

MICHAŁ CEBULA
University of Wrocław

Beyond Economic and Cultural Capital: Network Correlates of Consumption Tastes and Practices

Abstract: This paper attempts to provide a picture of network effect on cultural participation by building on theoretical concepts of social capital and social networks as well as on original data collected by the author on 362 inhabitants of Wrocław. The central discussion of the study concerns the relative explanatory power of network variables (such as intensity of contacts with friends and acquaintances, or access to resources via social ties) in predicting the reported consumption tastes, practices or knowledge, net of structural factors. The findings support the hypothesis that more networked persons (particularly those having many non-kin contacts) are more likely to participate in a greater number of cultural activities and to be more “omnivorous” consumers. The article concludes with some possible directions of future research.

Keywords: social capital, networks, omnivorousness, cultural participation, taste, social ties.

Introduction

According to a common sense intuition, expressed in proverbs such as: “birds of a feather flock together” or “who keeps company with the wolves will learn to howl,” what we think, like or do depends on or affects with whom we keep in touch or where we belong to. The paper is a part of an ongoing debate concerning the mutual links between social network characteristics (e.g. size, intensity, diversity or density) and cultural preferences, knowledge and activities. How do social contacts and their structure affect the cultural repertoire of individuals and how does the latter (e.g. type of knowledge or preferences for different cultural genres) shape personal contacts and ties?

This research topic derives from the classical sociological problem pertaining to a relation between social structure and culture and expands it into social networks (DiMaggio 1987). Although the idea that culture is in some relations to structural factors (irrespective of the direction of the causal relationship) is well known in sociology, the role of social networks (or social capital) seems to remain a blind spot (DiMaggio 2004). In the traditional framework, the main research focus was rather on the link between social positions (classes or statuses) and cultural tastes or practices (with no reference to personal ties). In this area three main arguments were formulated: a) the homology argument, b) the individualization or neotribalism argument and c) the omnivore—univore argument (Chan and Goldthorpe 2007; López-Sintas and García-Álvarez 2002; Cebula 2013). For example, although Pierre Bourdieu considers

the roles played by different forms of capital in the construction of social space and reveals mechanisms underlying processes of social reproduction, e.g. transmission of capital in the families, accumulation and convertibility of its different types (Bourdieu 1997; Bourdieu and Passeron 2013), in his empirical research (Bourdieu 2000) “the concepts of economic and cultural capital perform the entire analytical work, while social capital disappears from the stage” (Cvetičanin and Popescu 2011: 444; cf. Erickson 1996; Warde and Tampubolon 2002; Kane 2004). He does not use the term very often to analyze consumption empirically and does not fully theorize the directional link from cultural to social capital (or inversely).

The paper is a tentative attempt to fill this void by using and developing the concept of social capital, and social networks in particular, and testing it in the study of consumption tastes and practices in Polish society. By tackling the problem of networks-consumption link, the project contributes to better understanding the mechanisms of social structuralization and cultural participation in Poland (cf. Drozdowski et al. 2014). The most recent research indicate that social connections matter. Basing on data from panel study conducted on a national sample in Poland, Kazimierz M. Słomczyński and Irina Tomescu-Dubrow (2007) have argued that having a large number of nonredundant friends (friends who do not know each other) is conducive to income performance—it works as a social capital (giving an access to new information, influence, social credentials, identity reinforcement). Similarly, the results of research on the lives of “transformation generation” (meaning the 18-year-olds of 1989) have given grounds to the conclusion that social networks play an important role in professional careers (e.g. job searching, upward mobility) and in psychological functioning of individuals (e.g. self-assessment) (Sadowski 2012). Different kinds of social capital (so called “bridging” and “bonding”) can have divergent effects on social functioning and attitudes (Growiec 2011). The latter is more likely to be responsible for low level of widespread trust among people and conducive to authoritarian orientation, the former goes hand in hand with greater life satisfaction and leads to innovative behaviour.

These works show promising connections between networks and many other variables that heighten the desire for extending the network analysis into cultural preferences and practices. Following the recent studies (Erickson 1996; Relish 1997; Kane 2004; Lizardo 2006) the paper revolves around three main issues. Firstly: is there a positive association between network volume measures (e.g. intensity of contacts, access to resources) and cultural consumption variables (e.g. range and frequency of participation in leisure activities)? Secondly: can we indeed observe an omnivorous tendency among persons with higher social capital? Thirdly: what kind of social connections (kin- or non-kin ones) are more conducive to cultural activity and diversity of tastes/practices? The meta-question is also to what extent the results obtained in the study are specific to Poland?

Of particular concern is the phenomenon of “cultural omnivorousness”—the concept introduced and disseminated by Richard A. Peterson and his co-workers (cf. Peterson and Simkus 1992; Peterson and Kern 1996; Peterson 2005). When speaking about this issue, the recent paper by Seweryn Grodny, Jerzy Gruszka and Kamil Łuczaj (2013) could be referred to as it draws some challenging conclusions about

the omnivorousness in Poland. The authors found out that in Polish context we can discern rather an opposite phenomenon, namely: the narrowing of aesthetic taste (among so called “the highbrows”). Although present research do not pertain directly to this conclusion (which requires longitudinal data), it provides a more comprehensive picture of the term under discussion. It is argued that omnivorousness depends not only on social position but is also a function of social networking and the variation of the latter may additionally account for cultural heterogeneity.

The article is organized as follows: in the next section main theoretical proposals regarding social capital are reviewed. It is argued that network approach to social capital offers a range of promising possibilities for exploring consumption patterns. Having established the understanding of social capital, the main focus is on how insights from it can be integrated into cultural consumption. Based on the theoretical and empirical argumentations together with the review of previous research, some hypotheses are formulated. In the next section, data from a non-probability sample of Wrocław inhabitants collected in 2011 on the network predictors of consumption tastes, knowledge and practises are presented and analyzed. The article concludes with the general implications of the results, the limitations of the current effort and future avenues for further research on the topic opened up by this analysis.

Toward a Network Theory of Social Capital

The link between networks and consumption may be explored in the context of debates about social capital. This term has made a meteoric career in sociology and in public policy during the last three decades (Portes 1998), but its multiple definitions and uses make it a rather vague category. It appears that the core of the social capital theory, excluding the approaches emphasizing its purely cultural character (cf. Fukuyama 2000), is the proposition that specifiable benefits are associated with the relative degree to which individuals are embedded in either closed or loosely bound social networks. Societies are not composed of atomized individuals but of individuals who are connected with one another through intermediate social structures (webs of association), and these potentially form specific “resources,” beneficial for individual and collective actors (Coleman 1988; Portes 1998; Halpern 2005). In other words, social organization (structure and its components) is a kind of capital that can create for certain individuals or groups a competitive advantage in pursuing their ends. Holding a certain position in the structure of connections can be an asset on its own. As it was put by Ronald S. Burt (2001), better connected people enjoy higher returns. The metaphor of capital connotes “advantage,” “productivity” or “benefits.” Depending on concrete theoretical orientations, focus is either on “morphology” of social ties or on resources available to individuals by virtue of a given stock of them (Growiec 2011).

There is a common agreement that the theory of social capital split into two frameworks, or two theoretical strands: individual/structural one associated with Pierre Bourdieu (1997), and normative/collective one associated with Robert D. Putnam (1993; 2000) (Siisiäinen 2000). In the first approach, social capital is rather an indi-

vidual resource based on a durable network of relationships and assets that could be accessed and mobilized through them. It follows that identifiable components of social capital are: first, the social relationship itself that allows individuals to claim access to resources held by their associates, and second, the amount and quality of those resources (Bourdieu 1997). The emphasis is put on the notion that social capital may be deployed to personal advantage in a variety of contexts, may be accumulated, invested and converted into and from other types of capital. In this view social capital creates social inequalities and enables the social reproduction (the more effective, the more it is subjected to informal obligations).

In an alternative understanding, in wider circulation, social capital is rather a collective phenomenon consisting of civic engagement, trust, and reciprocity, which helps solve collective action problems (Van Ingen and Van Eijck 2009: 192; Halpern 2005: 4). For Putnam (1993: 167) social capital “refers to features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions.” In another work—“Bowling Alone” (2000: 19), Putnam highlights that “social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.” As we see, the nature of the concept is much more complex than simple networks of relations because it includes also norms and trust. This ontological inconsistency of components was criticised (Piechocki 2012: 156), as was the focus on the positive consequences of sociability while putting aside its less attractive features (Portes 1998).

The second conceptualization of social capital raises many controversies and misunderstandings among scholars and commentators. It is claimed to be a rather unclear and incoherent term opened for relabeling a number of different and even contradictory phenomena as social capital (such as norms, trust, connections) (Portes 1998: 5). Additionally, recent writings on social capital have extended the concept from an individual asset to a feature of communities and even nations (so called “big-tent” definitions—cf. Halpern 2005: 14–18). The object of criticism was also defining social capital by its functions (Coleman 1988; Putnam 1993), which seems to be questionable because it often leads to tautological statements. There is a lack of empirical and theoretical separation of the very definition of social capital from its sources and alleged effects (Portes 1998: 19–20). According to another line of criticism (referring also to P. Bourdieu’s proposition), there is not one social capital but rather several types of it, whereby it is difficult (or impossible) to find one measure of it (unlike with economic capital) (Warde and Tampubolon 2002: 174–175). In the upshot, some scholars suggest that it would be better to shift analysis of actions from social capital to social network approach which is more neutral, analytically strict and avoids or better solves the problems of incommensurability of social capital and tautology in explanations of its functioning (Warde and Tampubolon 2002: 177–178; Piechocki 2012).

Rather than abandoning the concept of social capital, I turn to a specific approach to it, represented e.g. by Nan Lin (1999; 2008). His theory of the social resources (or a network theory of social capital) seems to span these two traditions.¹ Drawing

¹ In the past, the network approach operated independently of social capital approach, and it was only the popularity of the latter concept in the 1990s that produced some apparent convergence of interest.

on the status attainment argument, Lin defines social capital as “investment and use of embedded resources in social relations for expected returns” (2000: 786). Social capital is conceptualized as (1) quantity and/or quality of recourses that an actor can access or use through (2) its location in a social network. The general proposition is that social capital enhances the likelihood of instrumental returns, such as better jobs, earlier promotions, higher earnings, and expressive returns, such as better mental health. In the definition, there are both resources and connections taken into account. Depending on research preferences, the focus is more on the former (cf. Lin 2008; Van Der Gaag and Snijders 2005) or on the latter (i.e. on properties of social networks per se—density, closure, size, strength of ties) (cf. Burt 2001; Marsden 1987). Social capital may be assessed in terms of its capacity—the pool of resources embedded in one’s social networks (accessed social capital) or in terms of its actual use (mobilized social capital), e.g. while searching a job.

The network approach to social capital (in its descriptive aspect) offers a set of rigorous analytic techniques and tools which offer new avenues for exploration of taste patterns, knowledge and practices. Focusing on parameters of social networks, such as density, closure, variety, range, type of tie, it is possible to explain different configurations of consumption preferences and activities.² A wide range of concepts may be useful here, e.g. Mark S. Granovetter’s seminal “the strength of weak ties hypothesis” (1973). Granovetter has suggested that weaker connections (e.g. acquaintanceship) tend to form “bridges” that link individuals to other social circles, thus giving an access to information and resources not likely to be available via strong ties. Following this line of reasoning, Putnam (2000: 22–23) distinguished between “bonding” (or exclusive) and “bridging” (or inclusive) social capital. The latter, as an outward looking, encompasses people across diverse social cleavages. In a similar vein, Ronald S. Burt (2001) has argued that social capital is created by a network in which people can broker connections between otherwise disconnected segments. These holes in social structure (structural holes) create a competitive advantage for an individual whose relationships span the holes. She or he gains an access to and control over nonredundant sources of information and resources, which favours achieving better social positions. The idea of brokerage across structural holes can be helpful in explaining taste and cultural practices formation. People spanning the holes should show more eclectic and diverse (omnivorous) tastes and be more familiar with cultural items and genres. The opposite argument has been presented by James S. Coleman (1988). According to him, one property of social relations on which social capital depends is so-called closure of social networks. In operational terms it means a dense network (network with the preponderance of internal over external connections or network with few structural holes), for example when friends (acquaintances) of a given person know each other. This configuration of network may have some effect on cultural repertoire: facilitate acquiring “strong” and “restricted” or “solidarity-producing” cultural codes (cf. Kane 2004), or narrow cultural tastes (by blocking access to cultural knowledge).

² A complementary question (not developed here) is how people benefit from this connection? What kinds of profits or advantages may be accrued from possessing specific cultural preferences or networks (cf. Lizardo 2013)?

Social Networks and Consumption Patterns —review of research

Recent research in the sociology of culture has provided empirical evidence for two general propositions: a) culture consumption variety should be connected to networks of larger size (DiMaggio 1987; Warde, Tampubolon and Savage 2005; Lizardo 2006) and b) the greater the network variety (heterogeneity) the more diverse (omnivorous) taste people develop (Erickson 1996; Relish 1997; Kane 2004). Assuming that people are bearers of culture, Bonnie H. Erickson (1996) hypothesized that contacts with more varied persons (from different social classes) should lead to more varied cultural repertoire (omnivorousness). Research findings indicated that it was higher-class respondents that had the most diverse networks (they knew many persons from different social categories), and network variety was greater with reference to weak ties. It was confirmed that network diversity was positively related to cultural variety (measured as familiarity with books, magazines, restaurants, art and sports) and the relationship got stronger as the tie considered got weaker. Probably the network variety is one important source (or at least a correlate) of cultural variety and there are rather “weak” connections through which cultural knowledge is transmitted (cf. Granovetter 1973). It was also suggested that the link between cultural variety and class position might be mediated by social networks since, as prior surveys constantly showed (Marsden 1987; Lin and Dumin 1986), network size and diversity increase with social status.

These research findings may advance our understanding of “cultural omnivorousness.” This term was coined by Peterson and his co-workers (Peterson and Simkus 1992; Peterson and Kern 1996; Peterson 2005) to address an anomaly observed in the survey study of music consumption. It was shown that people of higher social status, contrary to elite/mass models of cultural taste, were not averse to participation in activities associated with popular culture. Indeed, they were adding diverse practices and cultural forms to their cultural “portfolio” at an accelerating rate.³ According to Paul DiMaggio’s (1987) and Bonnie H. Erickson (1996) intuition, the reason why people in higher positions develop a broad repertoire of taste may be that they take part in many social settings (perform many social roles at work and beyond) and thus have to maintain diverse networks. “Omnivorousness” fulfil probably not only an expressive function (as a marker of social status) but also the instrumental one (e.g. facilitates communication in workplace) (Erickson 1996).

This perspective may better explain the heterogeneous style of consumption also in Polish context. Recent research conducted by Seweryn Grodny, Jerzy Gruszka and Kamil Łuczaj (2013) indicated that we are witnessing the narrowing of the aesthetic taste among individuals rich in cultural capital which was attributed either to status seeking or to social closure orientation. Their findings were criticized for flawed

³ This idea attracted considerable sociological attention, because it challenged some central assumptions about the relationship between socio-economic position and cultural competence (Peterson, 2005). Recently, however, a growing number of scholars have begun to question the omnivorousness thesis (showing e.g. that the omnivores are not so inclusive and tolerant in their cultural choices as it was originally thought) (cf. Atkinson 2011).

measurement strategy (Szlendak 2014: 144)—the usage of too sweeping cultural categories (not capturing subtle distinctions within musical genres). Additionally it may be claimed that researchers did not take into account an entire spectrum of independent variables (e.g. social networks). As I will show below, including social capital variables into the analysis may improve prediction of cultural participation, net of social position measures.

Linking networks with cultural participation requires a consideration of the possible mechanisms that would underlie this linkage. Having more complex or extensive social networks probably increases odds of exposure to diverse cultural activities and resources (via social ties). Alternatively, keeping in touch with different others may teach or inculcate greater openness and tolerance for unknown and even subversive cultural contents. Finally, it is possible that high participation in culture and large networks indicate an underlying desire for cosmopolitan identity, since both variables are associated with high status people (Kane 2004: 107–108). A similar question is what is a nature of alleged effect of networks on cultural practices (informational, practical or based on encouragement of interest)? Alan Warde and Gindo Tampubolon (2002: 176) suggested that friendship ties, as long-lasting, are more associated with sharing interests (hence their greater influence on ever participating) while associational ties are more closely linked to current practices (hence their greater influence on frequency of participation).

Thus far, most analyses have explicitly or implicitly assumed that there are rather networks that implicate taste formation (cf. Mark 1998). But, as was convincingly argued by Omar Lizardo (2006), cultural “equipment” of individual may be an independent source of social connectivity. Developing his model of culture conversion he has showed that a type of cultural resource held by individual (e.g. popular vs. high-brow taste) leads to variations in network characteristics (e.g. number of weak vs. strong ties). It was empirically confirmed that (1) consumption of popular cultural forms has a positive impact on weak-tie network density but not strong-tie network density. This is because popular culture, as a “generalized” code (more universal and less context-specific) with broader distribution in social space facilitates making connections between actors from distant social positions (thus weak ties). (2) Conversely, the consumption of more demanding and “arcane” (context-specific) forms of culture (restricted code)—such as highbrow culture—because of its relatively stronger correlation with social position, should make for strong ties because it links people from similar (or the same) social backgrounds. What determines whether a given form of cultural knowledge will serve as either “fence or bridge” depends on its appeal and ease of incorporation.

An extension and further development of the culture conversion model can be found in the next article on the effects of strength of cultural preferences on the relative closure of personal networks (Lizardo 2011). The author asked how having either “shallow” or “deep” knowledge of cultural forms (instead of popular versus highbrow taste) influences the relative closure (or constraint) of social networks (instead of weak vs. strong social ties). His analysis confirmed two hypotheses: (1) individuals who displayed a wider range of weak cultural preferences were less

likely to be connected to contacts who are themselves connected to one another (Lizardo 2011: 481). In other words, possession of “passing knowledge” (in the form of weak preferences) of a wide array of cultural forms leads to social networks rich in structural holes. These “omnivores” are more likely to serve as bridges between disconnected others. (2) Individuals who display a wider range of strong cultural preferences are more likely to be connected to contacts who are themselves connected to one another. Having more specialized (deeper) forms of cultural knowledge leads to strong, densely knit social networks because it works as an excluding factor. These forms, because they are also more time- and emotion-consuming, are rich in social meanings and thus more useful for forming strong ties. Also another explanation could be provided. Namely, living in a dense and closed social network facilitates acquiring more redundant cultural knowledge that strengthens cultural preferences.

These results are an inspiration for new hypothesis. We could ask whether having more social contacts with family (kin) members than with unrelated people—a kind of closed network, will lead to less diverse (more “univore”) cultural preferences and to lower cultural participation (especially outside the home)? It may be conjectured that contacts with non-family people work as a bridging capital, because gives an access to other (more distant) social circles and thus to more diverse resources, information and incentives (cf. Putnam 2000: 22–23; Growiec 2011: 9, 23–24, 50–52). According to the evidence (Czapiński and Panek 2011) social capital in Polish society is mainly based on strong ties (inside families), hence the term “amoral familism” (Tarkowska and Tarkowski 1994), which may partially explain the low cultural activity in Poland in comparison to many other countries (Eurobarometer 2013).

Hypotheses

Based on findings in previous studies, as well as theoretical developments, I hypothesize that there is a positive association between the volume of personal networks/social capital (taking the size, intensity of contacts, or access to resources into account) and cultural consumption (e.g. the likelihood/frequency of participation in many leisure activities), even controlling for cultural and economic capital (H1). As mention above, a few possible mechanisms may underlie this linkage. More extensive and heterogeneous networks can increase odds of exposure to diverse cultural resources and activities, incalculates a preference for challenging cultural material, or indicate a desire for a cosmopolitan identity (Kane 2004).

Referring to Paul DiMaggio’s hypothesis that “persons with wide-ranging networks develop ‘tastes’ for the widest variety of cultural forms” (1987: 444), I posit a positive correlation between social contact volume and the breadth of cultural preferences, practices or knowledge (termed as a “cultural omnivorousness”) (Peterson and Kern 1996) (H2). DiMaggio pointed out that it is rather high-status people that consume a wider range of cultural items partially because they function in many social contexts and perform diverse social roles. Thus they need a broader base of

cultural knowledge (a larger toolbox) if they are to successfully shift between different audiences (Relish 1997: 125).

The question is whether every kind of social tie is equally conducive to acquiring “cosmopolitan” taste? I suggest that there are rather non-family ties that are associated with greater cultural activity and omnivorousness than kin-ties (H3). It is assumed that contacts with people outside the family work as a bridging capital—link individuals to other social circles for information and resources not likely to be available in their own circles (cf. Putnam 2000; Growiec 2011).

Data and Measurement

Seeking to capture network/social capital correlates of consumption patterns, I will use original data obtained from the project “Symbolic dimension of consumption in contemporary culture in the light of Wrocław inhabitants study” (2011), financed by The National Science Centre [Narodowe Centrum Nauki].⁴ The data was collected by means of a standardized face-to-face questionnaire interview, on a non-representative sample of working adult population of Wrocław inhabitants, resulting in a sample size of $N = 362$. Because the primary purpose of the research project was to assess the degree to which consumption tastes and practices vary by social position, respondents were recruited on the basis of their current occupational standing. According to methodological literature (cf. Domański, Sawiński, and Słomczyński 2009), occupation remains a basic indicator of placement of individuals in the social structure, because it reflects main dimensions of social differentiation (including inputs: educational attainment and outputs: income). The sampling strategy aimed at attempting to interview as much diverse representatives of population as possible. As the model for sample schema and categorization of raw data, I utilized the (Polish) Social Classification of Occupations (Domański, Sawiński, and Słomczyński 2009). The sample was split into three roughly equal general “class categories” (named A, B, and C)⁵ which worked as quotas to ensure adequate diversification of class positions.

The central discussion of the article concerns the relative explanatory power of network variables in predicting the reported consumption tastes, practices or knowledge, net of structural factors. In addressing this issue, two sets of independent variables will be used. The first set measures aspects of socioeconomic status/class position, following the well-established hypothesis that consumption practices and lifestyles reflect and uphold social boundaries (Bourdieu 2000). The second set serves as the best proxy available in the questionnaire for the number and variety of networks in which an individual engages. To assess the relative weight of these two variables

⁴ The project nr 4954/B/H03/2011/40.

⁵ “Class category” A included: chef executive officers, managers, directors, employers, professionals and specialists like doctors, lawyers, artists, professors, assistant professors etc. ($n = 110$). Category B was composed of technicians and specialized office workers, other middle-level non-manual workers, and partially of sales and service workers (those well-qualified) ($n = 141$). Category C comprised sales and service workers, skilled, semi-skilled, and non-skilled manual workers ($n = 111$). In addition to three-part model, I used a schema with nine occupational groups in analyses.

blocks, I will use a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, where network predictors will be entered in the second step, after controlling socio-demographic variables.⁶

In sociological literature we can find at least three main survey instruments for measuring social capital (networks), such as the Name Generator/Interpreter (McCallister and Fisher 1978; Marsden 1987), the Position Generator (Lin and Dumin 1986; Erickson 1996) and the Resource Generator (Snijders and Van Der Gaag 2005). Although all of them have some potential for culture consumption analysis, I used an instrument similar to that utilized by M. Van Der Gaag and T. A. B. Snijders (2005) as the best indicator of the independent variable, available in the questionnaire. The very idea of this tool lies in understanding of social capital as a collection of resources owned by the members of an individual's personal social network, which may become available to the individual as a result of the history of these relationships. In my own version of the instrument, respondents were asked about the number of people whose help they could count on in various "difficult" life situations (searching for a job, borrowing a significant amount of money, helping in official matters, emotional support). Then, the responses (measured on 4-point scales) were subjected to principal component analysis (KMO = 0.785, Varimax rotation) giving a one-factor solution, explaining 61.3% of the variances of 4 input variables. The analysis of reliability using Cronbach's α method showed high reliability of the scale (0.788). This new variable was named as "social capital (accessed)" as it tries to capture the real benefits a person can accrue from his/her ties.⁷ This approach is compatible with P. Bourdieu's social structure concept.

Besides, also other indicators of social networks were used. I looked at social networks in terms of their intensity: how often the person interacts with people in the network? The main emphasis was laid on contacts with non-family members according to assertion that non-kin ties are more likely to work as a bridging capital (Putnam 2000; Growiec 2011).⁸ In similar vein, I assumed that there are rather meetings outside home, which would favour acquiring more diverse cultural resources, information and engaging in many cultural activities.⁹

Some attention should also be given to a question, one which has generated controversy in the field of cultural consumption: how to measure cultural consumption/participation (cf. Holt 1997; Krajewski 2013)? Is it better to ask people about their cultural behaviors or their preferences for cultural activity (Peterson 2005: 265–266)?

⁶ In addition to social class, these variables include age, education, household income (per capita) and economic living standard (measured as possession of 11 durable consumer goods in a household). These goods included, among other things, a dishwasher, mobile computer (laptop, notebook), DVD player, mobile phone worth over PLN 300, etc.

⁷ It should be noted that it is not sufficient to measure the size and density of a person's network to assess somebody's social capital. We must also look at the resources that the network connects the individuals to. It is possible to have relative sparse social contacts but very profitable (as in the case of members of elite).

⁸ The respondents answered the questions of how often they met socially with friends and acquaintances other than their family members, choosing from answers on the scale from 6—"once a week or more often" to "less than once a year."

⁹ The respondents answered the questions of how often they met socially with their families or acquaintances outside the home: in pubs, restaurants, clubs, etc. Answers on the scale from 5—"very often" to 1—"never."

What kinds of measures are the most relevant to a description of contemporary (liquid, postmodern) societies? British researchers (Warde, Wright and Gayo-Cal 2007), for example, measured omnivorousness, defined as breadth of cultural involvements, along three separate dimensions: taste (likes and dislikes), knowledge (familiarity with cultural items) and participation (attendance at cultural events), arguing that they are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary (cf. also Purhonen, Gronow and Rahkonen 2011: 387–388). Following this research strategy, I will use three different cultural indices (as dependent variables) which correspond roughly to these three dimensions. Items included in the analysis are necessarily selective, and the choices could always have been otherwise. However, the list of cultural items is relatively rich and extensive to provide a valuable opportunity to explore the arguments addressed in this article.

As the first step in the analysis, I will refer to standard indicators of cultural participation, including: going to movies; watching films on a computer or on DVD; going to the theatre, opera, or attending a classical music performance; visiting an art museum or gallery; going to a live performance of popular music; and attending popular events such as feasts, trade fairs and festivals. Respondents were given a list of activities and asked how often they participated in each, ranging from “at least once a month” to “never” (a five-point Likert scale). Further analyses revealed that all of the examined “cultural activities” created one coherent syndrome—a synthetic coefficient of “cultural consumption”¹⁰ (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.807$).

Going beyond traditional measures of cultural activity, I will also draw on questions about “culinary experiences” and “familiarity with visual artists.” In the first instance, to capture the breadth of cultural repertoire, respondents were asked to indicate which of the dishes from the list they had ever tasted. The list included the following items: “sushi,” “seafood,” “Mozzarella cheese,” “gyros,” “asparagus,” “salmon” and “snail.” In the second instance, respondents’ task was to indicate in a list of 14 names those artists, representatives of visual arts, that they “at least have heard of.”¹¹ By summing the number of items that interviewees knew, I created the index of cultural knowledge (competence) which was then used to test the hypotheses.

Networks and Cultural Participation —an empirical illustration

According to the traditional view, taste and cultural participation practices reflect and constitute socially important diversities, class and status-based divisions and inequali-

¹⁰ It was shown by the results of principal component analysis (KMO = 0.792; Varimax rotation) which revealed one-factor structure of the data explaining 51.7% of the variances of the original variables. The component value for each respondent was calculated using regression method.

¹¹ The list comprised the following names: Vincent van Gogh, Wassily Kandinsky, Wilhelm Sasnal (Polish contemporary artist), Gustav Klimt, Peter Bruegel the Elder, Wojciech Kossak (Polish painter from the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century), Jacek Malczewski (Polish painter from the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, representative of symbolism), Salvador Dali, Andy Warhol, Claude Monet, Edward Munch, Leonardo da Vinci, Jackson Pollock, Banksy.

ties (Bourdieu 2000). On the other hand, the vision assuming isomorphism of cultural positions and models is questioned by theses of growing individualisation of choices, the ego becoming more reflective or emergence of a new type of tribe-“community” lifestyle linking even distant regions of the social structure (Cebula 2013). Even the initial analysis of data indicates that the social position is of no small importance, as evidenced by high correlation coefficient between general social position (occupational group membership) and “cultural consumption” (being a combination of many cultural practices) ($\text{Eta} = 0.420$).¹² It means that the surveyed inhabitants of Wrocław were roughly divided into two groups: active and participating in numerous forms of culture “omnivores” and culturally inactive (apart from the television) “univores.”

In order to assess the relative weighting of structural and demographic variables as well as variables related to social networks in explaining participation in culture, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted (table 1). The first step of the analysis took into account: class membership of the surveyed (dummy variables with category C as the reference group), education, economic living standard and age. The created model (I) fitted the data well $F(5.356) = 62,094$; $p < 0.001$ and explained as many as 45.8% of variances of the adjusted dependent variable.

Table 1

Predictors of Cultural Participation (hierarchical regression coefficients)

Variable	Model I		Model II	
	Beta	t	Beta	t
(Constant)		-1.262		-6.104
Class A	0.227***	3.863	0.159**	2.963
Class B	0.088	1.582	0.097	1.942
Class C	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Education	0.219***	4.027	0.174**	3.489
Index of economic standard of living	0.117**	2.715	0.108**	2.789
Age	-0.444***	-10.583	-0.249***	-5.634
Frequency of social contacts with non-kin friends and acquaintances	—	—	0.159**	3.393
Frequency of meeting socially outside the home	—	—	0.241***	5.825
Social capital (accessed)	—	—	0.106*	2.569
Adjusted R ²	0.458		0.561	

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Not surprisingly, there has been a strong relation between the social position (here category A) and education and increased degree of participation in the examined cultural practices, which is shown by positive standard beta coefficients: 0.227 ($p < 0.001$) and 0.219 ($p < 0.001$) respectively. At the same time, a strong negative impact of age has been seen (beta = -0.444; $p < 0.001$). The older the people the less frequently they used the different channels of culture dissemination (except for the television,

¹² The variable “cultural consumption” was correlated with a detailed division of the respondents into 9 social and occupational groups.

where the correlation was positive), which, along with other studies, would confirm cultural alienation, or exclusion, of the elderly in Polish society. Of some importance was also economic standard of living ($\beta = 0.117$; $p < 0.01$). Wealthier households usually indulged in cultural entertainment to a larger extent.

Adding, in the second step of regression (model II), factors describing social networks and social capital significantly improved the quality of predicting the dependent variable ($\Delta F(3.353) = 28.639$; $p < 0.001$), thus proving that social contacts increase the level of cultural participation (in accordance with hypothesis H1). It has turned out that people who more often meet with their acquaintances and friends (but not with the family—see hypothesis H3) outside the home and have better access to resources contained in social networks more often take part in activities considered as cultural participation regardless of their social positions. Nonetheless, the character of this correlation is not fully identified. A role is played by both direct influence of individuals and groups (e.g. going to the cinema with acquaintances) and indirect one, connected with access to information channels and agendas impacting preferences and predispositions. On the other hand, in accordance with the model of conversion, our cultural equipage may constitute a resource (capital) used to establish and maintain ties with other people (e.g. with similar interests).

In sociological studies on culture and consumption, a hypothesis exists according to which the breadth of interests, tastes or practices is a positive function of a socio-economic status (see Peterson and Kern 1996; Grodny, Gruszka, and Łuczaj 2013). My hypothesis H2 contains an assumption that the factor that is, at least partially, responsible for this conjuncture can be the breadth and intensity of social contacts, which are both the source and conditions of enriching one's cultural repertoire. To test this proposition I will refer to analyses of "culinary experiences" which, as noted earlier, was measured as the number of dishes (from seven-items list) the respondent had ever tried. It was assumed that this index will be a convenient measure of the breadth of the culinary repertoire and a certain reflection of diversity of tastes.¹³ The surveyed from group A tried on average 5.6 dishes out of 7 (median = 6), which is more than the figures for the representatives of category B ($M_b = 5$, $Me_b = 5$) and C ($M_c = 3.5$, $Me_c = 4$)¹⁴ ($\text{Eta} = 0.476$).

To show which variables determined the number of tried dishes, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted (table 2).

The first model fitted the data well $F(7.305) = 38.095$; $p < 0.001$, and the predictors contained in it explained a total of 45.4% variances of the dependent variable. The analysis of beta coefficients showed that the orientation towards traditionalism¹⁵ had the strongest impact on the number of tried dishes ($\beta = -0.237$; $p < 0.001$). The more a given person was attached to the traditional Polish cuisine, the less

¹³ Note that the question measured only the fact of trying or not trying a dish, which cannot be used to determine whether the dishes were liked and became a permanent element of culinary practices.

¹⁴ The mean for entire population was 4,7, the median 5 and standard deviation 1,77.

¹⁵ This was a synthetic variable comprising 4 items measured on Likert 5-point scales. The items are as follows: "I like the traditional Polish cuisine most," "I like trying new dishes and experiencing new flavours" (opposite coding), "Usually I eat the same, proven dishes" and "I do not attach much importance to what I eat."

Table 2

Predictors of breadth of culinary “experience” (hierarchical regression coefficients)

Variable	Model I		Model II	
	Beta	t	Beta	t
(Constant)		8.192		4.093
Class A	0.160*	2.370	0.136*	2.044
Class B	0.155*	2.571	0.149*	2.536
Class C	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Household income (per capita)	0.143**	2.583	0.136*	2.505
Index of economic standard of living	0.132**	2.763	0.110*	2.362
Education	0.154*	2.506	0.131*	2.160
Age	-0.227***	-4.934	-0.151**	-2.961
Traditional cuisine orientation	-0.237***	-5.188	-0.213***	-4.741
Frequency of social contacts with non-kin friends and acquaintances	—	—	0.114*	2.130
Social capital (accessed)	—	—	0.127**	2.596
Adjusted R ²	0.454		0.481	

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

willing he/she was to try new dishes and flavours. Again, age had a strong negative impact (beta = -0.227 ; $p < 0.001$). Thus, culinary “cosmopolitanism,” willingness to experiment in the kitchen, is rather a domain of younger people, brought up in the conditions of European cultural pluralism. As expected, greater culinary experience was shown by people holding upper or middle social positions, better educated ones (beta = 0.154 ; $p < 0.05$) with higher income (beta = 0.143 ; $p < 0.01$) and generally wealthier ones (beta = 0.132 ; $p < 0.01$).

The introduction of network and social capital-related variables in the second step of regression significantly improved the predictive value of the model $\Delta F(2,303) = 8.769$; $p < 0.001$. The new model (II) explained 48.1% of the variability of the analysed variable. As an interpretation of the resulting data one can say that the resources of cultural capital (e.g. competence, knowledge curiosity, cultural refinement), apart from financial possibilities, have a positive impact on the breadth of “taste horizons” and type of shown likings, which is in compliance with the findings by Pierre Bourdieu (2000). At the same time, referring to hypothesis H2, it has been shown that regardless of stratificational variables, the number of tried dishes correlated with the amount of (available) social capital (beta = 0.127 ; $p < 0.01$) and frequency of meetings with friends and acquaintances outside the family (beta = 0.114 ; $p < 0.05$). Here again one can speculate that people with extended social networks (e.g. with more intense and resource rich contacts) have a bigger access to new cultural models, information, or consumption occasions (whereby they develop a more “omnivorous,” cosmopolitan and broad taste) than people that have less ties with others. On the other hand, possession of numerous interests and experiences itself may constitute an effective “currency” in building social capital.

In the study by Bonnie H. Erickson (1996), the measure of complexity of the cultural repertoire of individuals was knowledge of genres, items or names from various

areas of culture (e.g. literature, the arts, sport, restaurants, magazines). Recognition of musical pieces, directors or composers was an essential element of the cultural map of the French society described by Bourdieu in *Distinction* (2000). To replicate this research strategy, respondents were asked to recognize the names of 14 visual artists—both Polish and foreign, representing broad spectrum of styles and periods, including classic, impressionism, surrealism, symbolism, abstract, pop or street art. Although it might seem that recognising artists, including as “popular” and “iconic” ones as Wojciech Kossak or Vincent van Gogh, should not pose significant problems, in fact knowledge of artists turned out to be a very accurate indicator of social gaps. Representatives of category A knew on average 9.55 artists from the list (median = 9.5), whereas in group B this figure was 8.07 (Me = 8), and in group C—5.97 (Me = 5) (Eta = 0.425). The average value of the property in the sample was 7.88 (SD = 3.31). The most recognized artists were Leonardo da Vinci (96.1%) and Vincent van Gogh (90.6%) and the least recognised were the contemporary Polish artist Wilhelm Sasnal (17.1%) and British representative of *street art* and engaged art, Banksy (18.8%).

Whether the level of cultural competence is associated with the social position held is shown by standard beta coefficients in regression analysis (table 3) (model I).¹⁶

Table 3

Predictors of familiarity with visual artists (hierarchical regression coefficients)

Variable	Model I		Model II	
	Beta	t	Beta	t
(Constant)		3.723		4.190
Class A	0.220***	3.901	0.204***	3.661
Class B	0.086	1.611	0.081	1.539
Class C	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Age	-0.155***	-3.744	-0.133**	-3.229
Education	0.272***	5.203	0.239***	4.559
Interest in art	0.426***	10.932	0.417***	10.843
Social capital (accessed)	—	—	0.136**	3.329
Adjusted R ²	0.484		0.498	

* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001

It is easy to see that the examined knowledge index was a positive function of education (beta = 0.272; p < 0.001), class A position (beta = 0.220; p < 0.001), and in particular interest in art¹⁷ (beta = 0.426; p < 0.001), but a negative function of age (beta = -0.155; p < 0.001). But shouldn't the level of competences, in accordance with hypothesis H2, depend also on the amount of social capital, treated as the “infrastructure” for information flow and socialising interactions? The data from model II suggests that it does. Including the variable of (available) social capital in

¹⁶ Model I fitted well the data $F(5,355) = 68.574$; $p < 0.001$ and explained 48.4% of the variances of the dependent variable.

¹⁷ Answer to a single question about the degree of interest in art, painting, sculpture, etc. (5-point Likert scale).

the regression analysis has substantially improved (although slightly) the predictive quality of the model,¹⁸ to the value of adjusted $R^2 = 0.498$. Larger inclusion in social networks and bigger access to resources were related with bigger knowledge of artists painters, irrespective of education or interest in art.

Does, however, every type of knowledge of culture depend on social networks? Examining musical taste, Michael Relish (1997) found out that various independent variables (socio-demographic and network ones) may to a heterogeneous extent explain the breadth of interests depending on what area they refer to. It turned out that education increases omnivorousness, but only in the case of “elite” musical genres, whereas network variables (e.g. number of associations to which an individual belongs) explain both “passion” for “popular” music and “more rare” musical genres. Taking similar view, I divided the artists, based on the principal component analysis, into two fractions: “popular” artists (consisting of the most recognised names)¹⁹ and less popular ones (less recognised).²⁰ What is important, the recognition of the artists from the first fraction was a stronger predictor of class position ($\text{Eta} = 0.454$) than the knowledge of the “more difficult” names ($\text{Eta} = 0.298$). To find out how the factors will impact both the variables I conducted two independent hierarchical regression analyses (table 4).

Table 4

Predictors of Familiarity with “Unpopular” and “Popular” Artists (hierarchical regression coefficients)

Variable	Familiarity with “unpopular” artists		Familiarity with “popular” artists	
	Model I	Model II	Model I	Model II
(Constant)	—	—	—	—
Class A	(-1.487) 0.157* (2.530)	(-1.224) 0.147* (2.370)	(10.539) 0.222*** (3.551)	(10.842) 0.209** (3.357)
Class B	-0.025 (-0.427)	-0.028 (-0.482)	0.177** (2.996)	0.173** (2.947)
Class C	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Age	-0.122** (-2.689)	-0.109* (-2.369)	-0.127** (-2.773)	-0.109* (-2.377)
Education	0.125* (2.176)	0.104 (1.791)	0.341*** (5.890)	0.314*** (5.370)
Interest in art	0.486*** (11.328)	0.480*** (11.219)	0.201*** (4.661)	0.194*** (4.522)
Social capital (accessed)	—	0.086 (1.892)	—	0.110* (2.430)
Adjusted R^2	0.375	0.379	0.367	0.376

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

t Statistics in parentheses

Even a superficial analysis shows that the same predictors have a different explaining power depending on the dependent variable. Knowledge of “the more difficult”

¹⁸ $\Delta F(1,354) = 11.084$; $p < 0.01$.

¹⁹ This group comprises: V. van Gogh, W. Kossak, S. Dali, L. da Vinci, J. Malczewski and C. Monet.

²⁰ This group comprises: G. Klimt, W. Kandinsky, Banksy, W. Sasnal, J. Pollock, P. Bruegel the Elder

artists depended mainly on how much a respondent was interested in art (beta = 0.486 and 0.480; $p < 0.001$), and almost not at all on education, unlike with the names of “popular” artists. Maybe the formal education guarantees the mastering of only “the basic” cultural code, whereas going beyond the average knowledge of the world of art requires additional conditions (here described by interests). Similarly, class position better explains recognition of “popular” artists. The only factor that democratically decreased cultural knowledge was age. In each case, older people recognised fewer names.

The inclusion of the variable “social capital (accessed)” in the model containing “unpopular” artists has not caused a substantial change in prediction of the value of the dependent variable ($\Delta F(1.354) = 3.58$; ns), but increased (although slightly) the prediction of the number of “popular” artists ($\Delta F(1.354) = 5.904$; $p < 0.05$). We can put forward a working hypothesis that it is “popular culture” that better spreads across social networks (or more often: is a “building block” of social relationships), whereas a more “specialist” knowledge depends less on contacts, or various types of contacts (not specified here) explain the mastering of the two kinds of knowledge to differing degrees. Further analyses should be oriented towards showing more nuances between network variables so as to capture, among other things, various types of social ties (strong and weak) and their relationships with a cultural repertoire (Lizardo 2006).

Summary and Conclusions

Taking practices of cultural participation and unequal taste for and mastering of culture products as a starting point of his theory of class tastes, Bourdieu (2000) did not give much space to the role of social networks or social capital to explain consumption diversities. Network analysis, which has been dynamically developing for over three decades, creates new opportunities for research in the area which traditionally remains one of the main dilemmas of sociological investigations: what is the relation between the structure and culture? Introducing network correlates of cultural participation patterns as well as competences necessary to participate, I tested three general hypotheses that synthesize the existing research achievements in this area. First, I assumed that there is a positive relationship between the amount of social capital/social networks (e.g. intensity of contacts, access to resources) and the probability and frequency of participation in various forms of cultural activity. Second, referring to the concept of consumption “omnivorousness,” I have put forward the thesis that the breadth of taste, experiences or cultural knowledge is not only a function of socio-economic status, but also a function of the span of social networks (more specifically: frequency of contacts, affluence of networks, among other things) and this could enrich our understanding of omnivorous consumption in Poland (Grodny, Gruszka, and Łuczaj 2013; Drozdowski et al. 2014). At the same time, “omnivorousness” and general cultural activity should depend more on non-family relations, which were assumed to function as the so called bridging capital.

Analyses of cultural practices, culinary experiences and knowledge of art conducted among inhabitants of Wrocław permitted initial acceptance of all the above-mentioned hypotheses. At the same time, further studies are postulated. Cross-sectional and quantitative data do not make it possible to fully capture the mechanism of mutual conversion of cultural and social resources. For instance, are contacts with others a source of only knowledge and inspiration, or of direct “company” in undertaken activities? What is a causal order of network and cultural variables? This opens possibilities for qualitative as well as panel studies (cf. [Vaisey and Lizardo 2010](#); [Benediktsson 2012](#); [Edelmann and Vaisey 2014](#)). Further, the data suggests that different types of cultural knowledge (e.g. “popular” and “specialist” ones) may to differing extent be connected with social capital or be a result of its different kinds (e.g. division into “weak” and “strong” ties). A challenge is thus to improve the indicators of social networks and to show more nuances of their parameters. A stronger test of the hypotheses would also require a broader selection of cultural measures especially towards the non-traditional (“popular,” “commercial”) end of the spectrum.

It remains an open question to what extent the results obtained here are specific to Polish context? On the one hand, we can find significant convergence with earlier studies as regards the omnivorousness hypothesis (H2) ([Erickson 1996](#); [Lizardo 2006](#)), on the other hand, it has been suggested that the specific factor underlying the cultural diversity among Polish respondents is composition of their personal networks (preponderance of non-kin ties). This latter conclusion do not have to be peculiar to Poland. As was shown by Peter Marsden ([1987](#)) and Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin and Mathieu E. Brashears ([2006](#)), American’s core discussion networks are heavily constituted by family. Furthermore, it has been argued that there are rather non-kin ties that are the most likely to bridge socially distinct parts of the community structure and thus to give an access to more diverse resources, since it is known that marriage and family ties are more homophilous on class, religion, race, and several other social attributes than ties formed in other ways ([McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001](#)). Nevertheless, this issue requires a systematic comparative studies.

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Biographical Note: Michał Cebula (Ph.D.) is assistant professor in the Department of Consumer Behavior, Institute of Sociology, University of Wrocław. His research interests include sociology of consumption and taste, lifestyles, social structure and social networks. His works has appeared in *Studia Socjologiczne*, *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, *Ruch Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Socjologiczny* and *Marketing i Rynek*.

E-mail: michcebula@gmail.com