# YOUNG PEOPLE IN POLAND AND GERMANY – SELECTED ASPECTS OF THE ANALYSIS

## Młodzi w Polsce i Niemczech – wybrane aspekty analizy

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## Abstract

This paper discusses selected aspects that characterize youth in Poland and Germany taking some selected aspects of the sociological, and comparative analysis. In particular, the following aspects that differentiate young people in the neighbouring countries are presented in the context of transformations occurring in Poland and Germany: family, the perception of school and the role of education, leisure time, including time spent in virtual reality, the perceptions of faith and religion. Which have been placed against the background of the transformation of both societies over the last decades.

On the basis of the data presented, the text is an attempt to describe the reasons for the changes, and explain them in a broader theoretical context.

**Keywords:** youth, family, peers, school, education, significant others, leisure time, religiosity, Poland, Germany.

## Streszczenie

W artykule omówiono wybrane aspekty charakteryzujące młodzież w Polsce i w Niemczech w perspektywie socjologicznej i porównawczej. W kontekście przemian zachodzących w Polsce i w Niemczech w szczególności zwrócono uwagę na te obszary, które nadal różnicują młodzież w obu sąsiednich krajach, takie jak: rodzina, postrzeganie szkoły i rola edukacji, czas wolny, w tym czas spędzany w rzeczywistości wirtualnej, postrzeganie wiary i religii. Umieszczając je na tle przemian obu społeczeństw, na przestrzeni ostatnich dekad.

Biorąc pod uwagę zaprezentowane dane, tekst jest próbą opisania przyczyn zachodzących zmian i umieszczenia ich w szerszym kontekście teoretycznym.

**Słowa kluczowe:** młodzież, rodzina, rówieśnicy, szkoła, edukacja, znaczący inni, czas wolny, religijność, Polska, Niemcy.

## Introduction

Issues relating to young people's attitudes, beliefs, and opinions have been in the scope of scientific interest, especially in the social sciences, for many years. Consecutive generations of youth, growing up in constantly changing social, political, and economic circumstances, provide grounds for carrying out research projects, and updating the existing scientific knowledge in this respect. The paper presents selected aspects that characterize youth in Poland and Germany in a sociological and comparative perspective.

Why is it important to know what a young generation thinks? Obviously, the point is not just the epistemic significance of the collected information, that is undoubtedly valuable for the researchers in this field. The diagnosis of what is important for young people, what their priorities are, and whether they are identical to the priorities of adults, is a perfect reference point to sketch the image of a young generation from that is entering adulthood, or being on that threshold. Transition to adulthood is an important moment of making crucial decisions concerning the choice of one's personal development path, and professional life. But it is also a time when young people's opinions crystallize, and when they make choices regarding family and accommodation. It is the time of facing first obligations, as well as dealing with the privileges of adult life, such as the form and direction of one's social activity, and the necessity of determining one's position in various fields in the context of a pluralistic, but at the same time polarized society. The increasing complexity of contemporary reality does not help making life choices. Hence, it is most interesting to investigate young people's opinions in this respect.

Studying opinions expressed by youth is also of significant practical value. Young people, as teenagers at the threshold of adulthood, constitute a specific emanation of a compulsory education system that they have been a part of for years. This prompts questions as to the effectiveness of education, and its significance for the individual, society, and state. Additionally, this provokes questions as to the extent to which education responds to the challenges and needs of contemporary times, and, what is frequently overlooked, of the future. Knowledge and skills acquired by young people will be, after all, mostly utilized in the years and decades to come.

The opinion of young people is also important in a situation of social change, which is not always anticipated by those in power, a situation which we are currently experiencing in many countries, for example, on the occasion of protests related to climate protection (e.g.: Fridays for Future), which has taken many young people to the streets in Germany, but also in Poland, or the mass protests in Poland (very often young people), at the end of October 2020 (in connection with the judgment of the Constitutional Tribunal).

## Priorities

Traditionally, one of the most important issues analysed in the context of young people is education, considered in the context of its tasks and responsibilities.

The needs and challenges of education are discussed, for instance, by B. Jałowiecki and Z. Kwieciński (Jałowiecki, 2006; Kwieciński, 2019, p. 56). Education should contribute to building creative national societies that are open to diversity. Education should support citizen democracy and the free market, but also support workers' rights, direct attention to self-government and locality, as well as to the merging of regional cultures with national culture and universal culture (culture extending beyond the national framework). The extent of neglect in these spheres that concerns Polish society seems not to be diminishing, and the gravest flaws include: extreme ignorance and incapacity for dialogue, intolerance and xenophobia, citizen passivity and mistrust of public institutions, destruction of public media, including their commercialization, ideologization, stirring conflicts, as well as religious influence on public policy making, and the politization of the Church.

Naturally, opinions presented by youth do not stem only from the education system that they were, or still are part of. Young people's opinions simultaneously reflect a conglomerate of beliefs, and experiences of the generations of their parents and grandparents, as well as traditions and ideas communicated at the level of the family, locality, and region. Although the enumerated categories are not static, systematic studies investigating youth opinions allow researchers to determine precisely which spheres are transformed more rapidly, and which remain more stable. For policy makers, and those whose decisions shape the education policy, such studies are a valuable source of information concerning directions of changes, hierarchies of priorities, and designating guidelines for education. It is particularly important in an optimal situation, when policy makers are genuinely ready to utilize such information.

Finally, the collected research data have some prognostic value. Obviously, anticipating the direction of social changes that may occur in the future is the most difficult task. However, data collected at regular intervals makes it possible to observe, and to some extent, predict further trends, thus creating strategies that account for adequate reactions to negative phenomena.

Further sections of the paper will present selected trends, and changes in opinions expressed by young people in Poland and Germany. The comparison of data from distinct, though neighbouring countries, facilitates looking at trends in a given country under a different light, and noticing similarities, as well as differences. I will attempt to describe the representatives of the young generation from both countries as if in a mirror of mutual changes, and this will allow for sketching the direction of transformations adopted by youth in Poland and Germany.

## Characteristics of the studies and presented data

The presented data comes from various sources, the most important being periodically conducted studies of youth in Germany – The Shell Youth Study (18 Shell Jugendstudie, Albert et al., 2019).

Analogous studies, of a similar extent, methodology, and regularity, are not conducted in Poland. Systematic studies investigating youth opinions carried out by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) may serve as the closest equivalent to German studies. Polish studies are more limited thematically and methodologically, but also demonstrate the occurring transformations and trends.

The Shell Youth Study is an empirical study of attitudes, values, habits, and social behaviour of young people in Germany, carried out systematically since 1953. In 2019 its eighteenth edition was published. The study utilizes a mixed methodology and is targeted at the age group from 12 to 25 years old. The last edition was carried out with a group of 2 572 young people who participated in a questionnaire survey as part of the quantitative study, and 20 young people from the same age group with whom extended interviews, lasting about two hours each, were conducted as part of the qualitative study; that stage lasted from the beginning of January till the end of May 2019 (Albert et al., 2019, pp. 325-332).

Studies carried out by CBOS in Poland concerned students of the last classes of primary schools, subsequently students of middle schools (gymnasium), and following the education reform of 2017, again students of the last classes of primary schools. The studies were carried out systematically, rather regularly since the 1990s, and in the last decade in: 2010, 2013, 2016, and 2018. Since the same methodology has been utilized in all editions, the common thematic range in all questionnaires is retained. Consequently, it is easier to follow changes in trends, and make comparisons with the results obtained in previous years (Grabowska, 2019, p. 7).

"The study was carried out in a randomly selected group of 80 post-middle schools throughout Poland, maintaining a regular curriculum – general education secondary schools (lyceum), secondary technical schools (profiled, vocational, or technical secondary schools), and basic vocational education schools (excluding special vocational training schools), in 69 localities. An auditorium questionnaire method was employed. Each interview consisted of one school class (45 minutes)" (Gwiazda, 2018, p. 17).

As mentioned in the introduction, this paper attempts to outline the situation with respect to the young generation of two countries.

Different methods of data collection, and conditions in which the studies were carried out, as well as some discrepancies in the thematic ranges, and the formulation of the questions enforce some degree of caution when comparing the data from the two countries. Nevertheless, the results indicate the strength and direction of transfor-

mations. Referring the outcomes to similar thematic ranges in a neighbouring country significantly enriches the analytical perspective.

An additional value of the presented data is the cyclical nature of the studies, illustrating evident transformations of opinions and values over the years. Whenever possible, cyclical data from both countries will be juxtaposed. Particular attention will be placed on these areas in both countries which demonstrate the largest differences and similarities, as well as those in which the changes are particularly dynamic. These are the basic criteria for the selection and description of specific thematic interests.

## Family and peers

This analysis focuses on investigating whether the family environment in which young people are brought up differs in Poland and Germany.

According to the study results (CBOS 2018), 75% of youth are brought up in full families in Poland. However, almost every fifth person (19%) lives with only one parent, mostly with a mother, much more rarely with a father, and the least frequently with other relatives such as: grandfather, grandmother, aunt, etc. Table 1 contains detailed data.

Table 1. Responses regarding people with whom respondents live; studies of the National Bureau for Drug Prevention (KBPN), CBOS Youth 2018

| Do you permanently live: | Respondents' answers according to the study period | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2003 | 2008 | 2010 | 2013 | 2016 | 2018 |
| | percentage | | | | | |
| - with both parents | 82 | 81 | 81 | 77 | 75 | 75 |
| - with mother only | 12 | 13 | 12 | 15 | 15 | 17 |
| - with father only | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| - with some distant relative (e.g. with grandmother) | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Different situation | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 |

Living with only one parent or carer obviously results in a more difficult financial situation. The financial situation is assessed as good by 58% of youth living only with fathers and by 53% of young people living only with mothers. Interestingly, living with both parents is related to a deeper religiosity declared by youth as compared to those living with only one parent, or carer.

Another issue related to the financial situation is the experience of parents' labour migration. Among the studied youth, 17% indicated their parents' labour migration

within the last 12 months, including 2% when both parents migrated for work, which is a similar level to that of 2016.

An additional positive correlation is noticeable in the case of youth who assess their financial situation as poor. Among those who indicate that at least one parent, or carer works, and yet the financial situation is poor, the greatest percentage is constituted by students in vocational education schools – 26% and profiled, vocational and technical secondary schools – 24%. In previous years this correlation was even more evident. It should be noted that during the last decade the percentage of youth who declare living without parents substantially increased: it was 2% in 2008, and 7% in 2018.

In the context of data relating to youth in Poland, the situation of young people in Germany is slightly different (Schell, Jugendstudie 2019). The first difference as compared to Poland concerns an evidently lower percentage of young people brought up in full families –70% of studied youth in Germany declare living in full families (in the age group from 18 to 21 years old). In these studies, full families also comprise those situations when young people live with at least one parent. Assuming this approach, in Poland the percentage of such youth would be much higher – over 90%. Significantly more often than in Poland, German youth indicate living independently (14%), in a group in a rented flat (8%), or with a partner (7%).

Both groups also differ in terms of ethnicity and nationality. Polish studies do not account for the percentage of foreigners, or people who have the right of residence but, for instance, do not have Polish citizenship, are not of Polish origin etc. This obviously results from the small percentage of foreigners in Poland generally. According to available data, in 2018 foreigners constituted 0.6% of the population, while in Germany it was 11.7% (Eurostat, January 2018).

Data collected from youth in Germany indicate that in 2019 individuals who did not have German citizenship constituted 15% of the study group (in 2010 it was 11%), and those with the so-called migration background accounted for a further 15%. According to the definition of the German Statistical Office (*Statistisches Bundesamt*), *migration background* refers to a person who did not acquire German citizenship at birth, or when one parent did not acquire German citizenship at birth.

In the group of youth with the migration background, the largest part consists of people from Poland, from the former Soviet Union republics, and from former Yugoslavia. The next most numerous groups come from Muslim countries, including Turkey and Arab states. Together they form two thirds of the entire group of youth with the migration background.

As with regards to the financial situation, it should be stressed that about 20% of youth in Germany live in families that are at risk of a negative social impact and relative poverty, i.e., income lower than 60% of the mean household income in the country. Eurostat data as of 2018 indicate that people at risk of poverty constitute 19% of the population in Germany, and 19.5% of the population in Poland (Eurostat January 2018).

Even this rather cursory analysis of the data signals a direction of change, that is indicative of an ongoing process of family fragmentation, which is not new at all.

Particularly, if we go a little further back, and consider as a starting point, for example, a multi-generational family from the end of the 19th century, consisting very often of several generations of great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, children, but also uncles, aunts, , cousins, and unrelated people (helpers, servants, etc.) living in one house.

In such a perspective, a nuclear family comprising only parents and children, which began to dominate in the second half of the 20th century in Poland, could also be seen as a crisis and a breakdown of old patterns. Today, although this is still the most common form of family, it is also becoming less and less numerous.

So this process is an element of a specific continuum, where at a given moment, different countries (or even regions within the same country) are at different levels of its advancement (as described above, the rate of people growing up in full families is much lower in Germany than in Poland).

There is also no reason to believe that this process will be reversed in the near future in both countries.

Of course, it is very important to support families in fulfilling their functions, and this support should respond to their needs. In my opinion, it is important, especially in these days, that decision-makers, supportive circles, particularly in more conservative, or rural areas, do not stigmatise too hastily members of single-parent families, specifically young people, and family arrangements that differ from the traditional and highly affirmed model of a full family - mother and father with child(ren), which is often counterproductive.

In the situation of increasing right-wing, conservative attitudes in Poland, but also in Germany, there is, in my opinion, a strong temptation to value positively only the correct traditional model, which, despite its obvious advantages, is not always a guarantee of an optimal educational situation, for example, in the case of a significant dysfunction, and even pathology of a formally full family.

It needs to be highlighted – every single family, whether, or not it is a traditional one, is unequivocally equal to a crisis situation which requires help and correction.

## Significant others

What are the most important trends relating to the significance of peer groups, parents, and other significant people?

The studied youth in Poland (CBOS, Youth 2018) indicated an increased significance of parents as mentors, and a simultaneous decrease in the importance of the peer group as the basic reference group in terms of spending leisure time, conversations, and discussions. However, this trend does not refer to close friends. There is an evi-

dent trend towards the limiting of the circle of closest friends and relatives with whom young people spend more and more time, and whom they trust, while other relationships become more superficial. It may be assumed that this trend also includes those with whom youth have contacts in social media, where the number of friends does not necessarily mean the quality of the relationship.

The significant person which young people want turn to, and may rely on in difficult moments is primarily the mother – 59% of responses. Next, according to the number of responses, these are friends – 34%, partner – 30%, father – 29%, siblings – 13%, and finally peers – 3%. The same question was asked in studies conducted in 1994, and then the order of indicated people/groups was similar, though the friends' position changed to a more significant one. In 1994, 27% of youth indicated friends, the same number as the father. The mother, though still is the most important person, received then 54% of responses, whereas partners – 23%, siblings – 14% and peers – 5%. These results seem to additionally confirm the already indicated hypothesis concerning the narrowing down of the group of close people who are trusted, and the specific polarization in the relationship circle of the youth. Simultaneously, a gradual change with respect to the most trusted person is visible, transferring trust from a member of the family to a potential partner, or friends, though the mother remains the closest, and most trusted person.

In Germany, exactly the same questions were not formulated, yet also in that country researchers wished to investigate young people's relationship with their parents. In 2019, in an age group ranging from 12 to 25 years, as many as 92% of the respondents indicated good, or very good relationships with their parents; this constituted an increase of 2% as compared to 2002 when 90% of the respondents answered similarly.

Simultaneously, young people were asked whether they would like to raise their children in the same way as they were brought up – which, theoretically, serves as a declaration that verifies beliefs concerning one's upbringing. Data collected in Germany illustrate an interesting trend in this respect. Generally, all groups declare that they would like to copy their upbringing model, but this declaration correlates strongly with one's place in the social hierarchy.

The respondents represent five social classes (correlative to income, education, parents' wealth, social capital, and profession). In the studies carried out in 2019, about 86% of people from the highest class declared that they would like to copy their upbringing model; in the subsequent three groups the responses ranged from 70% to 80%, but in the lowest class it was only 51%. Simultaneously, recent years (the question was asked in 2002, 2006, 2010, 2015, and 2019) indicate the strengthening of this trend, but only among the three highest classes. The opinions expressed by young people from the two lowest classes evidently fluctuate, though even here an increase was observed between 2015 and 2019.

Declarations regarding the willingness to duplicate one's own upbringing pattern indicate the low potential of generational conflict.

As researchers point out, "a constitutive element of the modern family is a partnership, which, although positive, is sometimes perceived as a weakening of the rank of upbringing" (Forma, 2014, p.265), which may contribute to the socialization shift, which will be discussed later in this article.

## Leisure time

Declarations concerning forms of spending leisure time always constitute a significant element in the diagnosis of young people's interest. This is when they do not need to fulfil any duties or learn. Traditionally, the most common responses referred to spending time with friends, with a partner, and only then with parents. No significant changes are observed in this respect, namely: in Poland young people still preferably spend their leisure time with close friends (57%) and a partner (40%). The following positions are occupied by: the mother (24%), siblings (18%), peers (15%) and, finally, the father (10%) (CBOS 2018, p. 22).

The question remains as to the forms of those meetings. Over half of the respondents (54%) declare that they spend more time with their friends in reality than online (the Internet). However, it must be remembered that at the same time almost every third young person spends the same amount of time, or more with friends online (the Internet) than in reality.

Although this does not mean that the majority of young people have transferred their contacts to virtual reality, it may be assumed that the moment when the frequency of virtual contacts will exceed those in the real world is approaching. Figure 1 presents detailed data in this respect.
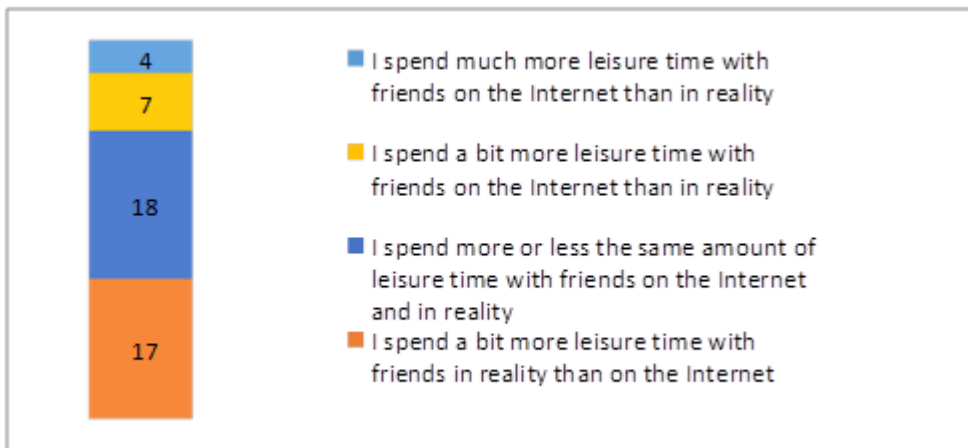


Fig. 1. Responses to the question: *Do you spend more time with friends in reality or on the Internet?*, KBPN and CBOS Youth 2018 studies

For some years now, the amount of time spent by youth online has been progressively increasing. In 2013 it was on average 3 hours, and five years later it was as much as 4.31 hours. It should be remembered, however, that a great polarization can be observed here: almost one fifth of the respondents (19%) spend more than 6 hours on the Internet daily, and at the same time 27% of the respondents declare that they limit their online activity to no more than 2 hours every day. Moreover, on average, boys spend more time on the Internet (4.44 hours), than girls (4.18 hours) (CBOS, Youth 2018, p. 204).

Individuals who mostly transferred their activity to virtual reality generally cope less well with interpersonal relationships. Among these 17% declare that they have no friends in their class, which accounts for 8% of all respondents. For 36% of them no teacher is a mentor, and the same is true for 23% of all respondents; almost every fifth young person (19%) believes that violence is a serious problem in school, and only 11% of all respondents share this opinion (CBOS, p. 27).

Do young people in Germany spend their leisure time differently than Polish youth?

The collected data demonstrate that Polish youth first of all choose meetings in the real world (with peers, partners, etc.). This is declared by over 80% of the respondents. The next positions are occupied by sports activities declared by every third person; social media and Internet surfing account for about 35% of the responses. In this context, the evident dominance of responses connected with Internet surfing is visible in Germany – 50%, while in 2002 it was only 26%.

Face to face meetings with other people account for 55% of responses, while in 2002 it was 62%. Using social media in leisure time is declared by every third young person in Germany (34%). The role of TV is significantly decreasing – it is indicated by every third person, while in 2002 TV accounted for 59% of responses. In Poland, TV was declared by 18% of all respondents, in 2013 it was 20% (CBOS, p. 183).

The presented data should be treated with caution since some of the discrepancies may have resulted from a slightly different methodology. However, just as in the previous analyses, these data demonstrate analogous trends in both countries. It may be actually assumed that youth in Germany are more advanced in their transition to the virtual reality than youth in Poland. Both groups demonstrate an evident trend towards a specific intermingling of the virtual and real realities, and maintaining contacts with the same people, both online and offline.

Easy accessibility of virtual contacts seems not to eliminate ethnic divisions. This is apparent especially in Germany where, due to the much larger ethnic mix of society, a greater majority of youth without the so-called migration background (79%) declares that most of their friends also do not have such a background. Only slightly less than every fifth person in this category (18%) declares that the percentage of their

friends is equally divided between those with the migration background and those without it (Shell Jugendstudie, 2019, p. 26).

Of course, the increasing amount of time that young people spend online can be worrying.

When it comes to contacts with others on the Internet, there are voices of researchers, teachers and parents that raised concerns that there is a risk of devaluation of values, including closeness, friendship, even despite the electronic versions of common roots, e.g. for example on a joint portal (Karkowska, Skalski, 2010). In my opinion, however, it is not possible to draw overly negative conclusions here either, because, as it can be seen from the studies outlined above, when there is a very large circle of friends, the type of selection takes place, and only a small part of them is considered to be the closest circle of friends. Contacts with them are much closer and more intense, beyond the surface of the Internet.

This can be seen in situations of large social movements of young people, or protests (e.g. related to climate change – such demonstrations took place both in Poland and Germany). Obviously, the motivation for participation are the specific beliefs of young people, but also, as the author's experience shows, a network of close private contacts, in particular between young people.

Besides, the time spent on the Internet is not just for contacts with others, although this is undoubtedly one of the most important functions.

No less important is the question of how, and for what, apart from communicating with others, the Internet is used as a tool?

We have Polish research in this area e.g.: Młodzi 2018, indicating progressive fragmentation of Internet users, which reflects the structure of society (also very heterogeneous in this area). "The structure of Internet users is clearly differentiated. There are those who use the Internet in a dysfunctional and harmful way (fake news, hate speech, prejudices), but there are also groups who use the Internet constructively and creatively. However, the majority of young people are very average and still makes little use of the potential of the web, despite the increasing amount of the time they spend there" (Szafraniec, 2018, p.8). In the times of dynamic technological progress, the answer to such a situations "should be not only media education programs, but also more widely outlined solutions of social policy, with particular emphasis on smart education" (Szafraniec, 2018, p.8). This is closely related to the quality of education in a given country and its changes.

The need to equip young people with the tools to select information, to critically analyse the content, and to be able to justify their own decisions and views, and to put them in a broader context, to be constructively nonconform, etc. are, in my view, more important than ever. But given Poland's recent experience of reforming the education

system, there is an irresistible impression that this is not a priority, despite the declarations[*].

## School and education

As part of the study carried out by CBOS in 2018, young people were asked about their opinions concerning school and, in particular, how often they feel stressed at school. The same question was posited in three previous surveys, and the collected data unequivocally indicate that the number of students highly stressed at school has significantly increased. Respondents could assess their feelings associated with potential stress at school, and place them in a scale, where score 1 indicated "I never feel stressed, and do not get nervous at school", and score 7 – "I always feel stressed, and get nervous at school". In 2018 half of the respondents (51%) selected top scores of 5, 6, and 7. Five years earlier, in 2013, top scores received 10% less responses. Students who are least stressed (scores 1, 2, and 3) constitute a much smaller percentage (32%). When extreme values on both sides of the scale are compared, it becomes evident that the group that experiences the most stress at school is almost twice as numerous (31%) as those who do not experience such emotion (19%).

Concurrently with these changes, the percentage of youth who declare that they are not appreciated at school, and are not successful there, has increased. With the employment of a similar scale as in the previous question, youth who declared positive experiences (scores 1, 2, and 3) accounted for 40%, and in 2013 it was 55%.

However, the question whether during the current school year a misunderstanding, or conflict with any of the teachers took place was answered negatively by as many as 63% of the respondents in 2018, and by 58% in 2013. Figure 2 presents detailed data.

The collected data demonstrates that it is not the student-teacher relationship that is of a critical gravity in Polish schools, but, as may be assumed, all the expectations in the school milieu that students must meet are stress-inducing. It is difficult to assess as to what extent the negative feelings experienced by students are related to the permanent instability of the Polish education system that has been subject to various reforms in the last few decades. It may be assumed, however, that these changes do not alleviate this situation. Perhaps this is influenced by the school itself, where the value of the real learning function decreases, despite the emphasis on achievements and results of various tests etc. (Melosik, 2013, p. 450).

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[*] A good example is an anti-discrimination education, which is not carried out at all or in a very ineffective way. For more information, see the report „Great Absenteeism about anti-discrimination education in the formal education system in Poland Research Report / Wielka nieobecna – o edukacji antydyskryminacyjnej w systemie edukacji formalnej w Polsce Raport z badań)" edited by Marta Abramowicz, Society for Anti-Discrimination Education, Warsaw 2011.
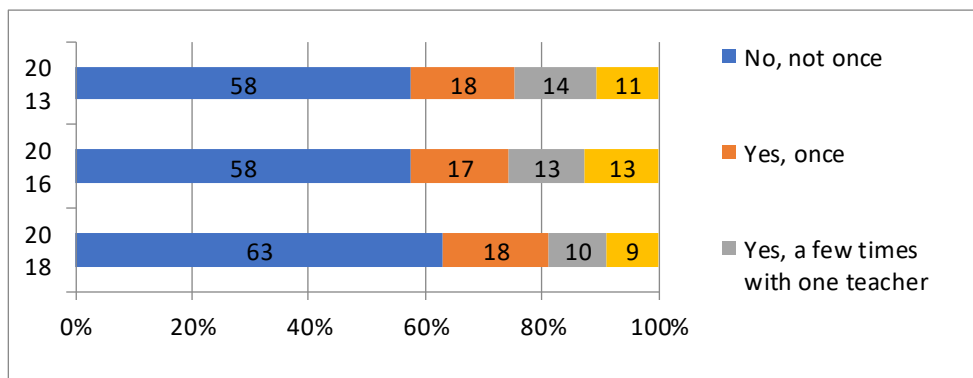
Fig. 2. Responses to the question: *Did you experience a misunderstanding or conflict with any of the teachers?*; KBPN and CBOS Youth 2018 studies

Studies conducted in Germany focused on young people's beliefs concerning social justice. The majority of youth living in Germany declare that this is a country in which everyone is offered the possibility to gain an education consistent with one's talents and skills. At the same time, every second person in a worse financial situation from lower social classes does not believe that Germany is characterized by justice.

In the context of school education in Germany, it should be added that in the age group 12–21 years old, almost every fifth person repeated a school year, including 25% of boys and 17% of girls. In the age group 18–21 years old, every third person had to repeat the class. Compared to previous years, this shows a slightly decreasing trend.

Data collected by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA, 2010) also demonstrates the problem of repeating a school year in Germany, where the percentage of 15-year old students who had to repeat the class at least once amounted to almost 9.2% in 2009. In Poland it was only 1.9%. If compared to other European countries, there are such states where this percentage exceeded 15%, e.g., Luxembourg – 22.2%, France – 17.8% and Portugal – 22.4%. The average for the European Union amounts to 7.7%.

Considering the above data, it should be remembered, that there are different approaches to repetition of class in Europe (Leppert, et. al., 2005, p. 216). There is a group of countries, e.g. Scandinavian, where there is practically no repetition of class until the end of primary school, and on the other side, there are countries, mostly in southern Europe, where the repetition of class is relatively frequent. Plus, there is a the third model, to which Germany belongs, where class repetition is used in the last years of primary school, before the selection stage, and this is due to the slightly different strategies adopted by different countries.

When analysing the effectiveness of class repetition, it is worth pointing out the results of research on the ineffectiveness of second years (Leppert, et. al., 2005,

p. 219), the rate of progress of pupils who repeat, even if it does not decrease, is much slower than this of non-repeaters. Also, the overall progress of students in countries that do not have a common secondary education (e.g. Finland) is higher than in countries where this phenomenon is more common.

## Selected differences – Poland vs. Germany

Another area of analysis, the differences between Poland and Germany is the issue of religiousness. On the one hand, religiosity as such reflects general trends in a particular society; on the other hand, it demonstrates transformations that involve the young generation in the first place. Although this paper discusses only selected trends, considering the situation in Germany, the background of religious transformations should be mentioned. In terms of faith and the frequency of religious practices, the discrepancy between Eastern and Western Germany is still evident. Germany constitutes a unique mosaic, and in fact, a combination of the lack of religious beliefs in a large part of society in the Eastern lands of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), the presence of two Christian denominations (Evangelical and Catholic) in other regions (the former Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)), as well as the increasing role of Islam. Presently, the largest group in Germany consists of people who declare no religious denomination (38%), the second position is taken up by Catholics who account for almost one third of society (28%), and members of the Evangelical church constitute one fourth (25%) of German society (Die Forschungsgruppe Weltanschauungen in Deutschland, fowid, 2018). By comparison, the situation in Poland seems far less complicated; almost 90% of society declare religiosity (the problem of the lack of religious beliefs as compared to Germany is marginal).

In 2017, Catholics constituted 93.7% of the Polish population (Central Statistical Office GUS 2020). However, also in Poland regional differences between the indices of religiosity in south-eastern and north-western regions have become evident, and amount to several dozen percent (compare: http://iskk.pl/). Nevertheless, the level of religiosity remains significantly higher in Poland as compared to Germany. Still, transformations relating to Polish youth indicate the decrease in the level of religiosity, including a less frequent declaration of being a religious person. As demonstrated by the conducted studies (OBOP 2018, p. 153), the decrease in religious observance has been evident for about 10 years, during which period the percentage of declared atheists among students has increased by 12%, and indecisive ones by 8 percentage points. At the same time, the percentage of those who declare deep faith has remained stable. The growing polarization of attitudes regarding religiosity is evident. Additionally, boys declare a relatively weaker attachment to religious observance than girls.

Irrespective of religious practices, 63% of young people in Poland in 2018 identified themselves as believers and deep believers. Every fifth young person was unde-

cided (21%) and the remaining 17% identified themselves as nonbelievers. Figure 3 presents detailed data.
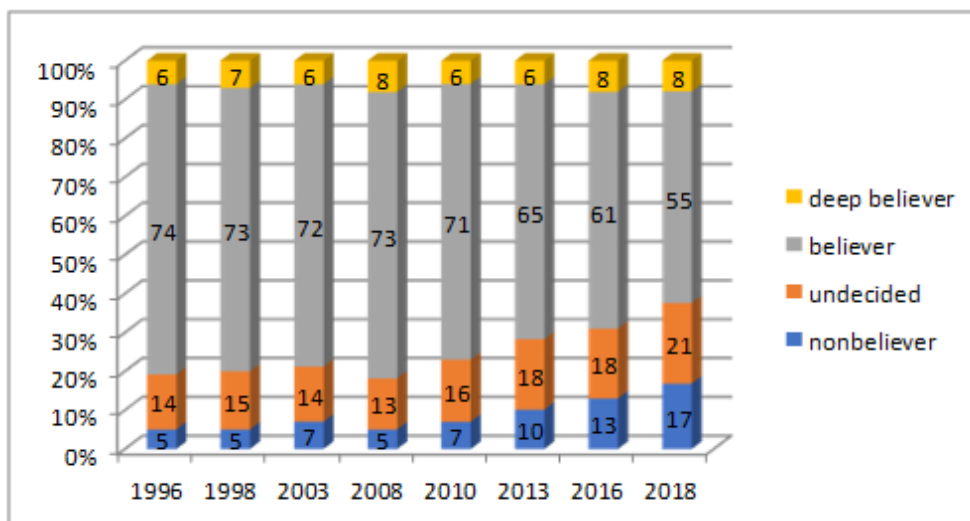


Fig. 3. Responses do the question: *Irrespective of religious practices, do you declare yourself to be…?*, CBOS statutory studies:1996, 1998; KBPN studies: 2003, 2008, 2010, 2013, 2016, 2018.

In German studies the questions were formulated slightly differently, but the results nevertheless indicated that faith was important only for 39% of youth declared as Catholics, and only for every fourth person belonging to the Evangelical Church. The situation is opposite as regards Muslim youth – two out of three persons (73%) were convinced about the significance of faith. Similar results were obtained as refers the frequency of prayers. In Germany, only every fifth young Catholic (18%), and slightly more than every tenth Protestant (13%) prays at least once a week, while more than half of young Muslims (60%) do so.

In Poland the question concerned the participation in the holy mass. In 2018, participation at least once a week was declared by slightly more than every third person (35%), whereas ten years ago it was indicated by more than half of young people (49%), and in 1996 when this question was asked for the first time the percentage was 63% (CBOS, p. 156).

Opinions of German youth regarding the institution of the Church itself are also interesting. Almost two thirds of the respondents are glad that such an institution exists (69%), with 75% of young Catholics, 79% of Protestants, and almost half (45%) of those who do not declare attachment to any denomination sharing this opinion (Shell Jugendstudie 2018, p. 156). As indicated by the results of the studies, young German people's values change from more pragmatic ones to those aiming at broader social goals. The previous editions of studies carried out in 2002, 2006, and 2010 identified

the dominance of the so-called *pragmatic generation* (German: *pragmatische Genera-tion*) manifested by the wish to possess, for instance, a small house, two children, a garden, etc. The studies carried out in 2019 indicate the growing dominance of those for whom the so-called *social future* (German: *gesellschaftliche Zukunft*) is important. This is evidenced in the popularity of such movements as the so-called *Fridays for Future*, known in Poland as *Youth Strike for Climate.* Inspired by the teenage Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, these movements aim at drawing attention to the necessity of immediate changes with respect to the climate policy. It was youths that were mostly involved in protests that took place in March 2019 featuring several thousand young people in Germany (Staude, 2019).

Nevertheless, these young people turn to tradition as regards many issues. For instance, the majority wishes to recreate a traditional family model in which they were brought up, or at least this is what they declare since their actual choices may be different in the future. At the same time, in majority, they do not want to excessively sacrifice themselves to professional obligations. This generation expects a professional career to be adjusted to a personal life rather than the other way round.

It should also be remembered that despite these general trends, young people constitute a very heterogeneous group, and one of the criteria that influence their beliefs in Germany is their background, including ethnicity.

Youth with the so-called migration background, in particular associated with the culture of Arab countries and Turkey, are more intolerant towards homosexuals and Jews as compared to the general population. They are also more religious and faith is important to more than every second person of Turkish or Arab backgrounds. In the entire population of youth, this issue is important to less than every fourth person.

Simultaneously, youth with the migration background share a belief in the promise of upward mobility in the new homeland on the one hand, and a higher frequency of school failure, repetition of a school year, on the other. Belief in upward mobility is interesting since the same studies indicate that it is specifically personal background that most strongly influences the possibility of achieving success in life in Germany (Shell Jugendstudie, 2019). Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that being aware of these discrepancies, youth still assess them more favourably than in the countries of their origin.

Finally, the issues concerning differences between Eastern and Western lands of Germany are of interest. 2020 marks 30 years since German reunification. Shell studies demonstrate further levelling off the differences between both parts of Germany, including the beliefs of youth. However, the attitude towards democracy is still slightly different in both parts of Germany, and its assessment is more positive in the Western regions.

Youth from all over Germany perceive their future optimistically. However, for many years young people from the former GDR were evidently less optimistic than their Western peers.

Young people in the Eastern lands are also more polarized. Despite strong populists ideas, including rightists ones, as compared to the West, some of them more often declare evidently leftist attitudes, partly a legacy of the former socialist GDR. As concluded by authors of the study, although the differences between these two attitudes do not intensify, the two sides nevertheless grow apart.

Taking into account Germany and Poland, there is another significant difference namely in the proportion of right-wing youth, which has been visible for many years now. Depending on the methodology, this group is on average three times more numerous in Poland than in Germany as a whole (derexindex.eu, 2020). Although, as K. Szafraniec notes (2018), on issues such as attitudes towards the church, abortion and sexual minorities, it is precisely the young who are clearly more left-wing than the rest of society in Poland. However, in comparison with their German peers, this comparison is no longer so favourable (Koseła, Jonda, 2005, Shell, 2019).

The specific popularity of right-wing ideas, up to the extreme-right and nationalist ones, also results, in my opinion, from the reaction to the increasing complexity of reality, and the fragmentation of society with the desire to return to the old ideologies explaining the world, even if schematically but simply and without an excess of nuances (Lambkin, 2001). It is also a counter-reaction to the belief in the growing power of the left-wing camp, which, in their opinion, threatens the traditional order. A similar mechanism is visible on the opposite side, where slogans are formulated about the need for progress. The key here is, in my opinion, the role of the centre of power, which has real tools at its disposal for dialogue, or for the strengthening of a conflict.

## Conclusions

Many theoretical approaches offer possible explanations for the transformations occurring in modern societies; however, I would like to draw attention to three of them.

The first one points to the so-called reflexive modernization, which means that social change may happen selectively and follow various directions (U. Beck et al., 2009, p. 13).

At the same time, it is characterised by the considerable selectivity of the areas that may be affected. This explains the phenomenon described above, where some of the beliefs of young people place them as being left-wing (e.g. movements related to the need for climate protection, the need for equal rights for sexual minorities, or such numerous and violent demonstrations concerning the reproductive rights of women in Poland, autumn 2020).

Of course, as this has already been mentioned, the group of young people is very heterogeneous. This can be seen again on the streets of Poland (October/November 2020) because thousands of very often young, and very young people have been demonstrating against the tightening of reproductive rights, it is then their peers on the other side who represent the extreme right-wing circles.

Although, as M. Boni in the report Młodzi 2018 (Youth 2018), adds: "instead of homogeneity, there is diversity. It is diversity that creates the 'multitude' of the young generation. And it is more a plurality of attitudes than just a polarised community (although there are elements of polarisation between certain groups too)". Especially when decision-makers with real power polarise society (Szafraniec 2018, p. 229).

The metaphor of "global teenager" may also be symptomatic here, referring to one who moves freely in the global village, knows languages, is open and tolerant. It connects him more with his peers in other, even distant countries and continents, with similar skills, rather than with representatives of his own nation with a lower socio-economic status. Such a teenager, in the post-modern era, can be also characterised by the necessity of "reinvent themselves" in the face of the ever-changing world, to create new trajectories of your own development (Melosik, Szymański, 2016, p. 17).

In my opinion, this highly selective process, which concerns in principle only more privileged groups and most determined and gifted individuals, has led to divisions in society, which scale had been very underestimated, leaving its course to itself for a long time.

After all, not all young people can and want to "reinvent themselves", and entering into the old patterns is very often really convenient and much easier.

Not all young people had access to good-quality education, e.g. language education, and not all of them had the skills to migrate, verify negative stereotypes, or succeed in another city, or country. And even if it partly happened, it turned out that socialisation experiences, mental differences, or those related to low cultural capital are not so easy to eliminate, and in a crisis situation they can easily become a breeding ground for xenophobia, distrust and a relapse to old, not always positive, patterns. This is particular in a situation when postmodern models promised universal success, strengthened by the common belief in Poland about a good and very good level of public education, and equal opportunities for all, as well as high expectations and faith about the quick catching up of civilization backwardness to the West (this is present especially in the eastern German, much less in Poland), are not fully confirmed.

The second area of theoretical reference, assumes the gradual transformation of values from materialism towards postmodernism – "the order of fundamental values of Western society shifts from materialism to post materialism – from broadcasting the highest level of physical maintenance and security, to a stronger emphasis on the sense of belonging, self-expression and quality of life", (Sztompka, 2005, pp. 33-40).

Changes in this area can now be seen primarily in Poland – today even more clearly than ever – with slogans from demonstrations of thousands of people in Poland in the background (related to the above-mentioned disagreement with the judgment of the Constitutional Tribunal on October 22, 2020), that were concerning primarily freedom of making decisions and choices, pluralism, equal right for marginalised and excluded groups, objection to traditional authorities like state and church. What is significant – the slogans raised by the demonstrators (sometimes very abruptly) correspond very accurately with freedom of decision and choice, pluralism, equal rights for marginalized and excluded groups (like LGBT community). And a very clear opposition to such traditional authorities in Poland as the State and the catholic church. Such a polarization of attitudes was visible much earlier (Koseła, Jonda 2005, CBOS), but the plane of the conflict never before has taken on such a violent, open and universal form as in the present protests.

It fits in the increasing role of conflict in the collective identity, in which the conflict is related to issues such as: identification with a specific political option, or interpretation of history, that does not coincide with the one, represented by the opponents (Przybylski, p. 165).

I would like to stop for a moment on the issue of protests, very often young people, in the fall of 2020 in Poland, e.g. in the field of defending the rights of LGBT people, climate issues, etc. J. Kurzępa previously named this phenomenon the so-called "social exhibitionism" (Leppert, et. al., 2005, pp.123-133). Although in my opinion such an approach, with all the correctness of its assumptions, may evoke also some wrong connotations, that diminish the value of the cause that the demonstrators are fighting for. Such a form of mass protests is nothing new in history. e.g. the protests of suffragettes at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries were also very critically assessed at the time, etc. Although I agree with the author, that the form of this social exhibitionism has various motivations, ranging from compensatory and therapeutic nature, through provocative and narcissistic, to simply expressing the resistance.

This proves the next process of changing the Polish society regarding the already mentioned socialization shift, or at least a significant part of it. In any case, the loss of the position of the catholic church, but also of the school and, indirectly, the State as an institution in its educational function is very visible here. I would also add here that the media are currently having a highly polarized nature, where on the one side, boundless trust in the media "from my own bubble" often precludes any belief in the truth of the message of the opposite ones. Although what connects young people is limited trust in the media as such.

I would not speak so clearly about the loss of the socializing importance of the family. Although I believe that it is no longer as dominant in terms of worldview as in previous decades, but its role is still significant.

In Germany, the division between the east and the west remains active, although the questions about the impact of the reunification process on the identity of young people in the eastern federal states, and the degree of their identification with the current democratic system are still on-going. When analysing the situation in Germany, the key word here is the ambivalence of young people – in the interpretation of the past, in looking at the future, as well as in political views and divisions. They are much sharper in the former East Germany than in the west of the country. The former GDR states, compared to the former West Germany, are the place where there is still greater aversion to migration and refugees, greater support for the right-wing AFD (Alternative for Germany) party, and still lower rates of socio-economic development – despite undoubted progress in this point.

I will risk saying that the partially accepted philosophy of this process is at fault here, because the fusion of the two German states did not resemble as a partner union, but rather the absorption and unification of the former GDR by the western Germany. According to clear benchmarks set by the dominant western Federal Republic of Germany. I strongly believe that the integration would have been more efficient, if the process had been more partnership-like, and had not rejected the former East German legacy so widely.

On October 3, 2020, exactly 30 years have passed since the reunification of the two German states, many studies documenting the experience of the last 30 years have been published on this occasion. Against this background, there is for sure a success story today, despite the difficulties and divisions, that still exist, not only among young people.

A good summary here is the title – the division of Germany no longer exists since the fall of the wall. Germany is reunited – but still not grown together, (www.dw.com, Greb, 2020).

Looking at the process of youth change in both countries, and taking into account the current changes generally, a number of questions arise, answers to which go beyond the scope of this text. However, I am convinced that it is important to re-initiate discussion, so as not to passively accept changes offered by decision-makers. I am putting them behind the authors of the report Młodzi 2018, even if it concerns only Poland, the questions posed in it are legitimate in every country. I will start by asking questions about the sense and necessity of change. In the beginning I will start with questions about the sense and necessity of changing the education system. An issue which is very topical in Poland, in view of the recent reform of compulsory primary and secondary education.

What is the reason, and why exactly is the change to be made? What is the guarantee of its effectiveness? To whom, and for what purpose expensive changes, leading e.g.: Polish education in a socially undiscussed direction?

To what extent can education reforms ignore the complex of factors that affect the development of the younger generation?

How in the era of universal access to the Internet, and in the world of virtual reality, is the school supposed to fulfil its basic function of a knowledge transmitter? The need for an urgent response to this question is particularly evident today during a pandemic of COVID-19.

Why is there insufficient reflection in education reform, and its link to the global discussion of its problems and responsibilities in education worldwide? Which concern the crisis of the entire educational model, dates back often to the 19th century? (Szafraniec, 2018, p. 15).

Finally, I would add from myself – how to minimise the temptation to make changes in education resulting from the current vested interests of parties and interest groups, which is probably not entirely possible, but it is certainly a matter to talk about.

Since the turn of the year 89' there have already been 8 ministers responsible for education in Germany, and 21 ministers of education in Poland, which shows how politically variable this area in Poland is, and yet there is still the impression that certain things have not changed much, and the social changes observed result "from the still centralized and statists education system, strengthening historical and structural chaotic circumstances of the society that educates". The best reaction to this situation appears to be an attitude of understanding that facilitates the designing and implementation of humanistic changes in education (Kwieciński, 2019, pp. 31-34).

Therefore, if we want the young generation to change the world for good, let's first help them understand it (Szafraniec, 2018, p. 15). Z. Melosik proposes here a number of statements that can serve as inspiration in the "culture of dispersion" (Z. Melosik, M.J. Szymański, 2016, p.41):

- to have the core of identity – in a situation of change, it is important to keep the core of one's identity, one's beliefs, and despite being open to change, to keep one's self
- to accept their subjectivity and their own value
- to shape critical thinking, and distance to things we cannot influence
- to establish and cultivate lasting human relationships
- to shape respect for high and popular culture, without favouring any of them
- to take care of and value so-called non-media forms of contact and expression, "face-to-face contacts", which is important today in times of pandemic
- to know the cultural message of their circle of civilisation, despite having different opinions about it
- to appreciate the value of written communication, books etc.
- to have the ability to organize thoughts, meanings, concepts, and assign them to an already existing structure
- to have the ability to concentrate and contemplate, and relax when needed.

There are some special areas that must definitely be noted, and these are: "demographic conditions, changes in democracy, increasing dysfunctions of the globe related to the environmental crisis, predictability and unpredictability of the processes, and effects of the digital revolution, and finally a forecast for further development" (Szafraniec, 2018, p. 14).

And as K. Szafraniec continues to stress, "in order for us to do this, we need an army of good teachers, a staff of competent experts, a large amount of money, serious public debate, and the ability to form political coalitions around reforms", (2018, p.15).

Although it may sound trivial, education is still a great, and maybe the only hope of modern times, but at the same time it is extremely vulnerable and susceptible to manipulation, what makes it even more important.

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