

A Practical Joke in Public Sphere – a Polish Case Study

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Abstract. The aim of the paper is to show multiple layers of discourse and the consequences of a particular practical joke that has been played at a local public event and has become a theme for media coverage nationwide. Students in one of Polish high schools brought a goat as a present to their headmaster and handed it in during their commencement ceremony. Some event participants reported it to the Animal Welfare Society claiming that the goat was mistreated. It seemed that it was not eager to be led on a leash and it urinated, which was interpreted as a sign of discomfort and stress. The story became a headline first in the local and then in the national press and television, and was accompanied by heated discussions on social media. Photos were posted on the official school website. Multiple comments were very aggressive towards the school, its students and teachers alike. Some students used the opportunity to create a goat fan page – a good source of rapidly appearing jokes. The discussions evoked by the incident, lead to the questions about political correctness and about the possibilities and consequences of making practical jokes in the contemporary public sphere. The analysis of the case makes it possible to create the communication model showing the reverberations caused by the incident in the public sphere. The perspectives of the participants involved in different communication roles are highlighted in the model, altogether with the links marking the relations between particular parties involved.

Keywords: animal, discourse, humor, media, political correctness.

1. Introduction

“Communication styles are the “software” of communication; they depend on the people involved and on their environment. [...] Differences in intra-cultural communication styles often reflect differences in values” (Hofstede, 2015, p. 1). These differences may be seen both in bona-fide and non-bona-fide modes of communication. They are very clearly observable when the modes are in juxtaposition. This sometimes happens when we deal with practical jokes. In different cultures, practical jokes have various purposes and frequency of occurrence. Some of them are present on particular occasions and acceptable in certain well-defined circumstances. The aim of the paper is to show multiple layers

of discourse and consequences of a particular practical joke that was played at a local public event and became a theme for media coverage nationwide.

2. Practical Jokes

Practical jokes are broadly understood as “forms of unilateral play” (Marsh 2015, p. 6), and more specifically, a practical joke is “a scripted, unilateral play performance involving two opposed parties – trickster and target – with the goal of incorporating the target into play without his or her knowledge, permission, or both” (Marsh, 2015, p. 12). Thus, apart from the target, a script is an essential part of this type of jokes. Not only does it include the systematic instruction for the trickster, but it also contains the description of how the targets will or should behave. Moira Marsh proposes five types of practical jokes based on such criteria as targets’ various roles, revelation and deception. They are as follows: 1) *put-ons* – known as “leg-pulls” or “passive pranks” as they may be spontaneous and require from the targets a word or phrase showing that they believe the fiction; 2) *fool’s errands* – when targets act on a specific belief, so the aim is to make them behave in an extraordinary way. This type is often used in the rites of passage for new hires (e.g. fetching a non-existent tool may be one of the examples); 3) *kick me* – this type turns the target into an unconscious performer; 4) *booby traps* – which aim to surprise with the intention of causing a loss of composure, so astonishment is essential to effectiveness here (e.g. loud unexpected noises or sudden jabs in the backside that cause a physical reaction); 5) *stunts* – they have their particular audiences, their targets are always collective and anonymous, they burst unexpectedly into everyday discourse or into public spaces - flash mobs are examples of stunts (Marsh, 2015, p. 29).

Among the multiple functions of practical joking Moira Marsh names, inter alia, a way of sending a subtle message of social sanction, a trial of correcting the miscreant, playing on weakness, drawing attention to political messages, subverting the symbolic environment, changing the routines and pointing out that life should be something more than “running through our programmes” (Marsh, 2015, pp. 59-71)¹.

1.1. Script of the Joke

A script is the essential part of a practical joke. In the case described in the paper the script was very consciously prepared. Its initiators spent much time, money and effort on it. The action was planned during the commencement

¹ For the detailed review of Marsh’s book, cf. Brzozowska 2015.

ceremony for the graduates of one of the best high schools in the city of Opole. There is a tradition that second graders – 17 year-olds – prepare some funny couplets or a show related to school life, performed to say good-bye to their 18-year old colleagues. Usually that special occasion of the last meeting of the whole school community is considered as a time of crossing borders of adulthood, time for memories, summing up and also some fun-related activities that should display the maturity, but also creativity of students. In May 2016, the school-leaving group prepared something that will stay in the school chronicles for a very long time. Students usually want to leave a part of themselves at their school so that future generations can be reminded of their predecessors, e.g. some planted trees in the schoolyard. That year a mock battle of Grunwald was prepared. The headmaster received two umbrellas instead of famous and culturally significant two swords – originally sent by the Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen as an insult and a provocation to "assist Władysław II Jagiełło and Vytautas in battle"¹. After the performance a small goat led on a leash appeared from the trunk of a car parked in the middle of the schoolyard. The initiators of the concept had bought a goat and brought it in their own car risking the smell and dirty consequences. Later – accused of keeping the goat in the trunk – they explained that they had wanted to put the animal in the front seat, but the farmer who had sold it to them did not recommend it.

<p><i>zwierzę kazał im włożyć do bagażnika hodowca, bo "tak się je przewozi".(S. 7²)</i></p>	<p><i>He told them to put the animal in the boot because "that is how you transport them".</i></p>
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Figure 1.
Students' excuses

Bringing the goat was definitely a planned action, a part of a practical joke script.

It was a very special and surprising gift. The event was so unexpected and the gift so unusual that the crowds of students burst out with laughter, which also spread among teachers – and the main beneficiary of the gift – the school headmaster. We may conclude that the effect on the audience was satisfying for the jesters. A few minutes later – after being told that the geography profited class wanted to start a mini-zoo at school and explaining that it would be rather difficult

¹ The Battle of Grunwald was fought in 1410. The alliance of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania defeated the German–Prussian Teutonic Knights. It is regarded as an important victory in the history of Poland, and has been used as a source of national pride, becoming a symbol of the struggle against foreign invaders.

² References to the particular sources (marked as S) are listed in the separate section at the end of the paper, translation of the Polish exemplary material is mine - DB.

– the head teacher asked one of the pupils to take the goat to a quiet lawn. Afterwards, the goat was sent to the nearest farm – where it could receive proper care. It was only the beginning of the goat story, however. Some students reported to the Animal Welfare Society that the goat had been badly treated – it seemed that it was not eager to be led on a leash and it had urinated – which was interpreted as a sign of discomfort and stress.

1.2. Communication Model of the Joke

The story became a headline first in the local and then in the national press and television, and was accompanied by heated discussions on social media. Photos were posted on the official school page, but they were soon removed as the comments started to become very aggressive towards the school, its students and teachers alike. Some students used the opportunity to create the goat fan page – where goat jokes started to appear very rapidly.

The multimodal type of research is connected with discourse analysis and it obliges one to take the sender, the recipient, the context of the utterance and the social-political context into consideration. It is also connected with transdisciplinarity, which allows the usage of diverse analytical methods. It is important to choose the proper analytical tool used for particular parts of multimodal discourse, as this kind of discourse as a whole is rather difficult to grasp (cf. Maćkiewicz, 2016). Participants and various points of view are visualised in the Figure 2. The reverberations caused by the incident are illustrated in the communication model. The relations between the participants and the questions: Who was blamed for what happened? What was the ontological status of the goat? and finally Where media right that the animal was tortured? are interconnected. The model depicts different aspects of the communicational situation described in the presented case study.

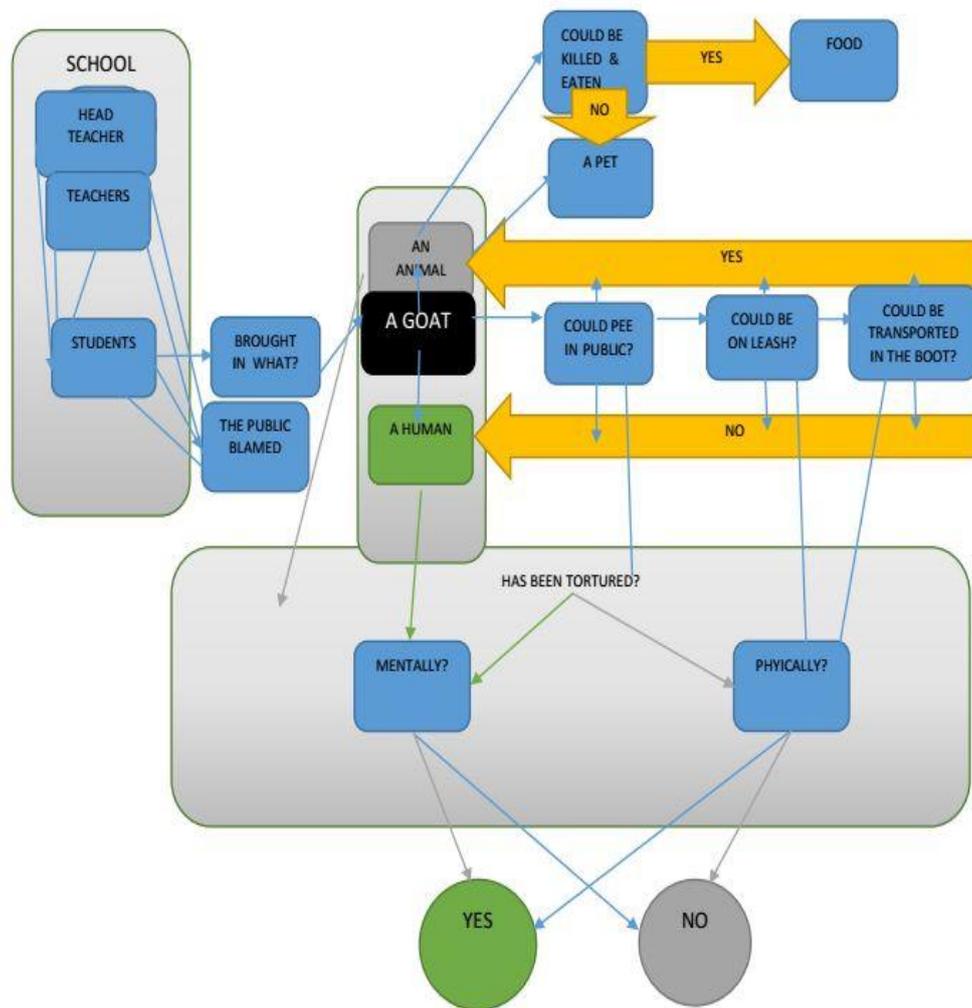


Figure 2.
 Conceptualisation of the analysed discussion

Content analysis of the media coverage of the incident, with special attention to the press headlines, comments about the articles and Facebook posts, is conducted to answer the above mentioned questions related to the main research

problem – trying to determine why the incident planned as a practical joke caused such a strong reaction – both serious and humorous.

1.2.1. Headlines

Chronological analysis of the goat-related headlines shows a trend where emotions evoked by the subject grow rapidly and then start decreasing when the debate ceases. First journalists use the statements to verbalize the allegations. Then, they ask questions suggesting that maybe someone is guilty. Finally, they reveal the verdict and admit that no real harm was done. Throughout the process the public opinion is mostly in favour of the school.

It is interesting to notice how the agents of the story were profiled. In some cases, they were named clearly – *students, graduates*. In the other ones, the passive voice concealed the agent responsible for the story. In many cases, the lead of the information used a quote to make the report more emotional and reality based (leads of a mixed type by Wojtak, 2004).

Uczniowie Liceum w Opolu <i>dręczyli kozę</i> (S. 3)	Students of an Opole high school <i>tormented a goat</i>
Uczniowie <i>przyprawdzili</i> kozę na apel. Towarzystwo Opieki nad Zwierzętami: powiadomimy prokuraturę (S. 4)	Students <i>brought</i> a goat to a school assembly. The Animal Welfare Society: we will notify the prosecutor's office
<i>Koźlątko dręczone</i> w państwowej szkole. (S. 3)	<i>Yeanling tormented</i> in a state school.
"Przerażona" koza na szkolnym przedstawieniu. TOZ: poinformujemy prokuraturę (S. 6)	" <i>Terrified</i> " goat at a school spectacle. Animal Welfare Society: we will notify the prosecutor's office
Na zakończenie szkoły maturzyści <i>dręczyli kozę</i> . " <i>Ciągnęli ją na smyczy, cała się trzęsła</i> " (S. 12)	At the end of their education, school graduates <i>tormented a goat</i> . " <i>They pulled it on a leash, it was all trembling</i> "

Figure 3

Headlines expressing allegations in the form of statements

In different headlines students were mentioned either as the ones torturing the goat or the ones that let the Animal Welfare Society know about the misconduct.

Uczniowie II LO w Opolu dręczyli kozę podczas apelu? TOZ chce powiadomić prokuraturę (S. 9)	Students of the II LO in Opole tormented a goat during a school assembly? The Animal Welfare Society wants to notify the prosecutor's office
W II LO w Opolu na szkolnym apelu dręczyli koziołka? Uczniowie powiadomili obrońców zwierząt (S. 8)	In the II LO in Opole during a school assembly they tormented a billy goat? Students notified animal (rights) defenders

Figure 4.

Headlines expressing allegations in the form of questions

The Animal Welfare Society presented the case before the prosecutor. It was only one of many institutions involved in the fight for the goat's rights. These included the following: the Department of Education of the Opole Voivodeship, the District Veterinary Inspectorate in Opole and the Inspectorate of Road Transport for the Opole Voivodeship.

In some of the last headlines, the school management board and the headmaster himself claimed that the goat had not been harmed. One of the headlines is inconsistent. It contains the information that the students have made apologies. Therefore, there is a contradiction, because it also states that nothing has happened.

Czy koziołek był dręczony na szkolnym apelu w Opolu? Dyrekcja zaprzecza (S. 13)	Was the billy goat abused during a school assembly in Opole? The Board denies
Dyrektor liceum: zwierzę nie było dręczone. Uczniowie przeprosili (S. 15)	High School Headmaster: the animal has not been abused. The students have apologised

Figure 5.

Headlines denying allegations

Inconsistency is also present in the following headline, where the Mayor of Opole, who is in charge of the city schools, is quoted as admitting that these kinds of embarrassing situations do happen, but it is a good school. Thus, it should be forgiven. He admits that there is guilt but there will be no punishment.

Wiśniewski o aferze w II LO: wstydlive sytuacje się zdarzają, ale to dobra szkoła (S. 14)	Wiśniewski about the scandal in II LO: embarrassing situations do happen, but it is a good school
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Figure 6.

Headline quoting the Mayor of Opole

He supported the headmaster, who claimed that the school is very well positioned in many rankings and their pupils are mostly well-behaved. They receive high marks in maturity exams, they are intelligent, and creative and doing harm was not their intention.

1.2.2. Ontological Status of the Goat

A. The goat as an animal

We may look at this case from the point of view of the animal categories defined by Leach, who uses the criteria of edibility. He names four groups distinguished by the distance between animals and people: 1) Those which are very close – ‘pets’, always strongly inedible; 2) Those which are tame, but not very close – ‘farm animals’; 3) Field animals, ‘game’- a category towards which we alternate friendship and hostility; 4) Remote wild animals – not subject to human control, inedible (Leach, 1966, p. 44).

The first and the last categories contain non-edible animals. The second group consists of animals farmed for human food. The third category is also associated with hunting for meat, but this group in contemporary European culture is not used as broadly as the previous one.

a) The goat as slaughter animal

The goat may be easily included in the edible animal category in many cultures, where it is a common practise to bring a goat, kill it, roast it over fire and sit around to share the meal.

As a response to the accusations of making the goat suffer, someone posted a comment on Facebook:

Zobaczcie w rzeźni jak wygląda zwierzęcy strach i tam protestujcie mądrze (S. 9)	See what animal fear looks like in a slaughter house, wise guys
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Figure 7.
Facebook comment on animal suffering

It raises the question if the people who complained were vegetarians themselves. If not, are they really so (over)sensitive? Can this incident be compared to the cases when animals are slaughtered or tortured, causing them actual physical pain? This brings to mind the reports of killing animals like lion

cubs or of feeding giraffes to a lion at a public dissection at a Danish Zoo, with the audience including four year old children¹.

b) The goat as a dog

The question is what if a dog was the present instead of the goat – would people react in the same way?. As someone commented on Facebook:

<p>Z igły widly a jak to byłby pies? Ktoś by zareagował? (S. 9)</p>	<p>Making a mountain out of a molehill. What if it was a dog? Would someone have reacted?</p>
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Figure 8.

Facebook comment comparing a goat to a dog

Is it reasonable to explain the physiological reaction of urination as a sign of high distress in animals? If it was a dog, we would probably say it was marking its territory.

Another issue is how dogs are treated in society. They should be closer to humans as pets than goats are, but in villages they are sometimes kept in too small kennels or even chained all day long. This is tragic both in the winter and even more so during the hot summer time, when they do not have the chance to move into the shade, or are left without water – and the local society does not do enough to help them.

B. The goat as a human

In the described incident, the goat has the status of a pet and was even given some emotional features characteristic of humans. Exaggeration mechanisms were used when the anthropomorphisation of the goat occurred, e.g. the goat was pictured as being afraid of the crowd, distressed to the degree that it peed itself scared. The mechanism of anthropomorphisation may be related to the idea of Paul Rodin, quoted by C. G. Jung that “the history of civilization is largely the account of the attempts of man to forget his transformation from an animal into a human being.” (Jung, 2011, p. 280).

In the story, the goat was treated as a human who can be offended at being laughed at – as being gelotophobic. Was the mental suffering really serious? Mentioning tortures is definitely highly exaggerated. It is good that the society is

¹ Dead lion dissected in front of children at Danish zoo, <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/dead-lion-dissected-in-front-of-children-at-danish-zoo-a6696156.html>; Lion will be cut open in front of children as young as four during public dissection at zoo, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/lion-cut-open-front-children-6614496>, Zoo kills a "surplus" giraffe in front of children, feeds it to lions, <http://io9.gizmodo.com/zoo-kills-surplus-giraffe-in-front-of-children-feeds-1519870667>, 10/10.2016.

getting more and more sensitive, but perhaps this type of political correctness brings oversensitivity that leads to a hypocritical behaviour – one that allows cruelty towards people (i.e. the hate speech towards the students and the school management). Is mistreatment of humans justified in order to preserve the wellbeing and state of mind of animals?

3. Two Points of View

To see the characteristics of the opponents discourses in more detail we can analyse the words they use, which uncover the values they represent. Exposition of different points of view is the method used e.g. in semiotic mediations (cf. Piekot 2016).

<p>Ontological status of the goat: How was it described?</p>	<p>The animal was supposed to be one of the attractions, as if a gift, terrified animal, heavily frightened animal, fearful, prone to great stress, poor animal, goat: “horrified” goat, young goat was the main attraction, goat pulled on a leash, dragged, abused goat, tortured, tormented, the goat was very scared, trembling, its legs spread completely, the goat peed itself scared, yeanling, (young) billy goat, nanny goat, “Friar Minor”, Philemon</p>
<p>Ontological status of the situation: What was it that happened there?</p>	<p>Spectacle, unethical spectacle featuring a terrified animal, game, circus, “artistic” performance, party, outrageous case, breaking the work ethic, tormenting an animal, lapse, misunderstanding, embarrassing situation, weak moment, thoughtless action, incident, inappropriate event, “unfortunate” event, useless scandal</p>

Figure 9.

Ontological status of the goat and the situation

Some disputants commenting the official media coverage of the case mentioned that gender issues can be noticed in this case as well. At the beginning, the goat was described as *kózka* – (‘small female goat’) while during the discussion it was discovered that it was he – *koziolatek* (‘small male goat’). Notably, male animals may be stereotypically perceived as stronger, less vulnerable.

The situation from the politically correct point of view, as described by the animal rights activists, is as follows:

- The small goat (feminine form used) was tortured by the students for the enjoyment of others, including teachers and the headmaster
- Place: very crowded and noisy – the reason for the goat to feel uncomfortable
- Time: lasted forever – the words “*dręczyć, męczyć*” imply a long lasting, very painful activity, associated with physical harm
- Participants were described as uneducated, stupid and cruel
- Personal attack on the headmaster who was accused of being responsible for the prank
- Observers laughed encouragingly – so they are also guilty.

The same case seen from the point of view of the defenders of the goat idea is seen as follows:

- The small goat was male (this may stereotypically suggest strength, male goats have an unpleasant smell - this connotation is supposed to diminish the empathy)
- Place was joyful, open-aired – so it should not make the goat feel scared
- Time: very short – a minute or two
- The behaviour of students was irresponsible
- Observers: head teacher responded by telling one of the students to take the goat to a quieter place, with green grass it could eat, and finding for it a good and safe home afterwards. He behaved as any responsible and carrying person would, educating the students verbally – without any more serious consequences.

The aspects of the situation which both sides see in the same way are only these:

- The goat was pulled on the leash,
- It was young,
- It was confused.

The official sources, using the strong, emotional language, full of the rhetoric of accusations, are clearly not neutral. Their authors show politically correct attitudes, constructing the message in a way which shows that something really worth condemning did happen.

The situation – even if the goat was sound and kicking – was a good topic for a sensational report to be put in the spotlight – as it was picked up not only by local but also by national mass media. The reason to highlight one of the accounts of what has happened was to engage as many people as possible to show verbal

aggression towards the students and the teachers, i.e. the real people, in the name of the anthropomorphically presented animal.

3.1. The Hate Speech

In the official debate, the accusations were initially directed towards the institution – the school, the students, and the teachers. The discussions about this situation provoked many unofficial statements containing verbal aggression, pointing out that the people who have just taken their maturity examinations should be ashamed of themselves since they are expected to keep higher standards. Their national identity is recalled, as they are a disgrace not only to themselves, but also to the whole country. The young age of the participants is mentioned as well. Selected comments accompanying the media materials are listed below.

Zdegenerowana patologia, która nie szanuje nikogo i niczego. Wstyd i hańba dla naszego kraju. (S. 10)	Degenerated pathology which does not respect anyone or anything. Shame and disgrace for our country.
Co za kretyńskie zachowanie uczniów i nauczycieli tej żalostnej szkoły. (S. 9)	What an idiotic behaviour of the students and teachers of that pathetic school.
Brak wczucia się i uszanowania emocji żywej istoty. Maturzyści jednak nie zdali egzaminu dojrzałości. (S. 10)	Lack of empathy and respect for the feelings of a live creature. The graduates have not passed the maturity examination.
Zwierzę to nie jest rzecz, nie jest do zabawy hołoty... To było barbarzyństwo ! (S. 9)	An animal is not a thing, it is not for riffraff to play with... That was barbarity!
grono klaunów, potwory normalne, to są ludzie na poziomie, wyższe wykształcenie...brak podstawowego, wstyd (S. 9)	Bunch of clowns, normal monsters, these are people of high standards, higher education... lack of basic education, shame
Cóż za pięknie wychowana młodzież, aż strach się zestarzeć bo zaciągną Cię do domu starców jak tę kozę (S. 10)	What beautifully educated youth. Aging is scary – they will drag you to the old age home like that goat

Figure 10.
Comments from the discussion fora

In the unofficial communication that included comments below the articles and on Facebook the most severely attacked person was the headmaster, who as a public person, is easily recognizable. Comments about the headmaster:

<p>Piękny przykład pan dyrektor daje młodzieży nie ma co! Wstyd!!! Chętnie przeciągnęła bym go po dziedzińcu szkolnym i ciekawa jestem czy by się tak uśmiechał żenada (S. 10)</p>	<p>Beautiful example Mr. Headmaster is showing the youth – no question about it! Shame!!! I would gladly drag him through the school yard – I wonder if he would be smiling as much then. Embarrassment.</p>
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Figure 11.
Comments about the headmaster

He suffered the most although he had taken part in the incident only as a school representative, a person responsible for what is going in the school area, but he was not engaged in the preparation or staging at all. It was him who was supposed to be surprised by this practical joke and he certainly was. As he is a person with a good sense of humour, he can appreciate a joke and the students probably knew it. As a result, however, he could even have lost his job and become a real victim of what had been planned as an innocent practical joke and a nice surprise by his pupils.

How else could the head teacher react? Should he have been serious? Punished the students? Rejected the gift? We do not know what they would have done with the goat then.

He dealt with the problem in a responsible way. He had the goat taken aside to a lawn and found a home for the animal which obviously could not be kept in the school where proper care could not be provided. Fortunately, some letters were also written by the parents to The Department of Education backing the headmaster:

<p>chcemy wyrazić swoją dezaprobatę wobec poczynań mediów związanych ze zdarzeniem do jakiego doszło na terenie szkoły 29 kwietnia 2016; solidarność i pełne poparcie wobec Dyrekcji szkoły; sprowadzanie dyskusji do rangi absurdu (S. 19)</p>	<p>we would like to express our disapproval towards the actions of the media concerning the event which took place in the school on the 29th of April 2016; solidarity and full support towards the Head teachers of the school; reducing the discussion to the level of the absurd</p>
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Figure 12.
Fragments of the parents' letter to The Department of Education

Apart from the parents, also the students supported him on Facebook, underlining the absurdity of the situation:

<p>Martyna...a jakby na Twoje urodziny trzech młodych ludzi przyprowadziło na smyczy kozę...tak dla hecy...winą obarczyła byś swoich rodziców...</p> <p>PS: - gdzie tutaj mamy "dręczenie"...co te pismaki wymyślają...w co nas wkrecają ?</p>	<p>Martyna... what if three young people brought a goat on a leash to your birthday party... just for the fun of it... would you deem your parents responsible...</p> <p>Ps: Where is the "tormenting"... what are these hacks coming up with... what are they dragging us into?</p>
<p>Nie Dam Dyrektorowi Swojej Szkoły Kozy Na Zakończenie Roku Szkolnego, 30.06.2016. (S. 18)</p>	<p>I will not give a goat to the Headmaster of my school at the end of the school year</p>

Figure 13.

Facebook comments of students supporting the headmaster

3.2. Humor

3.2.1. Humorous Intentions

We can observe the jocular vocabulary or assumptions connected with the non-bona-fide mode of communication in many texts dealing with the goat subject. They appear on both sides of the discussion, in some cases via contradiction by stating that something should be or was intended to be funny but failed.

	It was supposed to be funny	It was not funny
Terms used to describe what happened (ontological question – what was it?)	Game, circus, spectacle, party, casual atmosphere, for laughs, "artistic" part, "game"	
Terms used to describe the participants	The goat was the centrepiece The animal was supposed to be one of the attractions, surprise, bunch of clowns	
Reactions	Students were amused, some of them laughed, bursts of laughter,	"It was supposed to be funny but ended up embarrassing", is "tormenting"

	he is smiling, he is baring his teeth when seeing that poor goat	animals that entertaining”, how entertaining, a real side-splitter, (the goat) was not an object of games, the animal started to frolic.
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Figure 14.

Textual indications that bringing in the goat was supposed to be a practical joke

3.2.2. Humorous Material

The students who thought that the whole case was exaggerated defended it claiming it was humorous, often employing multimodal types of texts. Shortly after the incident, one of the first things that happened was the creation of a humorous site dedicated to the Koza [goat] on the internet. The page was called official, and was introduced as a fan page that does not aim at offending anyone. The purpose of all content was supposed to be strictly entertaining and humorous.

Koza z LO2 jest już na Facebooku. Oficjalny fanpage kozy z lo2. Fanpage nie ma na celu obrazy nikogo. Treści tylko w celach rozrywkowo humorystycznych. (S. 18)	The Goat from LO2 is already on Facebook. Official fan page of the goat from lo2. The fan page does not aim to offend anyone. Content only for entertaining or humorous purposes.
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Figure 15.

Information about an official fan page of the goat

One of the main mechanisms used in humorous transformations was anthropomorphisation, which drew upon the common way of presenting the goat in the media discussions. For instance, the original photo from the commencement ceremony (on the left) was first published on the school website, but soon afterwards it was deleted. The slightly changed version – the goat looking like a gangster wearing sunglasses and smoking a cigar was published, with the caption that it is an upgraded version of the profile photo. The caption was in English:

The original photo from the meeting:



(S. 18)

Fan page version:



My boys gonna kill you anyway

Figure 16.

Actual photo of the goat and the edited version – goat as a gangster – with glasses and a cigar

-Trójkąt, gaśnica jest?

-Nie ma, ale wiozę trzech delikwentów w prezencie

- Do you have a warning triangle and a fire extinguisher?

- Nope, but I am transporting three culprits as a present



Koza z LO2, 6.05.2016. (S. 18)

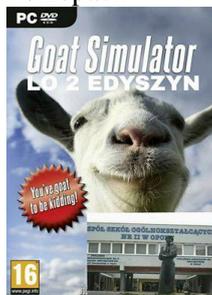
Goat from LO2

Figure 17.

The role reversal

The popularity of the subject itself and its frequent occurrences in the media was ridiculed in the following way:

Premiera 8.05.2016 tylko w najlepszych sklepach



Celem gry jest poinformowanie o Twoim istnieniu jak największej ilości osób poprzez Facebook'a, gazety, telewizję oraz inne media! Zaskocz odbiorców i wyskocz np. z bagażnika samochodu i posikaj się na dziedzińcu szkoły! (7.05.2016) (S. 18)

Out on 8.05.2016 available only in best stores

The purpose of the game is to inform as many people as you can about your existence, using Facebook, newspapers, television and other media! Surprise the audience and, for example, jump out of a car boot and pee yourself in the school yard!

Figure 18.
Creating a cover for a special edition of Goat Simulator
(a game where you play a goat)

Sarcastic comments included references to the original words which described the so-called cruelty to the animal, some others – to the live reporting from the schoolyard:

Koza maltretowana w opolskim liceum. Zobacz film. Uwaga drastyczne 18+ (S. 1)	Goat abused in an Opole high school. See the clip. Attention – drastic – 18+.
Najnowsze zdjęcia z dziedzińca LO 2. Zaraz wysyłam do ekipy TVN24. #JeSuisKoza(S. 18)	Newest photos from the LO 2 school yard. Sending to the TVN24 [the Polish news station] team. #JeSuisGoat

Figure 19.
Comments making jokes of the media

3.2.3. Comical Coincidence

The interesting fact about the case that gives it an extra flavour is that coincidentally the surname of the school secretary is Maria Koziół (which means ‘male goat’ – a common village name). When she answers the phone, she usually says: “Drugie Liceum, Koziół, słucham” (The Second High School, Goat speaking, Can I help you?). These words infuriated the callers wanting to complain about the school policy of treating the animal – they shouted: “How dare you keep on joking?!”, “What a school!!!” and usually they hung up quickly throwing down the phone.

4. Conclusions

The practical joke concerning the goat described in present paper could be classified as a *stunt* type as it burst unexpectedly “in the public spaces and redefined everything – without warning or permission” (Marsh 2015: 28). Its audience was collective and the aim was to surprise. Thus, the astonishment of the spectators was essential to its effectiveness. Its main function was subverting the symbolic environment – converting the official city space, which is characteristic of this big school, into a countryside farmyard. The performance also aimed at changing the routines and indicating that life should not be treated so seriously. It may have had a hidden auto-therapeutic message for the young adolescents who were leaving the safe and predictable environment where they no longer belonged. They may have been scared of the adult world that awaited them in which they were to be forced to decide what to do with their lives. Paradoxically, they wanted to play because they felt that for some of them the game was over. This practical joke may be deemed successful as it drew attention of many people. The extent of its popularity though was probably much larger than the initiators had foreseen and would have liked to gain. This case study, devoted to the media coverage and the discussions about the incident that was supposed to be a practical joke, shows that there are many ways people can react to humorous acts. Reaching a consensus is not easy if people represent diverse values and different sensibility. The broad coverage of what has happened in media confirms the thesis that the strong polarization of the society takes place when values, attitudes towards animals or humans, and political correctness are involved.

Fortunately, the incident ended well for all parties involved – the students, their headmaster and the goat itself. The head teacher’s friends bought him a lawn mower for his birthday, which was shortly after all the media coverage. They called it a mechanical goat and commented that probably no animal rights group would be interested in it. They joked that he should use the grass to feed the goat...

Others brought wine and goat cheese. Some of the guests suggested he should organize a school trip to Pacanów, the Polish town famous for Makuszyński's cartoons about a goat who travelled around the world, trying to find his way to Pacanów after he had been told that goats are shoed there ("w Pacanowie kozy kują, więc koziołek mądra głowa błąka się po całym świecie, aby dojść do Pacanowa"). It is a very nicely illustrated book for both children and adults (also the base of an animated movie). Pacanów is very proud of its goat and now hosts a Matolek the Billy Goat European Fairy-tale Centre¹. Some people joke that the school should include the goat into its coat of arms, or make a sculpture of a small goat and put it next to the sculpture of the school patron – the prominent 19th century Polish writer Maria Konopnicka – in the schoolyard.

Successful pranks may live for a long time. We could consider it as either bad or good news. One may wonder how much truth there is in the statement that regardless of the effort of the teachers, "pranks are the real memories that students carry with them forever" (Busbee 2008: 48). This will probably be true for the Opole class that wanted to be remembered. Everyone associated with the school will have a joking matter for a long time. It is good that also the students responsible can laugh at the event, even after the scary and unpleasant threats that their practical joke would be severely punished. The school is now well known in Poland – not only for its significant educational achievements, but also because of this memorable practical joke that has been taken very seriously.

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