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Polish fans vs. the participatory culture:
"just for fun" but also "on a mission"

ABSTRACT
The participatory culture and its influence on society is an increasingly important field of study. This paper presents the results of a pioneer Polish research conducted at the turn of 2008 and 2009. Interviews with local amateur authors were carried out in order to indicate their motivations to create and the key values they believe in, as fans and internet users. Two case studies, of *Star Trek* and the National Hockey League, were used. Both products share an important characteristic: traditional Polish media do not cater to the needs of the fans who are therefore forced to become *prosumers* (producing consumers).

Such reality is perfect for the blooming of the participatory culture – both in the form of fan fiction (in this case: writing, filming, or running another Polish project, in the *Star Trek* realm) and in form of the grassroots journalism (in this case: reporting and commenting in Polish on anything new in the NHL). Our analysis revealed three key groups of fans' motivations; relations of these motivations with the hacker ethic (Himanen 2001) were also analyzed. As the research showed, doing things 'just for fun' was important to some fan authors, but the awareness of 'being on a mission' was also often present in their claims.

Introduction

According to Manuel Castells (1996), the contemporary society enters the era of a new technological paradigm replacing the capitalistic paradigm; thus humanity leaves industrialism and enters informationalism, where the key social structures and activities are organized around electronically processed information networks, hence the acknowledged term 'network society'. Such networks are aterritorial, elastic, amorphic, often non-persistent and without determined borders, as well as based on individual choices of free-willed individuals.

The perceptible changes are also present in the normative culture. Informationalism and the network society relate to different values than industrial capitalism and mass society; some of these 'new' values can be linked with traditional hacker values. Castells himself

suggests that, in accordance with Pekka Himanen's *The Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of the Information Age*. Himanen argues that the hacker ethic is an ethical system upholding and legitimizing informationalism, just like the Protestant Work Ethic upheld and legitimized capitalism (2001). The members of hacker culture – often renowned creators of the early internet – emphasize strongly that financial benefits are not among their most important motivations while programming. The motivational system embedded in this culture relates to the higher needs, such as peer recognition and self-accomplishment. For hackers, working is not primarily a source of social acceptance but a way of realizing their passion and of acting *just for fun* – this reasoning is, as a matter of fact, the title of a book written by Linus Torvalds, a renowned hacker and the creator of Linux operating system (Diamond, Torvalds 2001).

Hackers' assurance that the most valuable products and ideas emerge from internet-based networks of selfless cooperation, stood behind the new approach to culture, economy and social distribution of power. It can be even stated that the hacker ethic is the backbone of various activities related to Web 2.0 or to the concept of the free culture.

There are commercial implications as well. Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams (2006) prove that the key to success in the new economy will be in following such rules as openness, partnership, and resource sharing. Nonmarket peer production – the result of people's cooperation in their free time – also gains importance (Benkler 2006). The social change, however, are also present in the media realm. Henry Jenkins (2006) foresees the end of the traditional model of mass media communication, described e.g. by the classic Harold Lasswell's five-questions model. There is no longer place for one-sidedness of the message and initiative attributed only to the sender. New technologies force traditional media to converge and become interactive. Senders and recipients become communication partners, also due to internet's ability to democratize the role of senders (regardless of social roles and formal competence).

In effect, the overall amount of information rises considerably. Apart from vitally important public debates, the internet offers information about niche phenomena sometimes concerning only a handful of people. Both senders and recipients can switch their roles and both influence the constant (re)creation of culture. Preparing and sharing information becomes an important form of participation in culture. The process of media convergence encourages the former consumers to create; the convergence equals people taking media into their own hands. Not only they discuss, but also remix the commercially prepared content and

build their own output on it. This, as Jenkins writes, is the very core of the participation culture.

Needless to say, the internet gave a strong impulse to the fans and fandoms, and nowadays hosts countless websites, mailing lists, discussion groups or forums where fans can virtually meet, share opinions, discuss and further develop knowledge on their respective fields of interest. This is also where bigger projects, such as amateur films (example: Polish *Star Trek: Horizon*) or independent sport portals (example: NHL.com.pl), are born.

Fans frequently make efforts to contribute to the phenomenon that fascinated them in the first place. Easily accessed and easily interpreted products of the contemporary pop-culture facilitate that pursuit and amateur creativity often equals fan creativity. By fan creativity we understand e.g. short stories, novels, drawings, comic strips, songs, video clips, feature films, fanzines, as well as blogs and various websites related to a given fan-attracting phenomenon. It seems that such amateur creativity is the ultimate stage of fan' involvement, as it usually requires a thorough knowledge of their field of interest, as well as considerable amount of resources (such as e.g. time or money).

Polish amateur creativity: description of the research

Participatory culture and its influence on society are an increasingly important field of research in the recent years (see e.g. Jenkins 2006, Haastrup 2008; Ito, et al. 2008). The aim of our research was to contribute to the growing field of study of youth participation that emerged due to popularization of the internet. The aforementioned field benefits from both quantitative and qualitative research techniques present in social sciences; it profits equally from research efforts based on surveys and global data, as well as from interviews, participant observation and case studies. The latter approach the social phenomena to develop a deeper understanding of them, rather than gathering data necessary for statistical analysis. Our research was therefore aimed at shedding light on Polish amateur creativity on the internet, from qualitative perspective. At the turn of 2008 and 2009 we have conducted a research that combined case studies with in-depth, semi-structured interviews and based on purposive sampling.

We have selected two case studies of global media products – and their active, albeit not very numerous, fan communities in Poland. The renowned realm of *Star Trek*, as well as the National Hockey League (NHL), world's best ice hockey league, share an important characteristic: it is very hard to reach them in Poland. Despite being globally acknowledged, these two products were and are hardly present in the mainstream media. In effect, such media

are not capable of catering to the needs of true fans who have to count on themselves as producers of the information they themselves seek. Such fans therefore become *prosumers* – people who produce media products for themselves and others to consume (Tapscott & Williams, 2006).

The study consists of 20 individual in-depth interviews with most active community members. Eight interviewees are involved in fan projects within *Star Trek* realm (three are makers of the amateur movie project called "Horizon", five write fan fiction), whereas 12 contribute to NHL.com.pl – the most reliable Polish source of information about NHL hockey. Interviewed *Star Trek* fans are of mixed gender (3 women, 5 men), whereas hockey-writing authors are homogeneous (12 men). The interviewees are either young professionals (25-34 years old at the time of the interview), or university and sometimes high school students (15-24 years old at the time of the interview). All interviewees were assigned a code [r] with a number from 1 to 20 (e.g. [r1], [r20]) to be used within this article. The list of respondents' nicknames or first names can be found at the end of the text.

By interviewing local amateur authors originating from above mentioned communities, we wanted to indicate their (1) motivations to create and the key (2) values accompanying their activities, in their social roles of authors and active participants of culture. We believed such insight can be a valuable contribution to the field of research of the participatory culture. By tracking fan motivations – some of which were not present *expressis verbis* and thus would not appear in qualitative research – we also wanted to (3) indicate the eventual relations between these motivations and the hacker culture. The hacker ethics includes such critical values as freedom, openness, caring, passion and – last but not least – creativity (Himanen 2001: 139–141). Another issue was to verify whether in this particular case, actions taken within participatory culture are close to realizing the hacker ethic, or perhaps are – as Himanen tends to think – simply an effect of decisions taken in a favorable ethical environment.

Describing case studies and their environments. Polish Trekkers and NHL.com.pl

Little presence of *Star Trek* and NHL in the traditional media was caused by a complex of reasons. *Star Trek* used to be treated as a children's TV show in Poland and has never been televised in prime-time; even nowadays, the series and movies from the realm are not considered audience-grabbing. Although NHL games can be transmitted live – a feature attractive *per se* – it does not really matter for an average sports follower, because an usual game set to start at 7 PM in New York and Los Angeles requires Polish enthusiasts to stay up

at 1 AM and 4 AM respectively. This characteristic, together with considerable licensing fees, makes the NHL a not-so-attractive product for the mainstream, countrywide media. However, since *circa* 2006, NHL games are available on niche, paid TV channels of limited reach – Polsat Sport Extra in the past and now nSport. Press coverage in regard to the NHL remains scarce and usually limits to reporting last day's scores, *sans* the details.

Such situations leave true fans in need of seeking fulfillment elsewhere. In recent years, *Star Trek* films and series were often downloaded by Polish audience via peer-to-peer networks or hosting services such as Rapidshare, whereas NHL games were watched live on ESPN (legally), Sopcast (self-described 'free peer-to-peer Internet TV'; illegal) or on easily accessed websites such as Justin.tv (illegal). Certain void was also filled by amateur creativity, in this case by fans frequenting Startrek.pl, Trek.pl and NHL.com.pl websites and related forums.

Star Trek is a true phenomenon of the popular culture – it has a uniquely well-developed and well-organized fandom. The fans have played an important role in *Star Trek* realm from the very beginning, i.e. from the 1960's. They managed to organize a protest and lobby the film company, forcing it to produce the third season of The Original Series. The first feature film – *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979) – was produced partly due to pressure put on Paramount Pictures by fans along with *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry. The success of the aforementioned film encouraged Paramount to finance additional movies and series, among the latter – the most widely known *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Multithreaded and diversified plot of the Star Trek productions provoked lively discussions among the fans. Erik Davis (1999) mentions that it was the Trekkers (i.e. *Star Trek* fans) who added proper resonance and depth to the series, filling it with personal interpretations, collective rituals and common sense of fun.

As of now, *Star Trek* fans in Poland are not very numerous, but they form a very strong community. Popularization of the Internet became an important impulse for development of this community, partly due to easy access to illegal copies of feature films and all three series – what was not offered in traditional television, was now easily accessed on fans' own computers. Since the beginning of the XXI century, most activities of the fan community concentrates on two websites: Startrek.pl (USS Phoenix) and Trek.pl, as well as on associated forums gathering a considerable amount of Trekkers. These two forums are the most important places not only to discuss *Star Trek*, but to socialize; many Trekker relationships begin there and are continued offline. Regular fan meetings are held offline as well, usually as a part of bigger Sci-Fi conventions.

At present, *Star Trek* fan activity in Poland consists of written fan-fiction, wiki database, an e-zine and a movie. Many fans get involved with writing short stories situated in the *Star Trek* realm – such stories, produced both individually and collectively, are usually published on Trek.pl or on blogs. Another common project is a translation of Memory Alpha, a worldwide *Star Trek* database. In 2004 'Pathfinder' was founded and nowadays this e-zine produces articles regarding *Star Trek* and other Sci-Fi realms. Finally, there is *Star Trek: Horizon* – a fan-made feature film and the central project of the Polish community, engaging the vast majority of its members (http://sthorizon.com; Fig. 1).

As of August 2009, the shooting of the movie was complete, leaving the project at the stage of post-production. The project maintains a bilingual Polish-English website that also hosts a blog and a forum, as well as various information and galleries of pictures from the set .
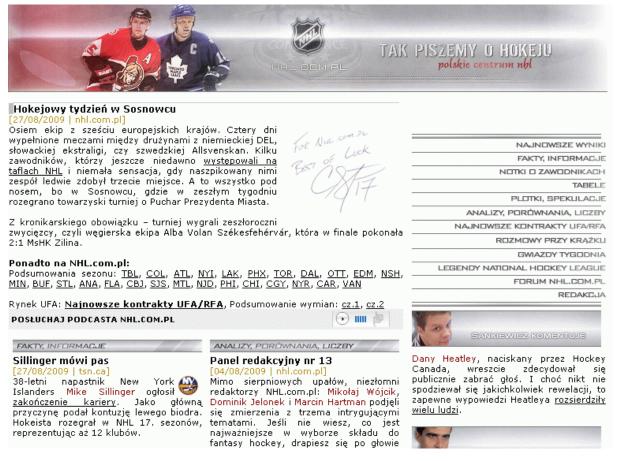

(Fig. 1 – screenshot of the 'Star Trek: Horizon' project website, available both in Polish and in English)

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The National Hockey League is a professional ice hockey league composed of 30 teams located in Canada and in the United States of America. It is the supreme professional ice hockey league in the world, with very remarkable history – The Stanley Cup is the oldest professional sports trophy in North America. NHL has been a global product for at least 20 years and currently hosts players from around 20 countries. Since the start of 2006/2007

season, Poland has no active representatives in the NHL, although Wojtek Wolski is a Poland-born and Polish-speaking Canadian.

Polskie Centrum NHL (eng. Polish NHL Center; Fig. 2), better known as NHL.com.pl, started in 2004 as an independent and non-profit effort of grassroots journalism. The birth of the community dates back to year 2000 (as mentioned by [r13] and [r20]). From the very beginning NHL.com.pl was – and still is – a non-profit initiative, created in free time as a hobby by numerous contributors, overseen by the senior editors. It is supported by voluntary donations of editors, ex-editors, friends and other members of the NHL.com.pl community originating from an affiliated forum (http://forum.nhl.com.pl).

(Fig. 2 – screenshot of the main page of NHL.com.pl)

The website offers vast editorial content in Polish, including daily coverage of NHL news and trade rumors, complex analyses of trends and major events around the league, as well as the editorial columns, audio podcasts and up-to-date statistics. As of now, more than 20 people are involved in creation of the NHL.com.pl, ranging in age from high school teenagers to professionals in their thirties. The community employs hacker-like, meritocracy model: to

become a contributor of NHL.com.pl, one has to be recognized as a reasonable, knowledgeable and thorough member of the aforementioned forum. Hard-working contributors are successively promoted and offered bigger responsibilities.

Despite declared informality of internal relations and independent structure – mentioned by most interviewees – NHL.com.pl defines itself as a medium. It maintains an editorial board, even if the formality level between participants is very low (as declared in the interviews). It also holds a subpage equivalent to a newspaper's masthead with all necessary information about the contributors (http://nhl.com.pl/redakcja) and some of the most experienced editors have created an internal stylebook for aspiring new members.

Today the fan-made NHL.com.pl serves as the most detailed source of NHL knowledge prepared in Polish. Its position seems to be acknowledged by the mainstream media – since 2006 NHL.com.pl editors regularly serve as color commentators and experts during game transmissions and other coverage (first by Polsat Sport Extra, then by nSport). Also, as fans/journalists proudly mention in the official information kit of NHL.com.pl (2006): 'Mariusz Czerkawski told us about his Maple Leafs contract three days before he was called by a journalist from Gazeta Wyborcza'. Toronto Maple Leafs is one of the most recognized NHL teams and influential "Gazeta Wyborcza" is the leading non-tabloid daily in Poland.

Findings: Polish fans and their motivations to create

As the research shows, there are numerous motivations behind respondents' decisions to undertake their amateur activities. Often one statement consisted of elements pointing to a few types of motivations; some of the statements were difficult to include in only one category.

In order to demonstrate the connection between motivations of the fans, the values they believe in, as well as their orientations, we decided to propose a following analytical division of types of fan motivations:

- **self-oriented motivations** – connected with an individual who decides to start a fan activity;
- **peer-group-oriented motivations** – connected with a collectiveness of some sort. It can be either a little group which helps an individual in his amateur creativity projects, or a general group of fans of a given phenomenon (in our case: *Star Trek* and the whole Polish fan community). In both cases the group is not overly big and its members share the same interests, hobbies and social relations. It is an 'us' focused type of group.

- **society-oriented motivations** – connected with society perceived as an abstract collectiveness, recognized by certain culture, as well as norms and values present in laws, customs and other aspects of public life.

Self-oriented fan motivations
- Motivations of this type are linked with the individual and consist of such motivations mentioned by the interviewees, as:
- interest in a given subject area (*Star Trek*, ice hockey);
- willingness to have fun;
- willingness to spend good amount of time fitting into a group of same subject-oriented people;
- willingness to develop knowledge or other skills.

It is worth noting that self-oriented motivations may be either *autotelic* (when fans perceive their own creativity as a value *per se*) or *heterotelic* (when they perceive their activities as an opportunity to gain or polish certain skills useful for their future personal and perhaps even professional goals).

However, the respondents often claimed openly that their activity is not profit-oriented; they undertake it primarily to enjoy themselves in their free time. It corresponds well with the classical *homo ludens* concept by Johan Huizinga (1955), according to whom playing is a goal *per se* – a selfless activity undertaken for pure pleasure.

Self-oriented motivations usually result from individual needs. Many of the needs on Abraham Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of human needs are connected with satisfying the need of belonging, especially when an individual participates in a creativity-oriented social network or when it feels strongly connected with the fan community. It seems that sharing fun with others is particularly important at least to some of the interviewed fans – [r12] underlines: […] *we have started friendships and it is good to do something that gives us pleasure, even if it takes time – but it takes place in a circle of good friends and buddies.*

Fan creativity is also tied with willingness to fulfill the need of respect and peer recognition. Whenever some of the respondents reveal the need of praise as one of their motivations, they usually expect this praise from the most involved fans as the best judges of their work's quality. The authors may even be discouraged if the feedback is only politely positive and thus superficial – e.g. [r16] mentions that he is only exposed to positive opinions

and comments: *'I am not that happy about it, because I would like my eventual mistakes, blunders and especially too bold thesis to be commented on'.*

Fans committed to creativity are also able to fulfill the last need of the Maslow pyramid – self-actualization, i.e. the pursuit to progress as individuals, to reach their maximum potential and possibilities, as well as to simply learn and expand their knowledge. In fact, passion, fun and self-actualization are among the most important motivations for fan creativity.

The examples of fans' statements where the key self-oriented motivation is *passion*:

- [r7] *'Star Trek The Next Generation stimulated me. I am absolutely serious. As a little kid I saw this series for the first time and after long time of fantasizing about it, I decided it would be possible to put my fantasies on paper.'*
- [r9] *'My passion for hockey made me start this form of creativity. It is a sport I've been passionate for almost ten years (…). It is an important part of my life.'*
- [r11] *'The first steps of writing resulted from pure passion and willingness to share my opinions on subjects that were interesting to me.'*
- [r15] *'NHL became my passion a couple of years ago and it's still that passion today. Since journalism is in my area of interest as well, writing about hockey gives me pleasure (…). I will write about this sport for as long as I'm in love with it and as long as I have enough zest and time.'*
- [r20] *'Passion, willingness to learn and to absorb as much knowledge as possible and eventually sharing it with others.'*

The examples of fans' statements where the key self-oriented motivation is *fun*:

- [r1] *'In 'Horizon' the motivation is rather the willingness to have fun, to spend your free time nicely.'*
- [r2] *'[It] is a materialization of my childhood dreams, to live in this universe. It has an element of fun.'*
- [r5] *'I also have a lot of fun doing it.'*
- [r7] *'Besides, despite the lapse of time, these contributions were generally written only for self-satisfaction.'*
- [r17] *'It stills brings me a lot of fun, [and] gives me a respite from the every day [duties].'*
- [r18] *'I do it because I like doing it, I treat it as some sort of a hobby.'*
- [r20] *'Because I still feel that it brings me a lot of joy.'.*

The examples of fans' statements where the key self-oriented (and also heterotelic) motivation is *self-actualization*:

- [r1] *'I have learned a lot, especially when it comes to personnel management in such specific situations.'*
- [r5] *'What does it give me? The possibility to hone my lingual skills. I do not forget the orthography rules thanks to that.'*
- [r6] *'Nowadays I treat fan-fiction writing as a form of practicing my skills, as a form of learning and experimenting with new techniques.'*
- [r17] *'It gave me a lot of joy since the very beginning and also helped me to learn to write better in my mother tongue. I received most points on the final exams in high school thanks to the proper style.'*
- [r18] *'[I treat it] also as an investment for the future. You never know what you will be doing in your life...'*

Polish fans of *Star Trek* and professional ice hockey often mention their willingness to contribute to the phenomena they admire. The Trekkers, for example, speak about their appetence of *'making their own Star Trek'* [r1], their willingness *'to show something of our own in a given realm, our own reality, own heroes'* [r6], as well as their ability *'to introduce my own ideas to a given realm – things that, according to me, should or could have been added and which were never thought of by the authors (or they did, but screwed up).'* [r5].

Such willingness to contribute is a peculiar motivation, lying somewhere <u>in between the self-oriented and peer-group-oriented fan motivations</u>. On one hand, it allows individuals to fulfill their particular needs, visions, plans or dreams, on the other – the very same fans tend to define their works as additions and expansions of the whole realm, itself treated as a common good, not a mere commercial product. The fans treat the general notion of the fan creativity as a valuable part of various realms which officially consist only of the licensed products released by the producers.

Peer-group-oriented fan motivations

Fan creativity is also a way of gaining friends and acquaintances interested in the same phenomenon – a way of living a social life. Most fan authors are aware that their writings, films and other works will be noticed and received by a very limited group of people. As [r7]

states: *'Such works rarely leave the circle of people who are interested in a particular product and works related to it'*. It is thus worth underlining that a given fan activity may become very important in his community, facilitating integration of the fans and expressing the identity of the group. 'Star Trek: Horizon', for instance, is well-known and admired by Polish Trekkers and its makers are usually treated with utmost respect and recognition. In fact, many fans have supported the project in many ways (help on set, on-stage appearance, as well as financial support) which undoubtedly strengthened the bonds in and of the community.

Below are examples of fans' statements in regard to other fans and to their respective groups:

- [r1] *'It* ['Stark Trek: Horizon'] *is connected with discussing, meeting others, seeing each other face to face, building a social group who has a lot of fun with* [working on] *'Horizon'. (...) We do it for other fans.'*

- [r2] *'Each time something gets done, it has to be decided: either we hide it for ourselves or give it to someone to acquaint them with it.* […] *Since we do it for a number of years and invest some money in it, it has to be distributed.'*

- [r6] *'I write a lot also for my friends who like this or that realm.* [...] *Fan creativity* [...] *also helps to integrate the fan circle.'*

- [r9] *'I would like my readers to read from page one to the end and hopefully they find [these writings] interesting and profound in knowledge. If at least a few people share a positive word about my works – even better.'*

- [r12] *'[NHL.com.pl] was a website created by regular people, who could be joined, did not treat each other badly, often tolerated your lack of knowledge and tried to teach you something as well, is encouraging, because it develops not only your interest in a given fan subject, but also your interpersonal relations.'*

- [r13] *'What motivates us to work for NHL.com.pl is the feedback from the reader, not necessarily positive, but generally* [it's something] *to keep it all spinning. I have the impression that for every creator who does things as a hobby and who gives [something] to others, the most important thing for him is to get feedback.'*

- [r14] *'Now it's more like writing for a small group of fans and friends.* [...] *I like when something that I write induces a discussion – naturally, it is pleasant to hear praise for what one has written, but it's good when the other is able to discuss constructively.'*

- [r17] *'Besides, I like the feeling when the effects of my work is visible to a larger group of people.'*

- [r20] *'The exchange of ideas is quite very active, I would even say that it is often difficult to tell who is a writer and who is the reader of a given project.'*

Society-oriented fan motivations

Sometimes motivations of the respondents focused on the society are understood as an organized, inclusive collectiveness. Such collectiveness, as already mentioned, has a specific culture, particular norms, values, as well as laws, customs and other aspects of public life. Society-oriented motivations revolve around popularizing knowledge about particular phenomena, promoting brands, as well as simply informing others about one's areas of interest. Because fans value highly their hobbies, they often believe other people would also benefit from learning about these areas.

Some of the authors are very conscious of their chance to influence the mainstream, general culture – [r16] claims: *'Activities such as NHL.com.pl or, for example, some of the blogs, expand information resources that can be reached by an interested person. [These activities] often offer a new point of view on a given case – it can be [just] an answer to the question as to why a given sports team lost its last game, but also how to make the best of the public space or how to interpret the situation on stock markets worldwide. One could say that such 'fan' creativity is directed outwards – towards people who aren't necessarily into a given subject, in order to let them know about it.'*

Other examples of society-oriented fan motivations in interviewees' statements:

- [r1] *'[Fan creativity] enriches culture. [...] [It] shows that you can take things into your own hands.'*

- [r6] *'I think that fan creativity is primarily supposed to serve, and it serves, as a way of letting other people know about the original works and of their promotion.'*

- [r9] *'There is a chance that after reading an interesting article they [the readers] will get into hockey.'*

- [r11] *'In my opinion [our work] can influence spectator's imagination and inspire him/her to start his/her own initiatives promoting his/her hobby.'*

- [r12] *'We do it completely selflessly and we want to popularize hockey.'*

- [r13] *'This is in fact the editorial board's mission, to popularize the knowledge about hockey [...]. For us, in fact, the reward for writing is that we can encourage people to discuss a given subject.'*

- [r15] *'We want our work not only to be the source of up to date information for longstanding fans, but also to contribute to the increase of hockey popularity in Poland.'*

- [r17] *'I also hope that through co-creating the website I contribute to popularizing hockey in Poland. [...] In my opinion fan creativity is something meaningful on many fields, especially if it concerns not very popular areas and have no – let's say professional – alternative. The reason is simple – others can benefit from your knowledge, get to know the subject, find information. [...] Fans are able to spread their passion to others, to show something you did not see before or you knew very little about. They broaden their horizons, the cultural ones as well.'*

Perhaps the best summary of this type of motivations – and self-consciousness in the role of the prosumer – was verbalized by [r14]: '[Fan creativity] *contributes to the rising of the initiative-awareness, active participation in the events. More and more we get used to the fact that we are not merely a passive recipient of information, but that we can also participate in its creation. It's worth to recall alert24 website* [www.alert24.pl]*, which is based on a similar concept – it is not about the people ('the fans') receiving the information produced by a small group of authorized people, but about everyone being able to send out information he/she feels is substantial.'*

Values, motivations and the hacker culture

While analyzing the structure of social action, Talcott Parsons (1937) takes notice that acting individuals go by both their individual motivations and a selection of norms and values existing in a given society. The action results from individual needs, but accepted ways of fulfilling these needs are suggested by culture. This is also the case of our respondents. Becoming amateur culture producers may result from their psychological needs, but only through culture they realize that fulfilling these needs is possible by fan creativity projects.

It seems that the key element of the normative culture responsible for suggesting fan authors particular solutions, is the hacker ethic. According to Pekka Himanen, creativity is its ultimate value to which all remaining six values lead (2001: 141). Through their actions, the respondents bring this particular value to life – they become producers. We therefore decided

to verify whether they mention other values discussed by Himanen, i.e. passion, freedom, social worth, openness, activity and caring.

Almost all of the interviewed fans mention *passion* as one of their motivations. Contributing to their subject of interest is something more than just an entertainment to them – a fragment of popular culture or a part of their public reality. Polish fans underline that the respective phenomena they are interested in, is important part of their lives; they are deeply emotional about it and are willing to attribute significant resources (time, money etc.) to it, sometimes even feel their activity is a form of commitment. Fan creativity in a given area or discipline, becomes, as [r2] puts it, *'a form of a tribute paid to this discipline'*. Fans decide to start acting on the strength of passion, deeply sympathizing or even worshipping a given phenomenon.

Acting on the strength of *passion* is primarily connected with self-oriented motivations, albeit it is always legitimized within the normative culture. The hacker ethic decides what can – or perhaps even *has to* – be done on the strength of passion.

Another frequent motivation is the *social worth*, which can be attributed to peer-group-oriented motivations. It seems that some of the interviewees appreciate the ability of cooperating with others and the opportunity to hang out with other people who share the same hobby. In this context, fan creativity can be perceived as a way of fulfilling the need of appreciation and belonging – but the clues about whose appreciation is meaningful and which groups are worth belonging to, come from the culture.

Caring as a value can be linked with society-oriented motivations. Some of the fans perceive their activity as a mission and as their contribution to knowledge, culture, and society.

Although these three values are openly present in the interviews, it does not mean that other hacker values are not. Culture, including the axionormative system, is internalized by individuals within social practices; in other words, people know how to behave, but very often are not able to name the guiding norms or values. Anthony Giddens (1984) called it practical consciousness – the actor has the necessary knowledge to move on the social stage, but is rarely able to formulate it discursively.

It thus can be stated that *freedom*, *openness* and *activity* – three remaining values of Himanen's hacker ethic – are present in the actions of respondents, although not mentioned *expressis verbis*. However, freedom, openness and activity are *sine qua non* conditions of fan creativity, with its permanent references to products of the popular culture and liberty of

interpreting these products. It is worth noting that Polish *Star Trek* fans often consider their works as forms of interpretation.

Alfred Schütz's (1953) concept of knowledge construction is also useful in the description of problem discussed. The first-degree constructs correspond to the common-sense knowledge and include practical knowledge about social behaviors, whereas the second-degree constructs – useful e.g. in social research – are built on the former constructs and allow to describe the social world in general categories of the social sciences. The hacker ethic is such a second-degree construct. It allows to describe social actions called 'fan creativity' and creates a general axiological background for the contemporary informationalistic society – a society only intuited ('felt') by its members and described in a precise way by social scientists and other specialists.

As Giddens (1984) notes in his theory of structuration, social actions are on one hand focused on certain values, while on the other contribute to strengthening the role of the very same values in the society. Structure influences the agency, agency influences the structure – this particular mechanism is useful in describing relations between fan creativity and the society, allowing to state that such creativity favors building a hacker ethic-centered society. Henry Jenkins (2006) underlines the importance of fan creativity for the well-being and development of the civil society. Being an avid fan usually equals being active and by taking media into their own hands, people soon realize that they can take many other issues into their own hands as well. 'Being on a mission'– an important motivation for the interviewed fans – is also important from the general point of view.

However, not all of the respondents are aware of the social meaning of their activity. Some claim it is just a hobby, a 'just for fun' activity – yet, as Johan Huizinga (1955) points out, playing and having fun always is significant in social interaction and constructing common culture. The individuals often are not aware of that fact, but it does not have to mean they are all but determined by forces they do not understand and do not control (Giddens sees this as a weak spot of Parsons' social action theory).

In fact, the actions of individuals in the contemporary society become more reflexive. Giddens (1984) claims that sociological knowledge penetrates both common and practical knowledge. This may serve as an explanation as to why some of the interviewed fan writers or producers openly mention such values as: selfless activity undertaken on the strength of passion; freedom of choice of the activity; social worth; caring; mission – as well as such expressions as i.e. participatory culture. Fans tend to realize the importance of fan creativity and find value in doing something selflessly for the common good. It is particularly strong in

the case of the NHL.com.pl members, whose activity resembles civic journalism. The Trekkers are less aware of a deeper axiological background of their actions – [r1] states that the common project he is involved in *'does not build a community based on axiology'*, even though he further acknowledges that fan creativity shows others that *'one can take things into one's own hands'*.

Conclusions

There are numerous motivations to become a writer or filmmaker involved with fan creativity products. Some of these motivations, such as the need of belonging and of self-actualization, correspond with the classic hierarchy of human needs by Abraham Maslow and with the ***self-oriented fan motivations*** category we proposed. Polish fans who were the subject of this research often claimed that their activity was not profit-oriented and aimed at enjoying themselves in their free time – but they have also revealed the importance of sharing fun with others, i.e. of cooperating with them. Such cooperation not only helps to attain peer recognition – a value important both in fan and hacker communities - but is also a way of gaining friends and developing social life. The attention paid to a particular group of people, their opinions and expectations, appears in statements assigned to the proposed category of ***peer-group-oriented fan motivations***. The third and last category – ***society-oriented fan motivations*** – concerns fans' thoughts and ideas revolving around the notion of popularizing their favorite phenomena and sharing their knowledge about it; it appears that most interviewed fans believed that members of the society would benefit from learning about such phenomena.

***Passion*, *fun, social worth,* and *caring* were some of the most important motivations of the respondents**, as well as among the seven key values of Pekka Himanen's hacker ethic. Almost all of the interviewees were deeply emotional about the subject of their passion, and were willing to attribute significant resources (time, money etc.) to it. They claimed their creativity serves a personal entertainment purpose, while acknowledging their activity became a form of commitment to them. They also seemed to greatly appreciate the ability to cooperate with others and some also felt their activity was a mission and their contribution to the culture and the society.

Polish amateur culture producers are therefore creative 'just for fun'– Himanen's *fun* and *passion* values are strongly present in their motivations – but they also care significantly about being in good company (*social worth*) and in many cases feel the urge to create as if they were 'on a mission' (*caring*).

Notes

The respondents have agreed to disclose certain personal data; therefore the list of respondents' nicknames or first names and their respective codes used within the article: [r1] – waterhouse, [r2] – Pah Wraith, [r3] – Domko, [r4] – Eviva, [r5] – Silver Phoenix, [r6] – Coen, [r7] – Zarathos, [r8] - Lo'Rel, [r9] – Strong, [r10] – Batigol, [r11] – Janmit, [r12] – Mikołaj, [r13] – Alan, [r14] – ddawwidd, [r15] – McRell, [r16] – Piotr, [r17] – Sailor Jim, [r18] – zdolny, [r19] – Andrzej, [r20] – Senator.

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