

# Essential characteristics of game in the cultural dimension

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**Abstract:** Game is a comprehensive integrative factor of human existence and knowledge of the world around them and themselves. Acting as a universal way of passing on to future generations the previous achievements of mankind, a versatile way to reveal the symbolic incarnations of civilization and construct new values, meanings and ideas, this complex and multifaceted phenomenon helps each individual to realize their main purpose – to appear as a person. The objectives of the research work are aimed at determining the characteristics and main provisions of the phenomenon of game in the cultural dimension. This is necessary to identify and reveal the inner unity of different views on game, the core of which is the philosophical and pedagogical idea of transforming the world through spiritual growth and physical improvement of the individual, the formation of humanistic guidelines and values. The results of the study allow us to make sure that the essential characteristics of game correspond to the basic elements of culture.

**Keywords:** game, cultural approach, essence, characteristics, interdisciplinary research

## Introduction

A significant trend in the development of modern science is the increasing interest of researchers in the prospects of forming a unified picture of the world, which determines the active involvement of humanities knowledge and its capabilities in this process. Unlike other complexes of sciences, the humanities, in the field of view of which is a person and their actions, express the attitude of the subject of knowledge to what is being studied and characterize their desire for integrity. The defining features of the new dialogue between human and nature, according to Irina Melyk-Haikazyan et al. (2005, 20), are such as: “Understanding the world as a process; human as a ‘creator’

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of reality, not a ‘spectator’ of the studied nature; event, ‘as a leap from potentiality to relevance’”.

One of the leading starting points in the study of the multifaceted and dynamic world is the principle of additionality, according to which there is a connection among alternative descriptions of the same complex object, which is undoubtedly the phenomenon of game. After all, game is a comprehensive integrative factor of human existence and knowledge of the world around them and themselves. Each of the definitions presented by a particular science is not able to convey the fullness of the essential characteristics of game as a phenomenon, but complements the others, which allows to combine different theoretical models to cover this multidimensional phenomenon. And if the post-classical paradigm focuses on the idea of Alfred North Whitehead (2009): everything that can be is being; everything that has happened is reality; reality is a view of reality, the humanitarian cognition of game should be based on the multivariate interpretation of reality, which makes it impossible to monologue and actualize interdisciplinary dialogue.

The logic of current research determines the synthesis of different sciences, the formation of scientific understanding and perception of game as a complicated complex problem. “The interdisciplinary nature of the study of game reflects the general focus of science on strengthening integration, mutual influence and penetration of different branches of knowledge into the process of cognition of this multifaceted and multifunctional phenomenon” (Naumchuk 2020, 37). In most scientific approaches to interdisciplinary game research, this phenomenon is studied through the prism of various manifestations of being. “The peculiarity of the culturological approach is that game is considered in the opposite direction: human life and culture are explained by the game phenomenon” (Melnychuk 2015, 224). Consideration of game from the standpoint of culturological approach allows to comprehend many of its images, get a multifaceted picture, because the multicultural state and diversity of cultural truth – a set of values and everything created by mankind throughout history, allow a situation in which game takes a leading position.

The problems of transformation in game of all human nature, human reincarnation and related changes, pose new challenges to the humanities and, in particular, culturology – to provide the necessary conditions for the formation of an independent creative personality with high spiritual values, worldview and world acceptance, able to act

effectively in accordance with social and personal needs and requirements.

According to Larisa Retyunskykh (2005), one of the ways leading to understanding a person is a direct study of game as a fundamental feature of their existence. Accordingly, the presence of game and the magnitude of its presence in the structure of human activity reflect what forms of activity they are ready to choose in order to form themselves and be themselves, how they identify themselves and how they can change. Proper disclosure of game phenomenon will help each individual in choosing reliable life guidelines, building a worldview and life strategy, determining their place in the surrounding reality. Comprehensive consideration and perception of game will preserve their identity and ethnocultural affiliation, creating favorable conditions for the formation of true values. As noted by Sergei Avanesov and Elizabeth Speshylova (2012, 208) “Theoretical understanding of gaming is important not only for the completeness of understanding the culture, but also necessary for adequate interpretation of leading social trends in their retrospective and future dimensions”.

The need to study game phenomenon, to determine its characteristics from a cultural standpoint is also justified by the uncertainty of the term ‘game’ and the arbitrariness of its use. “Increasingly, any process that involves a probabilistic outcome is called game, thus it is thought of as an overall, comprehensive phenomenon, while current trends in the actual game activity that unfolds within the game culture are studied insufficiently” (Banov 2007, 5).

That is why the question of clarifying the actual essential, inherent only in the game features that distinguishes it from other phenomena of life and culture.

## **Objectives**

The objectives of this article are to present the results of our scientific work related to the elucidation of the essential characteristics of the game in the cultural dimension. In the study, we sought to find answers to the following questions:

I. What starting points reveal the content of the culturological approach in the study of game?

II. What set of characteristics determines the essence of game phenomenon?

## **Results of the study**

Mankind creates a culture that encompasses various aspects of human's interaction with themselves, others, society and nature. The world around affects human activity and behavior precisely because the latter in their life cannot ignore the natural environment. This is the reality with which they have been associated for years of evolution. At the same time, the motivating impulse for human in contrasting themselves with the natural environment from the very beginning was game, which gradually, with the development of society, turns into an established social phenomenon, an independent type of human activity.

According to Sigmund Freud (2012, 478), culture is “Order in the ideas and activities of people which opposes Chaos”. It regulates social processes and personal life, regulates human activity, coordinates their knowledge and skills, and coordinates ability with capabilities and efforts. Focusing on the ideal, culture always needs a balance of spiritual and material values, the interpretation of which involves an understanding of their inherent meaning. In particular, the humanistic meaning of culture is not only in the creation of values that enrich its material treasury, but also in the changes that occur in human in the process of their assimilation – the formation of the spiritual sphere of the individual.

In life, a person is always based on certain values and acts on the basis of moral principles and beliefs. Based on each other, all values are inextricably linked, forming a certain hierarchical structure. Everyone has defining values and their derivatives, which allows finding out their structure and order, to understand the impulses of life. In gaming, a person, as a founder and subject of culture, not only translates and explains values, discovers their various semantic aspects, but also creates new ones. For its part, in the holistic context of culture, game it, which provides the individual with freedom of action, is seen as a comprehensive motivating mechanism for structuring the surrounding reality.

Thus, in the concept of Johan Huizinga (1997) game appears as the highest manifestation of the essence of human. It precedes culture, creates it and begins as game itself. According to the Dutch culturologist, game is the primary form of organization of life transmitted in society at the level of general prototypes of social behavior and actions. The importance of labor as a cultural factor in history is questioned and replaced by game, which, according to the

author, is the core of the formation of human culture. After all, the changes that actually take place in the environment are preceded by transformations in a person's own imagination, which they have already realized in game.

Game is a symbol of a person's hopes, their activity, struggle with themselves and competition with other people, confrontation with circumstances and destiny. It complements, diversifies and beautifies life, making it necessary for every person, regardless of age, gender, profession or social status. Revealing the role of play in all spheres of human life - in language, justice, war, wisdom, poetry, philosophy, art, Johan Huizinga (1997, 61) proclaims it a universal culture. And "the more game is able to increase the vitality of someone or a group, the deeper it enters the culture". For its part, culture is rooted in a noble game that compensates, neutralizes and eliminates the shortcomings of reality. According to Johan Huizinga:

Game sets the order, it is the order itself. In this imperfect world, in this hustle and bustle of life, it embodies temporary, local perfection. The order established by game is inviolable. The slightest deviation from it interferes with game, invades its original character, and deprives it of its own value. This deeply internal connection with the idea of order is the reason why game is so largely in the field of aesthetics. The game tends to be beautiful. This aesthetic factor may be nothing more than an obsessive desire to create an orderly form that permeates game in all its manifestations (Huizinga 1997, 28).

Satisfying the ideals of individual self-expression and social life in various forms of life, the game creates conditions for the realization of the potential of each individual, the formation of their individuality. Since game is flawless, as well as the perfect humanistic beginning of culture, the scientist turns culture itself into a similar compensator for the existence of the individual. True culture cannot exist without one or another game content. It is extremely important that "true culture always requires *fair play* in every respect, and *fair play* is nothing more than the equivalent of virtue in terms of play" (Huizinga 1997, 199). And if culture continues to want to develop its best qualities with dignity, it should not lose its game meaning.

A similar position is manifested in the ideas of the teachings of José Ortega y Gasset, who with the help of game reveals the complexity of cultural and transformational problems of society. Game itself appears as a spontaneous development of human energy, a voluntary manifestation of its forces, not foreseen in advance by a burst of vital

activity. Unlike other activities related to the achievement of certain goals, it is not a forced movement.

In his views, the thinker proceeds from the initial dichotomy of humanity into “mass” and “elite;” this is justified by the presence or absence of self-determination and personal thoughts:

In fact, to feel the mass as a psychological reality, you do not need human gatherings. For a single person you can determine whether the mass is or not. The masses are anyone who does not give themselves a proper evaluation, good or bad, but instead feel that they are "like everyone else" and not only does care, but are satisfied with their own indistinguishability (Ortega y Gasset 1991, 310).

A “mass” person floats downstream and has no life landmarks, which means that they do not create anything. It embodies the “rejection of the coexistence of the cultural, that is, orderly, and the return to the barbaric” (Ortega y Gasset 1991, 325). An alternative to the daily life of the masses, its utilitarian state, is a game expressed by the elite – a true minority of high spirituality and morality, noble, responsible, demanding, with an inner need for self-improvement and creativity. In this context, game is seen as an important tool for ridiculing and confronting the mundane and vulgarity of human existence, as a necessary way of social life that supports the ideal, which, in turn, determines the culture.

As José Ortega y Gasset points out, culture does not exist if there is no foundation on which it can be based, if there are no foundations of legitimacy to resort to. In the cultural plane, which is identified with the ideas of mankind, the bases for understanding the truth are the rules of the game, because they remain unchanged. And if most of society ceases to accept the rules of the game, it loses its cultural roots.

Because the ideas of the mass human are not like that and they did not get a culture. The idea is the chess of truth. Those who crave ideas must first seek the truth and accept the rules of the game that it sets. It is pointless to talk about ideas and views without recognizing the system in which they are verified, a set of rules that can be appealed to in a dispute. These rules are the foundations of culture (Ortega y Gasset 1991, 323).

For the Spanish thinker, game is not only a way to save culture from the emptiness that the masses carry with them, but also represents an exceptional cultural value and the highest human passion.

In the reflections of Hermann Hesse on cultural life, game embodies the natural connection of intellectual, aesthetic and moral spheres of

human life and society on the basis of order, piety and harmony. It opens up a whole world of possibilities and combinations and allows you to move towards complete reality and perfection. Reproducing various semantic situations of human activity, game not only contributes to change and development of human, but also ensures the preservation of their spirituality. After all, it exists only “with all the meaning and all the values of our culture” (Hesse 2017, 8).

Game activity allows receiving the general denominator of culture, to comprehend its common language. It opens the "way of becoming a cultural being, from the possible to the real", in which for each of its participants the achievement of goals is associated with the preservation of accumulated spiritual values and the observance of moral purity. Game is the driving force of the internal creative processes of the individual, which makes it possible to understand oneself, clarify behavioral norms and rules, make their choices, form one's own position and relationships with other people, attitude to the surrounding reality. According to Hermann Hesse (2017, 19), in its heyday game “means a subtle, symbolically multifaceted form of the search for perfection, high alchemy, approaching the internally unique over the whole set of images of the existing spirit”.

In his creative work and, in particular, in the game of beads, the German-Swiss writer tried to “present the spiritual universe with concentric systems and combine the living beauty of spirituality and art with the magical power of formulas of exact disciplines” (Ibid., 8). Under the condition of alternate domination of one or another science or art, game becomes a kind of universal language, which allows players to reflect and relate spiritual values through meaningful signs. In this case, Hermann Hesse draws attention to the fact that game is: “the embodiment of spirituality and artistry, a refined cult, *unio mystica* (mystical union) of all disparate parts of the *universitas litterarum* (set of sciences)”, thus emphasizing the interdisciplinarity of game phenomenon (Ibid., 18).

In the conceptual result of his scientific activity Moisey Kagan (1996, 28) notes that:

If society is a non-biological way of connecting people in their life and work together, then human themselves, synthesizing in their real existence and behavior natural and social laws, are the same embodied unity of nature and society, which must be recognized as a special – third – forms of existence that are not reduced to either biological or social forms.

This interpretation determines the understanding of game as a complex ordered biosocial education – a system that indirectly affects the physical and spiritual life of human.

Human communication and interaction with the environment are carried out through their activities. Every human activity is latently characterized by a game factor, which is manifested when this activity becomes free and self-serving. The transition of the main activity to game is mutual and can occur simultaneously. Game, as a manifestation of gaming activity allows a person to design the following actions, thus enabling the indirect construction of their future. According to Moisey Kagan (1996, 166), it is the ability to project a non-existent but desirable future that makes game “An extremely important means of humanizing human, the most effective way to transform a small animal born into the world, seeking to satisfy innate physiological needs, into a cultural being who freely plans their life, creates themselves and develops them”.

At the same time, game provides an amazing opportunity to infinitely expand the human experience, pushing their spatial and temporal boundaries. Thanks to the illusion in game opens the way:

Overcoming the rigidity of life experience within the narrow framework of “here and now”, giving the individual the opportunity to fully, psychologically entire – that is, contemplation, empathy, and all spiritual feelings, and generalized and meaningful thought, and associative memory, and predictable dream, and charming love – to gain additional experience (Kagan 1996, 115).

For the humanity cannot limit themselves to their real existence, requiring their “doubling” of imaginary, illusory life, because in this way they get the opportunity to infinitely the expand of the boundaries of their experience and practice.

In the views of Moisey Kagan (1996, 157) an important component of human activity, its basis is communication: “In the matter of human cognition by human and in their self-knowledge, the role of practical communication is irreplaceable by anything – neither by science nor by art”.

Under such conditions, game, which contributes to the formation of relationships among people, improving their communication, appears as a real cultural value, and its role and importance increase significantly. The peculiarity of game communication is that it allows



permanently renewed competition between partners and unfolds at different levels – physical, mental and spiritual.

### **Discussion**

If, for example, philosophy considers the game as a worldview category, which forms an understanding of the nature of the world and human essence and the search for meaning in life, then in the field of culture, characterized by the definition of the ideal, the game phenomenon appears universal by passing on revealing symbolic incarnations of the development of civilization and constructing new values, meanings and ideas.

We assume that the starting points that reveal the content of the culturological approach in the study of game phenomenon should correspond to the basic elements of culture and determine the characteristics of game (see Table 1.). According to Ward Gudenau (1981), culture consists of four elements, namely:

a) concepts that allow a person to use language and symbols to navigate the world around them and gain experience;

b) relations (connections), which form certain ideas about the relationship among concepts related to the realm of the real world and the supernatural;

c) values (generally accepted beliefs about the goals to which a person should strive), which form the basis of moral principles;

d) rules (norms) that regulate the behavior of people in accordance with the values of a particular culture.

Therefore, among the main provisions that reveal the content of the culturological approach, we consider it appropriate to single out such statements about game as:

I. Game is a process of creative activity of human, which is aimed at learning about the world around them and themselves. It is the highest manifestation of the human essence.

II. Game activities make it possible to “double” life; promote human development, their formation as a creative person and a subject of culture.

III. Game phenomenon creates, generates a system of values and ensures their balance; while game itself is also a value; it strives for the ideal and enables aesthetic reality.

IV. Game organizes personal life and social processes. The magnitude of its representation in the structure of human activity linearly reflects the level of order.

Table 1. Correspondence of elements of culture, initial positions and characteristics of game

Elements of culture	Initial provisions	Game characteristics
Concept	Creative activity, manifestation of human essence	Adaptability and dynamism, informativeness and representativeness
Relationships	Doubles' being, promotes development	Communicativeness, integrativity
Values	Forms a system of values, brings beauty	Axiology, universality
Rules	Organizes lifestyle and social processes	Voluntariness and initiative, order and aesthetics

RQ1 The content of the culturological approach in the research of game reveals the following starting points: game - a person's creative activity aimed at learning about the world around them and themselves; game activity allows “doubling” of existence, promotes the formation of the individual as a subject of culture; game phenomenon forms a system of values, brings beauty; game organizes personal life and social processes.

From the standpoint of this approach to the main characteristics of game, which determine its essence, it is advisable to incorporate:

- adaptability and dynamism – promotes human adaptation to the environment and is associated with changes that occur under the influence of external and internal forces;
- informativeness and representativeness – expands the worldview, enriches life experience, preserves the game identity;
- communicativeness – provides conditions for interaction and communication;
- integrativeness – is to unite people and activities;
- axiological – forms and maintains a system of values, expresses the quality of society;
- universality – emphasizes the general, comprehensive content of gaming activities, takes into account the interests of everyone, national and ethnic characteristics and traditions;

- voluntariness and initiative – makes it impossible to act under duress, determines the conscious self-realization of the individual;
- orderliness and aesthetics – identifies the structuring and establishment of order, expresses the integrity, harmony and optimal balance of all forces.

RQ2 The essence of game phenomenon determines a set of characteristics such as: axiology; volunteering and initiative; versatility; adaptability and dynamism; communicativeness; informativeness and representativeness; orderliness and aesthetics; integrativity.

All these characteristics are closely interrelated and interdependent and are system-forming. This means that they not only reveal the essence of game phenomenon, but also determine its properties and functions. And such a systematic interpretation of the game requires the study of the whole set of its components, the relationship of which determines the holistic qualities and properties of this phenomenon.

Accordingly, the next step in further research of game can be considered directly systemic approach.

## **Conclusion**

The multidimensionality of the existence of game arises only in human existence, because it is natural, social and cultural.

The culturological approach, as a way of methodology of scientific cognition, allows to consider game not in isolation, separated from the environment in which it really exists, functions and develops, but in the context of the surrounding reality – the whole system of which it is a part. It is the existence of connections among game, human and the surrounding reality that causes scientific research to go beyond one discipline.

Game substantiates the ontology of modern culture and is a mechanism for generating cultural meanings. As a symbol of the world in the eyes of human, it becomes a way of being and essentially determines its meaning. Game is not isolated from the environment; it is an integral part of it, which participates in the creation of ideas and values that make up a significant cultural value. At the same time, the game phenomenon connects the surrounding human reality into a single whole and is an important way of human existential self-presentation.

In our opinion, the presented materials of the article will help to better understand the significance and comprehensiveness of game

phenomenon will provide some guidelines for further use of its potential in various spheres of human life and culture, which will ultimately help solve various social and humanitarian problems and contradictions.

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