

Description for the General Public

The aim of the project is (1) identification and analysis of what Polish men representing four generations do in relation to their bodies (that is the so-called cultural practices). In order to better understand the male practices (2) the analysis will also cover the content on taking care of one's body which has been directed at this group by the media and other sources. The project will also involve (3) an attempt at identifying the symptoms of the social change caused by the evolving practices of men (the proposed theory assumes a mutual influence of what is said on what is done, that is the influence of discourse on practices). The above aims have been broken down into a series of detailed questions. According to the project assumptions, the changes which take place within the society also have their source in what people do on various fields, what patterns of performing particular activities they accept. In this case, the male body is such an area. From the sociological perspective, there is a double link because the body is an element of every human practice, and the study will cover the practices which are directly related to it. The analyses will be conducted from the generational perspective as this is particularly important in a society such as the Polish one, which has undergone a political system transformation and is still in the process of developing consumerism, and the latter has a great impact on the body shaping. The result is that men who have been very differently socialised to take care of their bodies function next to each other.

In order to achieve the aims outlined above and to obtain answers to the detailed questions, qualitative research will be conducted since it allows to look into what people do and the underlying social processes. The accepted research strategy assumes investigating male practices rooted in the everyday life. The focus here is not extreme or accidental activities, but the everyday routine, sometimes even intimate activities connected with taking care of one's body, its hygiene, appearance, physical condition or eating habits. In-depth interviews with elements of biographical interview will be conducted with men representing four generations (from Baby Boomers – the post-war generation, to the so-called generation Z, that is people born after 1995). Such a formula will allow both to learn the current practices and the retrospective which, especially in the case of the older men will enable to capture the changes in practices, as well as the relations between practices, cultural content and social change.

Although it is the female body and its social entanglement which is more frequently the subject matter of sociological considerations, the research carried out in western societies shows that changes concerning what men do in relation to their bodies transform other dimensions of their functioning and the functioning of people in their circles. The issues implied here include time budget, access to specialists, sports infrastructure or financial resources for the realisation of certain practices. The comparison of what the older and the younger men do in relation to their bodies will constitute the key to understanding other differences connected e.g. with finding time for the activities and reconciling them with other responsibilities and roles they perform.

An important element of the research will also be the analysis of secondary data concerning cultural content which has influenced the practices of men from particular age groups. The desk research will also be carried out from the angle of searching for symptoms of a broader social change generated by what men do in relation to their bodies. In the period covered by the research certain significant events have occurred, that is the universalisation of television, and then the Internet. The issue here is, among other things, the way the media and other agendas determined what men should do in relation to their bodies, the way they created fashions and defined bodily patterns. The linking of data from interviews and the existing data covering the period of 70 years (from the 1950's to the 2020's) will allow to better understand the phenomenon under study – to explore the structure of everyday male practices, the sources of differences between them, to understand the connection between what men do and what is happening at the level of cultural content and the way bodily practices change other areas of social life.

The project is significant for a number of reasons – here I will point out two types of them. The first one is scientific. There are many stereotypes of perceiving men and masculinity. At the same time, in Poland there is still a shortage of sociological research which would focus on men, especially in the approach proposed in the project, that is the approach of everyday bodily practices. The generational perspective is also particularly important. With the passage of time, it will be impossible to gain knowledge on the practices of the post-war generation, therefore it is necessary to conduct the research when it is possible to collect the accounts from the oldest representatives of the Baby Boomers generation. This will contribute to the development of various fields of social sciences, such as sociology of the body or studies of men and masculinity.

The second type of reasons which make this project worthwhile is connected with the development and improvement of the quality of life of the Polish society. The results of the research may serve the formulation of recommendations for health policies addressed at men, or for the non-governmental sector which deals with broad-sense issues on how men function in Poland, what difficulties they experience and how the faces of masculinity change.