

DOROTA GRABOWSKA  
Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies  
University of Warsaw  
e-mail: d.grabowska@uw.edu.pl  
ORCID 0000-0002-2727-6942

## CULTURAL ANIMATION IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN POLAND



DOROTA GRABOWSKA, PhD, works at the Department of Research on Libraries and Other Cultural Institutions at the Faculty of Journalism, Information and Bibliology of the University of Warsaw. Her research interests focus around issues related to the organization and operation of public and school libraries. She is particularly interested in the forms and methods of working with the user in the library. Since 2013, she serves as the secretary of the "Przeгляд Biblioteczny" ("Library Review"). Since 2003, she has been the secretary of the "Poradnik Bibliotekarza" ("Librarian's Guide"), as well as part of the editorial team of the "Biblioteczka Poradnika Bibliotekarza" ("Librarian's Guide Library") series. She is the author of articles: "Ewolucja zadań nauczycieli bibliotekarzy w dydaktyce szkolnej" ("The evolution of librarian teachers' tasks in school teaching") *Studia o Książce i Informacji (Studies about the book and information)*, 2018, No. 37, pp. 93-105. *Animacja kultury w bibliotekach publicznych w Polsce (Cultural animation in public libraries in Poland)*. W: *Litteris et Amicitia*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe i Edukacyjne Stowarzyszenia Bibliotekarzy Polskich, 2023, s. 289-300; *Biblioteka jako podmiot uczestniczący w procesach marketingu terytorialnego (A library as subject participating in territorial marketing processes)* W: *Marketing w działalności bibliotecznej (Library marketing)* Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe i Edukacyjne Stowarzyszenia Bibliotekarzy Polskich, 2023, s. 574-585.

KEYWORDS: Cultural animation. Socio-cultural animation. Reading animation. Public libraries.

**ABSTRACT: Purpose** – The aim of this article is to demonstrate that the activities of cultural institutions, including libraries, are focused on cultural animation. **Methods** – The method of literature analysis was used combined with the form of statistical summaries and library websites. **Results/conclusions** – The concepts of cultural animation, socio-cultural animation, and reading animation are explained, highlighting their connections with education and anthropology, trying to emphasize the specificity of animation. Cultural animation, especially of reading, is becoming increasingly prevalent in the activities of public libraries in Poland, although there are challenges in classifying these activities as promotional or animated.

Public libraries operate with a specific local community in mind and strive to meet the needs of its residents. This is achieved through, among other things, cultural animation activities, and cultural animation has become a permanent fixture in Polish public libraries, although the concept is still not entirely clear. The term comes from the Latin words *anima* – soul, and *animo/animare* – to revive, to endow with life, to transform into something, to invigorate, to fill with courage (*Słownik*, 1990, p. 38). Therefore, it can be said that it is not only “revitalizing culture” but “revitalizing people” so that they will participate in it.

## ANIMATION

These two perspectives can also be discerned when taking into account the definitions found in general dictionaries. According to the *Słownik języka polskiego* [Dictionary of the Polish Language], the term “animate” has four meanings. The first refers to: “stimulating, inciting to action, to activity in something, encouraging, inciting to something, bringing to life” (*Słownik języka polskiego*). This meaning emphasizes that animating means bringing people to life, encouraging them to action. The second meaning – “to move, to move puppets in a puppet theater” (*Słownik języka polskiego*) – refers to animating objects. The third meaning, “to draw, to sketch or perform, to take pictures for an animated film” (*Słownik języka polskiego*), as well as the fourth meaning, “to create, to create moving images using a computer” (*Słownik języka polskiego*) refer to animated films, in which images and characters are “set in motion” and “brought to life.” This definition clearly emphasizes bringing something or someone to life. The association with animated films is entirely appropriate, as they “set” images in motion. But you can also animate someone, meaning you can make them act or perform specific actions due to encouragement or a positive stimulus.

Similar definitions can be found in the *Słownik wyrazów obcych PWN* [PWN Dictionary of Foreign Words], where animation is defined as: “1. a method of making cartoons, puppet films, etc., consisting in

photographing drawings or three-dimensional objects in such a way as to obtain the illusion of movement when displayed; also a film made using this method; 2. creating moving computer images using appropriate programs; also these images; 3. activating puppets in a puppet theater; 4. initiating and stimulating some actions, 126). This also refers to bringing things and people to life.

Similar definitions can also be found in French dictionaries and lexicons (Jedlewska, 2009, p. 26), and Italian lexicons (*Pedagogika i kultura*, 2009, p. 26).

Wincenty Okoń, in his *Nowy słownik pedagogiczny* [New Pedagogical Dictionary] defines the concept of animation from an educational perspective, emphasizing that it is an encouragement to action, supporting an individual or group in self-improvement. He believes that "an animator is an educator who does not direct a group, but skillfully stimulates their own activity" (Okoń, 1998, p. 22). He differentiates among animation as being educational, communicative (assistance in establishing contacts), integrative (developing the ability to participate in team activities), and cultural (facilitating participation in cultural life and the development of cultural creativity) (Okoń, 1998, p. 22). Animation is therefore related to education. The animator in action often becomes a teacher. He shows how to take photos, teaches songs, games, dances, etc. It is often an educational situation that can be the starting point for stimulating creative enthusiasm and the will to act. Education from the animation perspective is not hierarchical, it is not based on imposed authority, or a model of education. The relationship is much more bilateral and the influences are mutual. The teacher is also an animator who, in addition to knowledge, can convey an active attitude towards culture. Animation is therefore education in action, in relationships with people, in contact. It is education in which specific and verifiable skills are only a tool to go further, to meet with oneself, with others. As Dorota Reksnis states, animation allows us to see culture "as an element in which everyone can have their own creative participation" (*Teraz! Animacja kultury*, p. 14). Animation activities are therefore closest to team forms, in which each participant is a sender and a recipient, with strong relationships between them (Wojciechowski, 2000, p. 142). If we look at methods, those dominating in animation activities are activating ones in which ready-made knowledge is not provided, but rather a space for acquiring it is created (Grabowska, 2013, pp. 4-6).

## CULTURE IN ANIMATION

So what does "animating" or "reviving" culture entail? In the context of developing animation, culture is understood anthropologically (Chymkowski & Dudzik & Rodak, 2011, pp. 205-221) as the totality of

what is created by people communicating with each other (Chymkowski, 2015, p. 9). This approach, as Dorota Piwowska states, "allows us to understand culture as a whole – dynamic and complex, as a nexus of all patterns, attitudes, behaviors, cultural practices, interpersonal relationships, institutions, cognitive paradigms, traditions, social models, knowledge and experiences, family and social group patterns, forms of expression and communication" (*Teraz! Animacja Kultury*, p. 8). In this approach, culture is everything created by humans: there is no division into "high" and "low" culture, they are simply human products. It is worth noting that the subject of animation is not culture itself, but human activity in culture, and that the aim of animation is not to revive the world of values, but to support the process of reaching them (*Social and Cultural Animation*, 2000, p. 10).

## ANTHROPOLOGY AND ANIMATION

In cultural animation, the anthropological perspective plays a significant role. It not only reflects a perspective on culture, but also opens the mind to the other and recognizes this otherness within oneself. As Andrzej Mancwel stated in *Wyobraźnia antropologiczna* (Mancwel, 2006), to recognize the "native" in a foreigner, one must question the "native" within oneself. Animation borrows from anthropology the principle of transcending one's own perspective, one's own system of classifying reality. Recognizing locality, acknowledging its value, drawing on it, and stimulating it leads to identifying needs, which is the impetus for cultural animation. Animation is therefore an activity intended to encourage the performance of certain activities, but one that stirs feelings and leads to the development of a given community. Animation is intended to enliven a group where this does not happen spontaneously, to provide impetus for new initiatives. The first step in any cultural animation activity is, therefore, recognizing local needs.

## SOCIO-CULTURAL ANIMATION

In cultural institutions, socio-cultural animation is increasingly being discussed. As the name suggests, it involves the social activation of various groups. Its primary goal is the internal integration of a given community. In this context, the animator, or a group of animators, plays a crucial role. They strive to:

- influence individuals and groups to participate in life with greater activity and commitment. They encourage creative action.

- encourage group members to communicate with others and improve their communication skills.
- participate in the life of the community.

Barbara Jedlewska views socio-cultural animation as a way of influencing individuals, groups, and communities, with the goal of educating and training them through culture and for culture. It involves implementing a series of activities that unleash creative potential, stimulate and motivate creative action, integrate people with each other and with the surrounding world, support spiritual development and self-creation, stimulate curiosity about learning and the need to create culture, and support and promote cultural and social activity (Jedlewska, 1999, p. 34). In this context, animation is an expression of growing civil liberties, as an expression of the formation of a civil society. A library in such a society is based on the activity of self-organizing groups that “want to take fate into their own hands,” social associations, and local communities. The essence of animation is, after all, to revive the aspirations of individuals, groups, and communities. Libraries are oriented toward the needs of these communities, and animation as a method leads to the active participation of individuals, groups, and communities in local socio-cultural life.

## READING ANIMATION

Another term related to animation appears in the literature, originating from cultural animation. Although much narrower in meaning, it clearly pertains to libraries: reading animation. In her article *Animacja lektury* [Reading Animation] Weronika Parfianowicz-Vertun states that this concept is still imprecise and treats it as a specific and specialized approach aimed at revitalizing reading (Parfianowicz-Vertun, 2013, p. 198). She goes even further, claiming that it is related to library animation, or “bringing to life” the documents collected in these institutions. According to the author, this involves: “creating new connections between the public and the collections. Facilitating access to the latest publications. Discovering works, literary genres, and topics less known to the general public. Creating events in the life of the library. Incorporating books into activities with other forms of artistic expression. Creating a dynamic image of the library, one that not only lends books but is also a place open to the outside, lively, enabling exchange and meetings” (Parfianowicz-Vertun, 2013, p. 6). Among the activities that can serve this purpose, she lists: “exhibitions, readings, storytelling, meetings with authors, illustrators, publishers, writing workshops, concerts, conferences, debates, film screenings, and activities outside the library walls” (Parfianowicz-Vertun, 2013, p. 6). The line between activities related to dissemination, education, and animation is becoming blurred. Can every activity undertaken in a library aimed

at promoting the collections gathered there be classified as reading animation?

Roman Chymkowski, in his article *Od animacji lektury do animacji kultury* [From Reading Animation to Cultural Animation], notes that “reading animation is a tool, a pretext, or a means for creative action in the local community...” (Chymkowski, 2015, p. 12). Reading animation encompasses a range of activities that help unite the local community, such as integrating national minorities or learning about regional traditions. Reading research reveals a certain pattern: reading culture is shaped in the family environment – this is one of the factors influencing whether someone will need reading in their lives. Readers most often come from families with a strong reading culture. Non-readers are surrounded by family and friends among whom reading culture is minimal or nonexistent. In such situations, it can be assumed that reading animation will be an activity that bridges social divides. Chymkowski states that “reading animation is a practice that prevents the strengthening of class or social distinctions” (Chymkowski, 2015, p. 12). He added that “promoting reading is an encounter with cultural otherness, and moreover, an encounter whose purpose is to encourage the assimilation of certain aspects of the animator’s culture” (Chymkowski, 2015, p. 12). Assuming that the animator is usually well-read and represents a certain level of culture, they may encounter non-readers whom they will encourage to read. Even if the encounter does not bring lasting changes in the attitudes of the “non-readers,” occasional exposure to a text can lead to it being perceived as something interesting. Such positive emotions stay with people for a long time, sometimes they are remembered, and this can trigger a desire to return to moments that evoke positive associations. As Chymkowski states: “Inclusion in the reading culture should not be based on a system of commands and penalties for non-compliance, such as stigmatization or emphasizing the distance between readers and non-readers, but on opening new, satisfying forms of participation in the world or in social worlds” (Chymkowski, 2015, p. 12).

In her publication *Książki, dzieci, biblioteka* [Books, Children, Library], Joanna Papuzińska writes about library and reading animation. She includes various activities aimed at fostering a love of books and reading (Papuzińska, 1992, p. 41). She states that “the path to reading leads through a series of activities, forms of activity, and creative play that gradually lead to the discovery of language codes, a simpler entry into the world of signs, graphic symbols, information, and intellectual knowledge. Reading – understood not as learned under duress, mechanical, a deciphering of letters that is useless outside of school, a skill that will be discarded and forgotten like unnecessary baggage as soon as the compulsory schooling ends – must involve introducing the book into the world of the child’s

experiences and needs and connecting them with this world” (Papuzińska, 1992, p. 41). Papuzińska emphasizes the importance of connecting reading with other activities, which allows the child, and later the older reader, to experience the benefits of reading. A crucial task for librarians is to recognize that a publication can be a cool, engaging solution that meets their needs. If users can stimulate interesting activities in the library, there’s a chance they won’t dismiss libraries as uninteresting and local. When interesting events happen around reading, sometimes even if there are no other ideas on how to spend time, the reader will be interested in what the library has to offer. It is crucial to create a variety of engaging activities centered around reading to familiarize and encourage readers. Therefore, animation can be linked to establishing a rapport with readers, evoking a response, and developing the habit of coming to the library.

Reading is extremely important because, as Weronika Parfianowicz-Vertun has stated, “it is one of the fundamental competencies that enable the elimination of social inequalities or coping with their consequences, possessing emancipatory potential and constituting a condition for the fullest possible participation in culture” (Parfianowicz-Vertun, 2015, p. 32). It is one of the main skills that allows us to move freely in the world, it also enables us to use other media and messages other than text more fully, and it is the basis of verbal communication.

## LIBRARY ANIMATION

Cultural activity, as defined in the Act on Organizing and Conducting Cultural Activity (*Ustawa o organizowaniu i prowadzeniu działalności kulturalnej*. Act of 25 October 1991; Act of 7 July 2023), consists of creating, promoting, and protecting culture. Libraries are also listed among the institutions responsible for this. Currently, the Act does not mention cultural animation, only dissemination.

In Poland, public libraries form a network,<sup>1</sup> serving not only to collect, process, share and provide information about collections, but also to respond to the needs of the local community because they are created with this community in mind, which means they should also animate local culture. International guidelines clearly state that “an important role of a public library is to focus on the cultural and social development of its community and to help shape and support the cultural identity of a given community” (*Działalność bibliotek publicznych*, 2002, p. 24). It is also

---

<sup>1</sup> At the end of 2024, there were 7,541 public libraries in Poland, including 4,925 branch libraries. During the year, 5.4 million readers borrowed 98.8 million volumes from the collection. “Biblioteki Publiczne w 2024 r.” [online], GUS [accessed on 05.11.2025]. Available at [www: https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/kultura-turystyka-sport/kultura/biblioteki-publiczne-w-2024-r-,14,9.html](https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/kultura-turystyka-sport/kultura/biblioteki-publiczne-w-2024-r-,14,9.html).

emphasized that they should reflect the diversity of cultures present in the community and be a meeting place. Given that “a public library is an organization established, maintained, and financed by the community through local, regional, or national governments, or other forms of social organization; it provides access to knowledge, information, and the products of human thought through a wide range of resources and services, and is simultaneously accessible to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, health condition (e.g., disability), economic status, or education” (*Działalność bibliotek publicznych*, 2002, p. 19), it becomes an ideal place to do something with others and to carry out joint projects. At the same time, numerous animation activities are implemented as part of recovery programs formulated at the national or international level. They are intended to provoke actions that will respond to the needs of various groups and communities, and libraries are also expected to serve this purpose. Like animators, librarians are expected to open people up to otherness and to the other, facilitating a view of the world through the eyes of others.

In her article *Podmiotowość społeczna a animacja* [Social Subjectivity and Animation] Ewa Bobrowska views animation as “a method of working with people that is based on certain assumptions and refers to a specific set of values” (Bobrowska, 2012, p. 18). She highlights three characteristics of animation: abandoning institutional authority, building social capital, and creating relationships between people in the public sphere. This understanding of animation aligns with dissemination, which is, however, a much narrower process. Łukasz Hajduk emphasizes that “the animator strives to ensure that members of a given community make their own choices, deciding whether and how to initiate contact with culture. The essence here is the encounter itself, not what results from it. What people possess within themselves—their skills, passions, dreams—is more important than the culture that exists outside” (Hajduk, 2015, p. 101).

By promoting culture, the library enables contact with culture, including that present in a given local community. As an expert in a given culture, the librarian learns about readers’ interests and utilizes them, suggesting what might interest the user, introducing them to the “unknown.” When the emphasis shifts from dissemination to animation, the situation changes. Above all, a broader understanding of culture becomes crucial, built from the bottom up, based on what is within people. The librarian knows their users, their needs, and their problems. Using their knowledge and skills, they enable users to encounter not only books but, above all, each other. This leads to people taking action.

It is clear that the scope for action is extremely broad, and there are many ways to spark readers’ interest through a range of animation activities. Choosing appropriate methods and content for specific age

groups is crucial. Playful pedagogy is also very helpful. Elżbieta Kądzior-Niczyporuk sees it as a supportive method of group work, aimed at providing instructors with ideas that will enable creative and imaginative work with group participants, methods that influence the emotional sphere and foster the expression of positive feelings. She notes that “play pedagogy has a very wide audience, from young preschool children, through school-age children, adolescents, students, disabled children and their caregivers, to seniors. It’s crucial for play pedagogy to select only those from the repertoire of traditional games that don’t create tension caused by excessive competition and don’t ridicule the participants. The games she proposes foster the activity of all group members. She uses various means, such as the written and spoken word, gesture, movement, dance, painting, touch, sound, role-playing, and pantomime.” A library is an ideal place to successfully implement play pedagogy as a form of animated reading. All activities that engage the reader’s individual senses are highly desirable in entertainment activities. The more engaged participants are, the more they will gain. A key assumption of this pedagogy is to avoid negative interactions between participants, to avoid competition, and to avoid evoking any negative feelings. Everyone has the freedom to express themselves, their ideas, and their feelings about a given book. A wide variety of emotions, sometimes incredibly strong and profound, arise from a reader’s encounter with literature. Playing with literary emotions significantly multiplies the text’s impact and its range of issues, allowing us to better understand the world, ourselves, our emotions, motivations, and what’s happening around us. Everyone has different psychological needs and finds different things relaxing. It’s important not to impose our tastes on the reader—letting them choose for themselves. Literature has therapeutic properties, helps alleviate various tensions, cheers us up, and lifts our spirits.

## SUMMARY

Animation activities can thus be undertaken in the library, in both the areas of cultural and social activities. This is one of many opportunities available to librarians to influence readers and promote culture in its broadest sense. The optimal situation is when multiple strands of animation activities (reading, culture, socio-cultural) are developing simultaneously. Animation can be compared to mediating between the library, which aims to disseminate culture through access to literature, and the community. Animation activities create a meeting place between the librarian- animator and the individuals – the local community. Animation can be understood as a kind of attitude or activity, implemented incidentally in various situations of everyday life (Hajduk, 2015, p. 10). After all, it

is an expression of emphasizing the multiplicity of ways of participating in culture, highlighting the diversity of lifestyles and the existence of distinct cultural traditions. By using animation librarians can support the development of groups and communities that integrate around a shared system of values, interests, hobbies, or problems waiting to be solved.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bobrowicz, W. (Ed.). (2009). *Pedagogika i kultura. Pomiedzy teorią a praktyką*. Oficyna Wydawnicza VERBA.
- Bobrowska, E. (2012). Podmiotowość społeczna a animacja. *Pedagogika Społeczna* 2012, 1, 5-22.
- Chymkowski, R. (2015) Od animacji lektury do animacji kultury. *Kultura Współczesna*, No. 2 (85), pp. 9-13.
- Chymkowski, R., Dudzik, W., Rodak, P. (2011). Antropologia, komunikacja, animacja – trzy wymiary ‘wiedzy o kulturze’. In D. Ilczuk & S. Ratajski (Eds.), *Edukacja poprzez kulturę. Kreatywność i innowacyjność*. (pp. 205-221). Polski Komitet ds. UNESCO.
- Gill, R. (Red.). (2002). *Działalność bibliotek publicznych: standardy międzynarodowe IFLA-UNESCO*. Wydaw. SBP.
- Grabowska, D. (2013). Formy i metody pracy w bibliotekach. *Poradnika Bibliotekarza*, dodatek Animacja w bibliotece, pp. 4-6.
- Hajduk, Ł. (2015). Biblioteka otwarta na zmiany. Od upowszechniania do animacji. *Rocznik Komisji Nauk Pedagogicznych*, LXVIII, pp. 99–109.
- Hrycyk, K. (Ed.). (2000). *Animacja społeczno-kulturalna wobec przemian cywilizacyjnych. Animacja – animator i jego kształcenie*. Państwowe Pomaturalne Studium Kształcenia Animatorów Kultury i Bibliotekarzy.
- Jedlewska, B. (1999). *Animatorzy kultury wobec wyzwań edukacyjnych*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej.
- Jedlewska, B. (2009). Elementy teorii animacji społeczno-kulturalnej. In W. Bobrowicz (Ed.) *Pedagogika i kultura. Pomiedzy teorią a praktyką*. Oficyna Wydawnicza VERBA.
- Kumaniński, K. (Ed.). (1990). *Słownik łacińsko – polski*. PWN.
- Mancwel, A. (2006). *Wyobraźnia antropologiczna*. Wydaw. Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.
- Okoń, W. (1998). *Nowy słownik pedagogiczny*. Wydawnictwo Akademickie „Żak”.
- Papuzińska, J. (1992). *Książki, dzieci, biblioteka*. Fundacja Książka dla Dziecka.
- Papuzińska, J. & Walczewska-Klimczak, G. (Ed.). (2004). *Animacja czytelnictwa dziecięcego. Koncepcje – Doświadczenia – Postulaty*. Książnica Płocka, 2004.
- Parfianowicz-Vertun, W. (2013). Animacja lektury. *Kultura Współczesna. Teoria, Interpretacje, Praktyka*, No. 2 (77), pp. 196-210.
- Parfianowicz-Vertun, W. (2015). O tych, którzy ‘nie czytają, by czytać mógł ktoś’. Figura ‘nieczytania’ w dyskusjach o czytelnictwie i programach promocji czytelnictwa. *Kultura Współczesna*, No. 2 (85), pp. 14-32.
- Słownik języka polskiego* (2025, November 5). Keyword: animować. <https://sjp.pl/animowa%C4%87>.

- Teraz! Animacja kultury* n.d. Stowarzyszenie Katedra kultury.
- Ustawa z dnia 25 października 1991 r. o organizowaniu i prowadzeniu działalności kulturalnej. Dz.U. 1991 nr 114 poz. 493.
- Ustawa z dnia 7 lipca 2023 r. o zmianie ustawy o organizowaniu i prowadzeniu działalności kulturalnej. Dz.U. 2023 poz. 1662.
- Wiśniakowska, L. (Ed.). (2020). *Słownik wyrazów obcych PWN*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN SA.
- Wojciechowski, J. (2000). *Praca z użytkownikiem w bibliotece*. Wydaw. SBP.