

INTRODUCTION

The fourth issue of the journal “Intercultural Relations” has been dedicated to a reflection on the limits of freedom in contemporary culture(s). The concept of freedom applies to many aspects of the public and individual life, among others: discourse, public space, politics and religion.

The freedom of speech is undeniable important topic in contemporary culture. The modern mass media including social media allow transmitting information quicker and to a broader audience than before, which makes the communication process faster and to some extent poorer in quality (especially in respect of credibility and compliance with the real state of matter). Thus, the unlimited freedom of speech can be questioned here for instance in cases when human dignity is harmed by rude comments and narratives published online or in traditional media.

Freedom in the public space can be identified by looking at the correspondence between architecture and urbanisation processes and the individual and collective human behaviours. The space arrangement of cities influencing inhabitants’ patterns of acting play an important role in shaping postmodern societies. The public space can limit or open acting possibilities for humans, unite or part (even isolate them), offer safety and comfort or bring insecurity and uncertainty. Therefore, the concept of public space planning, its borders or unlimited freedom, constitutes a crucial issue not only for urbanists, but also for those who analyse this concept from the perspective of esthetics, politics and economy.

Freedom in politics is based on the relationship of an individual and the state. On the one hand, we may discuss the civil freedom understood as civil right to participate freely in public life. On the other hand, we may wonder to what extent the individual freedom stays beyond the state influence or the state power. Contemporary postmodern societies constitute a space where these two approaches clash. Present liberal democracies also care more about protecting the so-called civil liberties rather than

individual ownership rights. Why? This is one of the numerous questions we would like to address.

Religious freedom is influenced in reality not only by religion itself but also by politics and social order. Religion has not disappeared as it was proclaimed by some post-Enlightenment philosophers and scholars; it is still present, playing in some cases a fundamental role. The power of religion lies in its creative and also anti-creative, destructive potential. Thus, religion is able to integrate or disintegrate a community. Religious aspects occurring in society are mixed with human universalism, individual rights and relativism of community rights (e.g. ethnic and racial groups, nations, languages). The problem addressed in this context applies to religious freedom executed in various social, political and legal orders, which is however located in a broader cultural dimension.

Modern times differ from the past in terms of the discourse on **freedom of speech** that focused mostly on the issues related to the possible expanding of this freedom. Nowadays, however, we notice a diverted process – notions demanding limitation of the freedom of speech are getting more visible. The notions in question do not come from the totalitarian regimes, but from democratic communities concerned about the negative effects of freedom of speech.

Each human being, to develop freely, must be able to express her- or himself. The ability and opportunity of verbal and non-verbal expressions are conditioning self-improvement of individuals as *homo faber* who produces culture. Let us stress, that only free individuals are able to make culture. An inseparable element of freedom of speech is **the truth** to which we as human beings aspire and direct our efforts. The more freedom of speech we have, the more likely we are to discover the truth. Freedom of speech, however, does not give a guarantee of reaching the truth, but our journey towards the truth gives meaning to this freedom. In modern times, freedom of speech is understood mostly as an activity to speak without any ethical and moral (self-)limitations. Such freedom is present also in culture and cultural production.

In science, freedom of expression for some researchers may mean negation of the objective truth. The postmodern dogma of the repressive influence of the truth removed the truth from the language of some contemporary scientists. According to postmodernists, the objective truth enslaves. In this approach, freedom of speech is not meant to discover the truth, but to create interesting narratives and catchy metaphors.

Neo-pragmatists argue that truth has become a useless tool and should be abandoned as such. There is no truth, and if it exists, it should appear in plural. Freedom of speech in this case is a guarantee of pluralism of truth or legitimisation of rejection of all claims to any objective truth. In turn, for some of contemporary artists, freedom of speech means unfettered expression that manifests itself above all in trespassing all boundaries. This crossing alone usually takes form in shocking or insulting, which very often become a content of the work, covering simply the lack of talent of an artist. Not seldom, such freedom of expression leads to a situation where religious feelings of the audience are insulted and moral taboos violated.

The area where the battle for freedom of speech was and is most visible are the media. Free media in democratic regimes have always defended freedom of speech in the name of truth. Today, they are rather defending (just as in the case of science and art) the post-truth. Delivering the message and news in a more attractive form, post-truth appeals to emotions and not to the reason. In modern media, freedom of speech has become an ally of a lie, which serves manipulation, misleading and diffusing the true picture of reality.

Today, when freedom of speech is abused in various aspects of our life, it seems reasonable to ask a question about the limits of the freedom. Also in the area of human activity which is called politics. Freedom in the political space means first and foremost freedom of the individual in relation to the state. In today's pluralistic world, this freedom takes on special significance. Conflict does not appear here in terms of freedom vs. enslavement, but in terms of several competing and conflicting freedoms. Western societies of highly developed countries have ceased to be homogeneous. A multitude of cultures, traditions and religions in a country means a multitude of values that do not necessary match each other. In practice, a conflict between civil, political, religious and moral freedoms may occur. On the one hand, the democratic state is trying to fulfill its duties by protecting the consensus based order; on the other hand it is under constant pressure from non-liberal forces to be more strict and rule-dictating in the context of multicultural reality.

Freedom in the political aspect means the ability of a group or community to officially represent their broadly understood interests. For pluralistic societies, this is a relevant constituency of the internal and external order, being a subject of ongoing negotiations. On the one hand, we have minority groups demanding their rights based on the positive

discrimination (equality replaced by equity – sameness replaced by fairness); on the other hand, the mainstream society may not agree to growing influence of minorities on the cultural, religious and moral dimensions of the host country.

The question about the limits of political freedom is still relevant. It concerns not only the delimitation of boundaries, but also the determination of who should define the boundaries and to whom freedom would be granted: to individuals, ethnic and religious groups or nations.

In the discourse on freedom, a significant shift becomes noticeable, namely the shift or turn from the political and civic perspectives to the social and economic ones. Citizens perceive the state not any longer as a threat to individual freedoms but as the addressee of their claims as citizens. Thus, we are experiencing proliferation of positive economic and social rights. Becoming a guarantor of the implementation of these rights, the state constantly extends the scope of its competences. This is to the detriment of individuals becoming more dependent on the state, and also to the detriment of the state itself, unable to meet its obligations. The state, wanting to realise its economic and social promises, must constantly increase taxes, thereby limiting the economic freedom of all taxpayers. As a consequence, it leads to increased state interference in private property, which is not sufficiently protected by law. It seems that the citizens of modern welfare states have already accepted the idea of the state as a guardian and re-distributor of their property. They are therefore more likely to protest against restrictions on civil liberties than against restrictions on property rights. They do not see that property rights form the basis of all other rights.

The articles included in this publication address issues related to the problems mentioned above, including: freedom of speech, freedom in politics, freedom of religious beliefs and freedom in formatting our physical environment. The collection of texts offers a multicultural view of the phenomenon included in the publication title, as the authors of the articles come from different cultures, different scientific backgrounds and different academic traditions. We believe that the publication may contribute to a better and deeper understanding of the processes happening around us now and having consequences in the future – the near and the more distant.

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