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### **TEEN-AGED CITIZENS: REALISTS OR PESSIMISTS?**

Generacja młodych Polaków, która dopiero wchodzi w życie stanęła w obliczu wielu poważnych dylematów. Brak miejsc pracy i związana z tym migracja zarobkowa, nieadekwatność wykształcenia w kontekście potrzeb rynku, niedostateczna aktywność społeczna, zachowania ryzykowne. Poznając problemy, postawy i opinie młodych możemy opisywać kondycję całych społeczeństw.

**Słowa kluczowe:** młodzież, problemy społeczne, socjologia, pedagogika społeczna.

The generation of young Poles, which is becoming adults currently, has faced many serious dilemmas. Labour migration triggered by lack of employment opportunities, a mismatch between demand in the labour market and the skills, insufficient social activities of young people and the risk-taking behaviours problem. Having known teenagers' problems, opinions and attitudes, describing the current condition of the whole societies may be possible.

**Keywords:** youth, social problems, sociology, social pedagogy.

In many academic debates, talk-shows or private conversations, a topic of the current situation and opportunities of the young generation is clearly visible. The youngsters' problem of adaptation to the rest of society has been always absorbing attention of adults. Currently, the new generation of young Poles, which is about to become mature citizens, is facing many dilemmas. In terms of the most important ones either labour migration triggered by lack of employment opportunities, a mismatch between demand in the labour market and the skills, insufficient social activities of young people or the risk-taking behaviours problem are mostly mentioned. In many publications, the condition of the Polish society is described with something called "the young people situation." Sadly, however, the discussion has been based on the theses assuming the countless stereotypes and generalizations which, unfortunately, have preserved in forms that have nothing in common with reality. It forces, though, the academic world to the scientific recognition of factors which describe "the main features of young people as well as their attitudes and aspirations and their role in the society."<sup>3</sup>

Creating an accurate definition of *youth* is not an easy task. As M. Filipiak writes "from the sociological point of view, youth consists of two perspectives. Firstly, young people are perceived as a social category which includes young individuals in the chronologic and biologic sense, though, not quite similar with their social features. Secondly, young people remind me <youthfulness>, an abstract concept that define position which youth occur in or the development phase where they currently are."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Adamski W. *Młodzież i społeczeństwo*. – Warszawa, 1976. – P. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Filipiak M. *Subkultury młodzieżowe wczoraj i dziś*. – Tyczyn, 2001. – P. 31.

A. Kłosowska, however, defines *youth* a bit different. According to her, "youthfulness is a sociocultural category built on the universal principles of physiological mechanisms."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, K. Kosela resolves the problem acknowledging that "the beginning of adolescence is appointed by pubescence, the end of it either by establishing a family or undertaking a job."<sup>6</sup>

The aims, aspirations and life plans are issues which are repeatedly described in both psychological and pedagogical literature. The importance of these problems comes out by the fact they are something valuable for teen-aged people because of setting their life paths. All of them, more or less specified, require a lot of effort and sometimes even luck, too. Hence teenagers' opinions on their aims, aspirations and life plans seem to be essential for understanding the young generation. This knowledge creates an opportunity to support them more consciously, as well as to overcome the barriers which they are facing.

In your opinion, what is the most important factor in achieving success?	Data in percentage (%)
Diligence	25,6
Having good contacts	23,6
Higher education	21,2
Resourcefulness in life	14,8
Ambitions	10,5
Other	4,3

(source: own researches<sup>7</sup>).

<sup>5</sup> Kłosowska A. *Socjologia młodzieży // Kultura i społeczeństwo*. – 1987. – № 2. – P. 33.

<sup>6</sup> Kosela K. *Młodzież // Encyklopedia socjologii*. – Warszawa, 1999. – T. II. – P. 252.

<sup>7</sup> The survey carried out on on April/May 2006 on sample of 388 people (secondary school pupils from Zamość, author Mariusz Gwozda).

Success, as it turned out, is possible to achieve thanks to work, competence and good contacts, too. The distribution of answers presented in the table proves the consciousness of young people in terms of necessity for commitment and putting an effort on what they do. Own exertion and competence are commonly accepted attributes which are crucial on the path to self-realization. Unfortunately, a large share of “Having good contacts” answer is a worrisome fact. It means that having informal connections and relationships are the significant barriers of achieving targets and goals according to young people. Significantly less, in life success context, teenagers chose “resourcefulness in life” and “ambitions.” It may be interpreted that perhaps these are not essential factors but can be useful, though.

The world seen from a young man perspective seems to be an interesting diagnose of country’s current social condition. Concerns signalized by the youth can be duplication of adults’ opinions. However, it must be assumed that they can show the difficulties which teenagers intentionally identify with barriers that may have an influence on their life plans.

According to you, what are the most important problems which you and your family are facing with currently?	Data in percentage (%)
Bad finance condition	40,2
Unemployment	31,0
Connected with further education	13,0
Health issues	9,7
Other	6,1

(source: own researches<sup>8</sup>)

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem.

Gathered empirical data showed that main problems which teenagers and their families are struggling with concern mainly social sphere. In the foreground, issues such as bad finance condition and lack of job are visible and as a result, they trigger absence of stabilization and hinder realization of the life plans. Dilemmas connected with further education were chosen much less. Moreover, the decision whether to study and its consequences, may be perceived as less absorbing. Health issues, as it turned out, are the least important problems of all. It is difficult to determine whether it results from a good health condition of the family members or answering in context of self frame of mind.

Teenagers’ position is a specific test of efficiency and foresight for their parents. Life choices are the derivative of the social reality in macro- (country) and micro-scale (family) where they have to live in. That is the reason, it does not surprise why on the young Pole’s long list of concerns, unemployment is on the first place. Lack of job or little satisfying market offers create difficulties which significantly hinder young people’s start to adulthood. Unemployment, therefore, is a phenomenon which is in the foreground in context of the young generation’s anxiety list. Another one could be poverty which has its own place in public discourse (it is widely discussed by specialists and journalists). Its manifestations are visible in closer or further surroundings each one of us. Just like diseases, which are the next problem mentioned by young people. Health is a value in itself, it conditions a life quality. What is more, good frame of mind is a necessary condition for realizing plans for life. This is the reason, why this category locates so high on the instructions list. It is hard, however, to clearly illustrate moral decline in context of young generation’s concerns. It cannot be excluded that it is all due to the need of a reference to ethics in private life and social activity. It is, perhaps, an expression of discontent of the quality of public life.

If thinking about current social conditions, what are you afraid of the most?	Data in percentage (%) <sup>9</sup>
Unemployment	38,4
Poverty	12,0
Diseases	11,6
Moral decline	10,4
Social pathologies	6,0
Terrorism	4,4
Corruption	4,0
Political crisis	4,0
Economic crisis	3,2
Delinquency	2,8
Collapse in health system	1,5
Education issues	1,2

(source: own researches<sup>10</sup>)

The factors which have an influence on how people act are their values and beliefs. These determinate setting life goals the most, they are the basic criterion of choices made in different situations. Like M. J. Szymański claims, “cognition of the modern teenagers’ hierarchy of values has a multiple meaning. It enables the better orientation of young people’s state of consciousness. It allows to understand better the aims and aspirations of young generation. It facilitates understanding the teenagers’ necessities of life as well as analyzing youth attitude. This knowledge serves predicting further aims and behaviors of young generation which is substantial for forecasting social development.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The answers do not sum to 100, 3 answers were possible

<sup>10</sup> The survey carried out on on April/May 2006 on sample of 388 people (secondary school pupils from Zamość, author Mariusz Gwozda).

<sup>11</sup> Szymański M. J. *Młodzież wobec wartości. Próba diagnozy.* – Warszawa, 1998. – P. 14.

For you, how important are: (data in percentage %)	Very important	Rather important	Not quite important	Unimportant	Hard to say
Family	76,9	15,1	1,3	1,3	5,5
Health	61,0	24,3	6,3	4,2	4,2
Friends	46,0	39,9	7,0	3,9	3,1
Free time	46,6	30,3	15,5	3,4	4,7
Work	39,2	37,4	12,1	3,4	7,9
Religion	31,8	40,6	16,6	5,1	5,9
Education	22,9	51,3	16,6	4,7	4,7
Patriotism	24,6	34,7	20,6	8,2	11,9
Politics	7,5	16,9	30,1	27,2	18,3

(source: own researches<sup>12</sup>)

The analysis of the above data finds that 9 out of 10 examined subjects (the sum of “very important” and “rather important” answers) rate family values the most. It shows specific conservatism of the young generation. Family, despite the appalling opinions of authorities, has been (and will be?) the central point of reference and the main goal (aspiration) for young Poles.

From the other mentioned answers, health took second place in terms of values rated the most by youth. It is an acknowledgement of many similar researches. This category, therefore, usually locates very high in the hierarchy of values. The awareness of the need of wellness is, as it can be easily figured out, a condition of a good frame of mind and an inevitable factor of the desirable quality of life.

Moreover, the researchers pointed out the allocentric values – close and cordial relationships with friends and classmates, which

<sup>12</sup> The survey carried out on on April/May 2006 on sample of 388 people (secondary school pupils from Zamość, author Mariusz Gwozda).

probably does not need leaving a comment. According to what could be expected, teenagers highly rate leisure values, indicating free-time activities. A high position of values connected with work may be interpreted as the awareness of a significant role of work which plays in market economy and, moreover, that quality of work have a big influence on young people's lives. Somewhere in the middle of the hierarchy of values, educational values place. Assuming the fact, that school teenagers were the subject of examination, it can be acknowledged that the position of this value is relatively low. What is more, the very low position of religious values can be found surprising. It may be triggered by

the typical for youngsters scepticism about the Catholic Church or disillusionment among the them. At the very end, prosocial values took place. Young people limit their interests to rather narrow circle of problems of their peer group, showing little interests in social activity such as political engagement.

The world seen by the young is a specific test of organizing the social life created by their parents. Concerns expressed by teenagers are a kind of a guidepost which shows the way the social changes should follow. We, adults, are responsible for shaping the reality in such way that our children's dreams and hopes could be possible to realize.

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