favorite place in school;	– director's office;	– proximity or distance, contact or its avoidance;
– loneliness in the "crowd" on the school premises.	– hallway;	– "face to face" co-presence.
	– school grounds.	

Diagram 2. The relationship between the social space of the school and its physical space according to Tadeusz Gołaszewski

Source: Gołaszewski (1977: 222).

In science, a school is often referred to as an institution rather than an organization. The concept of organization is universal, it is associated with action. School as an institution can be considered in terms of the characteristics of the organization. The basic features of the organization are:

1) purposefulness – existence of goals to be achieved
2) complexity – from identifiable elements, parts related to each other and with the whole organization of operation in a purposeful manner;
3) the distinctiveness of goals and structure in relation to the environment, and at the same time connected by them with the environment (Dymara 2009: 215).

Regardless of whether we analyze school as an institution, a system, an organization, an arrangement, most important are the functions it performs. Taking into account the tasks it has to perform it is possible to distinguish its basic, regulatory and auxiliary functions. In the scientific literature and in practice, the primary school functions include education, upbringing and care. From the point of view of the organization's theory, the basic functions include activities related to the main tasks of the given organization, whilst the auxiliary functions are those that are a necessary condition for the basic functions to be fulfilled. Regulatory functions include the formulation of operational objectives and planning. They consist of "establishing and permanently maintaining the established direction of the entire institution" (Zieleniewski, 1979 p. 400). Sociologists believe that the school has an external and internal function. The external function fulfills the tasks defined by the society, while the internal function consists of achieving a certain organizational level as well as satisfying the needs of people who belong to the school community, mainly teachers and students. Sociologist Jan Woskowski describes the school's functions as "directions of modern school activity". In the pedagogical literature, apart from the functions of the school I have mentioned, one can find a didactic, selective, caring or educational function (Dymara 2009: 219).

School is considered a very important element of the social system. It influences all young people and performs specific functions. It is understood as one of the basic elements of society, being an important component of the community, and the life activity of children and youth. It raises the young generation and conveys cultural heritage by preparing for certain social roles (INowosad 2003: 13).

Anna Sawisz writes that the school, next to the family, is 'the main agenda of socialization, which ensures continuity of values and cultural norms and thereby the continuity of society. The school prepares for the necessary social changes and innovations in the moments of breakthroughs' (Sawisz 1989: 5). There is a need in its functioning to maintain a proper balance between continuity and development, continuation and change. Schulz considered it obvious that the school as an organization must undergo constant changes in the world, but at the same time it must also maintain its identity, it should react to environmental changes. Nor can it cease to perform the function to which it was appointed. Therefore, elements of stability are required as well as changes in the dynamic development of the school. Despite the differences between the present and the past, the school function remains the same. It is understood as a unified and validated form of cultural communication (Nowosad 2003:17-18).

School is an institution that enters into everyone's life. It is a social institution shaping values, attitudes and life orientations. According to Barbara Smolińska-Theiss, 'school fits into the vector of time and social change. It is an important institution in which direct relations and purposeful educational activities dominate. It is not an island because it is supported by other institutions of indirect education, which provide children and youth with the values, content, and skills recognized by adults as necessary for the development of culture and society' (Smolińska-Theiss 2014: 80). Gołaszewski, referring to Parsons' concept, claims that school is a part of the social system. He mentions the didactic, educational and social system. In the center of attention is the social system, which includes the school community, the local community and the parent group. The most important element of the school social system is the student community. The school class, student organizations, student self-government are the most important operating entities. They enter into various interactions creating social situations, which comprise of variable, dynamic processes understood as the interaction of individuals or communities (Smolińska-Theiss 2014: 80).

4. School as a learning organization

The school as a learning organization is one of the visions of schools of the future. Before describing the concept of such a school, I would like to present a definition of the term 'learning organization'. The learning organization is described as a 'management concept that aims to improve the effective and efficient operation of the organization. It is based on the knowledge available to individual co-workers, and on the knowledge that is constantly enriched and developed'. This approach to knowledge management includes elements of knowledge discovery, its generation, evaluation and dissemination as well as its use in practice (Ratajka 2009: 65).

The school as a learning organization reflects a vision of learning, which consists of acquiring, consolidating and using knowledge. The intellectual potential of the organization plays an important role here. It arises in the relationship between knowledge, learning and intellectual capital. Such knowledge is enriched

by experience, and it represents an intellectual potential when making important strategic decisions. In such a school, the collective reflection of employee teams can be seen, and changes mainly concern the "school culture and the role of the director as the organizer of the learning process" (Ekiert-Oldroyd 2002).

5. Conclusions

There is a huge need in the education sector to look at the school as a learning organization. In this concept, education specialists appear as elements of a network for exchanging experiences on the application, acquisition and processing of knowledge. An interdisciplinary approach is needed. At this stage, the role of the school must change, and new forms of organization, curricula and methods of education must be created (Ratajka 2009: 65). The present-day school needs changes not only in its organization, but also in its tutelary and educational activities.

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