emecon
Employment and economy in Central and Eastern Europe
emecon.eu

Youth and work in Poland

Bernadette Jonda

This article focuses on selected results, taken from a comparative empirical youth study from 2011 to 2012 that deals with the 'Change in Norms and Values among Youth'. It mainly concentrates on one aspect: the value of work for young people in Poland, as described by them in group discussions and interviews. Work in general is crucial to being able to realize the visions for the future of Polish youth. Work is a goal in itself, as well as a means to achieve other goals. Particular aspects are put in relation with two youth studies carried out in earlier decades – in 1990–91 and 2001. The text contains numerous quotations originating from the interviews.

Key words: Polish youth, change in values, valuable work for young people, labour as a desirable goal, working abroad, connections, work-family balance

Introduction

Changes in norms and values have been for decades a diversely and sometimes controversially discussed topic in Europe, above all in politics and the social sciences. While for some a continuous degradation of values is seen, expressed in, among other things, the erosion of traditional ways of life (e.g. marriage) or in the weakening importance of religion and church, others believe to be able to diagnose – as for example Ronald Inglehart (1977) over several decades – a turn away from material, towards 'post-material' values. Then again, this is rejected by a third group – such as Helmut Klages (2001) – who speak of a 'value synthesis'. These discussions are inspired by extraordinary societal events that are in the rule not without consequences for the norm and value systems of the populations concerned. In this way the systemic transformations in Poland and the former GDR contributed significantly to destabilizing the cultural order and the value systems of the people living there.

Whether and in how far a norm and value transformation has taken place in young people in Poland and Germany, is being researched in our comparative empirical youth study 'Change in Norms and Values Among Youth in Poland and Germany' at the *Institute of Sociology of the University of Halle-Wittenberg*[1] since 2011, in cooperation with the *Willy Brandt Centre for German and European Studies* at the University of Wrocław in Wrocław/Breslau (Poland).[2]

The overall study consists of a qualitative (group discussions and interviews) and a quantitative research phase. In this article selected results from the qualitative research phase are presented, namely, those directly or indirectly related to the central topic of *work*[3], and derived from group discussions and interviews with young people in Poland carried out in 2011–12.

Because this is the explorative part of the youth study, there is explicitly no hypothesis tested here. Rather, it is a research report, which also only concerns that part of the study that took place in Poland. In the analysis of the results, also knowledge from other current Polish publications is being taken into account. The formulation of hypotheses and testing is planned for the spring of 2013 in the framework of a representative youth survey in Germany and Poland.

In our study 'Change in Norms and Values Among Youth in Poland and Germany', over 360 young people in Poland between the ages of 16 and 19 had the opportunity to speak about various issues in the context of group discussions (in their classrooms) and in individual interviews in 15 different cities in Poland.

To determine the cities where school classes would be chosen for the survey, the following criteria were applied: geographic and historical differentiation of the regions, density of contact with Germans. Smaller cities as well as larger ones were included, where young people originating from different social contexts and attending different types of schools (e.g. vocational schools and general secondary schools) were interviewed.

In order to identify and characterize a shift, at least one reference point from the past is necessary. For our study we have access to two such reference points. One consists in the results of a German-Polish youth study from 1990–91[4], and the other is the knowledge gathered from the 2000–01 study 'Youth in Poland and Germany at the beginning of the 21st century'. Because the problem of identifying norm and value change was also the central concern of both of these studies (in 1990-91 and 2000-01), they may help the present study to diagnose a further shift in German and Polish youth over the period of the last two decades.

These two previous studies were until now the only comparative German-Polish youth studies ever made in Germany and Poland. The quantitative study made by a German-Polish research team[5] in 1991 documented the life-situations of the younger generation in Germany and Poland at the end of the East-West division of Europe and the beginning of the normalization of relations between two sovereign countries. Ten years later again a German-Polish youth study was undertaken, this time consisting of both qualitative and quantitative parts. The group discussions and interviews of 2000 were the inspiration for the present study. The representative written survey conducted at the end of 2001 (Koseła and Jonda 2005) is today also an important reference point for our study: Though our actual comparison will in fact be made only in the quantitative phase, already various references to that study are proving valuable for the present study. Even then, the topic 'values and value change' were of central importance.[6]

Important values

The different definitions of values used in the social sciences are unhelpful. The tradition of conceptualizing of values is visibly influenced by Thomas and Znaniecki groundbreaking classic study of Polish immigrants in America (van Deth and Scarbrough 1995). They defined values as "any datum having an empirical content accessible to the members of some social group and a meaning with regard to which it is or may be an object or activity" (1918: 21 cited by van Deth and Scarbrough 1995: 25)

Based on this definition used other researchers – and also we – the definition: A value is shared by the majority of a group general idea about what is good or bad, desirable or undesirable (Joas 1997). Therefore the group discussions in our study were opened with the question 'What is important to you in life?'. First reactions to the question usually included such values and goods as family, friends, success, money, work, love, health, the future, and recognition for being able to change something in society. The relevance of these values was somewhat changed in comparison with results of earlier studies (cf. Koseła and Jonda 2005), but family, friends and love continued to rank highly. Some values – compared with the results of the earlier studies – gained in importance, such as money, success and 'self-realization', whereby, for most, money was not inherently important ('Money is not an end in itself')[7], but only because, without money, many things are not possible, such as starting a family, pursuing interests or avoiding the stress of a life in continual fear of perhaps not being able to make ends meet the next day.[8]

It would be outside the scope of this contribution to investigate all the values that are relevant in the lives of the young people we questioned. Therefore we limited ourselves here

to a few economic aspects that lead us to the topic of 'work' as a relevant value, and 'money' seems to be an element binding many of these aspects.

Often the following context emerged in the discussions: 'We'll have money by having a well-paid job, which, in turn, we believe we'll get when we get a good education', 'and for that we're here, in school'. This line of argument was often stressed by pupils attending schools that prepare for higher education.

In vocational schools however, the attitudes expressed towards money seemed to be different: On the one hand some pupils cited the commonplace 'Money can't make you happy', but others stressed that 'Everything you need to live you can get only with money'.

The following two quotations from vocational-school pupils in central Poland reflect the worries of these young people:

> *More and more people live from the first to the first of each month. What will I do if there's not enough, if the money is too little? More and more people already have to do without different pleasures, but I mean costs and bills and food. And so fewer and fewer people are starting families and having lots of children – they decide on one child and that's it, but before, it was different* (X,IIvs).[9]

> *But now the state has made the only goal just having money, because when somebody has no money, they can't be happy and they don't even exist because they can't afford anything. I'm not talking about luxuries but also about elementary things, and it's just getting worse and worse* (X,IIvs).

This does not mean that vocational pupils feel hopeless or have no ambition to get further training or study in order to 'someday be in a better situation' and to escape the precarious conditions that many already know first-hand. Many of them do.

The disadvantaging and markedly diverging levels of earnings in Poland cause frustration and dissatisfaction especially in young people who can only with difficulty fulfill their personal needs and wants, because

> *in a society of consumption, the poor and the rich do not live in separate cultures. They must live together in one world, which however is dominated by the interests of those who have money* (Szafraniec 2012: 5).

Important for youth in Poland as elsewhere is thus the struggle for self-realization, in the rule expressed as the need for further education and 'self-investment'. Here persistence in striving for a goal is important; one must 'develop a vision of one's own life, a goal, and slowly realize one's own plans'.

Occasionally we met in the group discussions young people who were not only mainly focused on their own well-being, but who had also developed a vision for all of society:

> […] *because we're the future of our people, as John Paul II once said. If we don't invest in ourselves, everything will stay as it is. As we move ahead, we'll start up firms, factories and businesses, but there will also be new jobs, and thus we have to invest in ourselves. It will be well enough if nobody disturbs us in doing it* (X,IIIgs).

Labour-market situation - Selected aspects

For a long time Poland was one of the few countries able to survive the global economic crisis of recent years almost unscathed. But now (fall 2012) signs of the crisis in Poland are clearly and increasingly noticeable.

One indicator of this is the growing number of unemployed. This development is especially troubling in terms of young people aged up to 25. According to estimates released

by Eurostat in August 2012, the number of unemployed in Poland in this age group was 25.9 percent.[10]

And the number of unemployed youth in Poland is on the rise: in September 2012, there were almost 19,000 more young people out of work than in the previous month. It is feared that this trend will continue.[11]

Table 1: Progression of unemployment in Poland in recent years (in thousands)

	2005	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**[12]	**2012**[13]
Total	2773.0	2309.4	1746.6	1473.8	1892.7	1954.7	1982.7	2141.9	1994.9
Age 24 years and under	626.1	476.7	332.7	304.6	425.9	428.3	416.1	437.2	
25-34	778.5	641.6	485.1	418.7	547.8	570.9	581.9	637.5	

Source: Author's assemblage of GUS data (GUS 2011).

The Polish sociologist Krystyna Szafraniec, coordinator of the extensive report 'Youth 2011' commissioned by the Polish Chancellery of the Prime Minister[14], explains the high unemployment rate among young people as an impact of the current economic and financial crisis (Szafraniec 2012: 4). This reinforces the insecurity felt among young people who are trying to find a satisfactory entry into the labour market. Table 1 shows the recent progression of unemployment in two age groups in Poland.

Although youth and young adults are becoming better educated – Poland has experienced in recent years an impressive expansion of education – many Polish graduates will face the consequences of the economic recession: high unemployment, fixed-term contracts and low incomes upon starting work, thereby creating an obstacle to their professional and personal plans. Szafraniec speaks of the danger that the crisis is bringing about a 'lost generation' of young, well-educated people who will remain isolated from the labour market and lack the energy to ensure their own economic survival (Szafraniec 2011: 13).

Work as a fundamental value

Among the most important values of Polish youth is work. Work is crucial to their being able to realize their visions for the future. In our study the theme of work was explored in all of the many interviews and group discussions. Work is a goal in itself as well as means to achieving other goals. This brief description may seem to posit nothing exceptional, since work and having promising perspectives for work are certainly already important elements in the lives of most young people in most countries. Yet it is worthwhile to reflect somewhat on this. To do this, two German-Polish youth studies shall be mentioned which were carried out in earlier decades – in 1990–91 and 2001.

The comparative 'German-Polish Youth Study' from 1990–91 (Melzer *et al*. 1991) shows that, for example, among youth up to age 24 then in Poland, 44.5 per cent worked, 48.8 per cent attended school, and only 6.5 per cent pursued higher studies.[15] The topic of 'unemployment' in communist Poland was so far from reality that it wasn't even mentioned in the then-used questionnaires (Koseła 2005). Ten years later the situation had hugely changed: In 2001 youth respondents indicated their status as follows: 34.2 per cent worked (i.e. 10 per cent fewer than in 1990/91), 16 per cent were university students and 49.8 per cent school

pupils (i.e. none admitted to being unemployed). At the same time, in 2001 32.3 per cent of the interviewed Polish youth indicated that there were unemployed persons in their families (for West Germany this was 5 per cent, and for East Germany 18.9 per cent) (Koseła 2005: 35).

Poland's share of occupationally active youth (34.2 per cent) was in 2001 ten percentage points larger than Germany's (24.5 per cent), which meant that Polish young adults generally entered 'adult life' earlier than youth in Germany (Koseła 2005: 34). But already then a growing interest in higher education was evident.

The reasons the educational phase in Poland has so greatly lengthened are several. For one thing, this has to do with basic changes in the labour market brought on by the change of societal system (transformation from centrally-planned to a social market economy): high unemployment, raised expectations/demands of employers; and for another, with the educational reforms of the 1990s that led to a decline in the importance of vocational schools and the higher professional aspirations of youth – who previously at age 18 would in large numbers have begun a steady job in a traditional vocation. Not unimportant against the background of high unemployment is the 'waiting strategy' many young people have today adopted: 'By the time I finish school, maybe something will have changed for the better'.

In more recent years this change has deepened, with Polish youth now entering the labour market later than their peers in the rest of Europe (Striker 2011: 32). The share of occupationally active persons aged 15 to 24 in Poland is currently the smallest among all EU countries. To compare, in the third quarter of 2009 the Dutch labour market was made up of nearly 75 per cent young people, while in Poland at the same time this was scarcely 35 per cent. The average age at which at least 50 per cent of the population is on the labour market was at this time 20 years in the EU. In Poland it was 22 years (Striker 2011: 32).

The Polish young people are conquering relatively late the internal labour market. They usually have a problem finding jobs: as mentioned, youth unemployment in Poland has for years been more than twice as high as in the general population. One reason for this, some Polish researchers (Sztanderska 2010; Szafraniec 2011:13) claim, is the expectation of high earnings on the part of the ever better-educated young people. This corresponds to the results of our qualitative study: today's school pupils expect and hope that they'll find 'good' jobs when they finally enter the labour market.

But what is a 'good job' for young people in Poland? They say it is above all a well-paid job, and further, one that allows them to 'do something that's fun'. But many of the young people we asked are prepared to forego an interesting job activity in favor of good pay, which is the main criterion. At the same time most are aware that it will be difficult to find a 'good job'. Above all in the smaller cities where the interviews took place, many emphasized that in their region it was especially difficult to find permanent employment at all. We typically encountered pupil statements such as:

> *'A job should be above all well paid.'*
> *'I don't think you can find a good job without a diploma.'*
> *'Everybody is afraid of finding not only no job like what you dream of, but no job at all, because now they talk a lot about unemployment and masses of people losing their jobs and leaving the country in order to work.'*
> *'I'm just afraid of ending up in the gutter'* (M,IIIgs).

The main options – in the face of joblessness – are starting a small business – or emigrating. 'Either we'll try to start our own company, or try to find some kind of job, or we'll leave the county. That's the third option'. But not everywhere does the situation seem so difficult. Young people from bigger cities say that 'you can find a job anywhere but you have to search for it, and experience counts". An important factor which makes finding a good job easier is also foreign-language knowledge. Respondents often judged their language competence to be pretty high, which may also be partly why they see themselves ready to take the risk of emigration. However, public-school teaching of foreign languages is assessed as poor. Private

lessons are therefore important but bring additional costs which not every young person can afford. ‘They teach badly at school’; ‘I should have been taught all of this at school. At the end of the day, we learn much more in private lessons than at school’.

Overall, very much of the activity and thinking of Polish young people surrounds the topic ‘work’, and in the group discussions and interviews it became clear that work is one of the fundamental values in their lives. One may of course ask whether ‘work’ is really the fundamental value here, or whether simply fear for the future, or the wish for more material security and a higher standard of living, is decisive for the pupils' concern with the importance of ‘work’. We will take up this question in the representative survey in 2013. According to the analysis of the group discussions however, we believe that ‘work’ is the decisive value category. As already indicated above, most youth acknowledge the following dependency: Work makes it possible to earn money, and money is one means to being able to reach other goals in life.

In the following, various aspects are addressed that emerged in the study in connection with work.

Dissatisfying job situations, precarious employment conditions

A job is not only a source of income, but also an important source of contentment and satisfaction, and a platform for self-realization. To have no job is thus grounds for particular dissatisfaction (Szafraniec 2012: 4). But also work conditions that not only do not fulfill expectations, but also do not guarantee a minimum of stability, are experienced as a burden.

Young people in Poland can anyway relatively seldom rely on a stable employment relation – the youth report ‘Youth 2011’ also diagnoses this state of affairs. They are offered mainly fixed-term contracts that, as in other EU-countries, were introduced in hopes of increased financial gain and the ‘flexibilization’ of the labour market. That which was introduced as the ‘Flexicurity’ model, protects however, in the eyes of young workers, only the employers, and leads to the condition of those on limited contracts becoming a second-class workforce in comparison to those who have contracts of unlimited duration – with worse working conditions, worse perspectives for development, and lower incomes. The economic and financial crisis increases the risk that well-trained but unemployed persons must take jobs not at all commensurate with their abilities or their particular career desires (Szafraniec 2012: 4).

> *Today, you have to get training and decide on an occupation with a future. But there's no scenario that says your diploma means you have to get a job in what you trained for* (M,Ivs).

> *A real joke is that I just talked to somebody – around 26 years old – who said he had just finished his Master's degree and will probably do his Doctorate, and the best job he can get is as stocker in S. (a drugstore); Or, you meet people who have finished university and now work in supermarkets* (X,IIvs).

At the same time, there are examples of, precisely, young people who practically right after university have begun an impressive career and not seldom taken over top management functions. But because such persons do not belong among the group of our study participants (they were only young people between the ages of 16 and 19), they are not mentioned further. Still, it is notable that various income and lifestyle levels among younger generations are currently strongly divergent: Along with young people in precarious work and living situations, there are also those who are very successful and prosperous.

School and occupation

Particularly among the vocational-school classes we spoke to, the opinion was expressed that pupils were well prepared there for later job activity, even if it isn't always easy for them to find a job directly after they finish school. Many therefore plan to study further. In contrast to communist times when it was usual that a common worker (e.g. a miner) could earn more than a university professor, currently one of the factors influencing income level the most is education: the more thorough and the higher the education is, the higher generally is income (Szafraniec 2012:4). The investment made in education is today more highly returned in Poland than in other countries of a comparable development. 'A Master's degree earns an almost three times greater return than a Bachelor's (57 vs. 17 percent), and a doctoral title raises the return a further 19 per cent over the Master's.' (Szafraniec 2012: 4).

But also in this regard, more realism is becoming apparent: With the great educational expansion of recent years, the number of people with degrees has risen enormously, which has brought a devaluation of the diplomas: 'Before, if people had studied and were educated, it was 'wow!", but now? Nothing – everybody has their Master's'.

Nevertheless, higher studies are worthwhile, in the opinion of most of the interviewed young people. Still, not all think that the required industriousness and great effort is rewarded. There was this exchange of opinion in a vocational school in one large Polish city:

> *'It's worth it', 'If you've got no degree, you've got nothing at all!'*
> *'Today education and experience have to be looked at together.'*
> *'That's not so – you've got to have connections.'*
> *'The worst thing is, when something like a rat-race begins. It's hard when lots of people lose their jobs because somebody high up in management wants above all to look good and doesn't even see that he's throwing out of work maybe a father of five kids, or anybody else for that matter – the main thing for him is increasing his own chances by doing it.'*
> *'If I've got the chance to get ahead, why shouldn't I try to get there by any means possible?'*
> *'So over people's bodies, right?'*
> *'It's always like that – if I don't do it, someone will do it instead of me'* (X,IIvs).

This exchange between vocational-school pupils makes clear the band-width of attitudes towards occupational education – from 'it's worth it to learn and get experience', all the way to the viewpoint that nothing makes any sense, because only 'connections' count – whereby also the moral dilemma among youth becomes visible: What means are allowed to make secure one's own future? Today's youth (as of this writing) are slowly becoming fewer than those of earlier birth years and thus probably will not be in such great job competition with their own group as were youth at the beginning of the 21st century – the more numerous children of 1950s' baby-boomers, who then also wanted to get started in occupational life. But today's occupational beginners are nonetheless at a disadvantage, for (among other reasons) precisely those older birth years have often still not found steady jobs and continue to crowd the market, blocking the way for their juniors.

Until they finish school and get onto the crowded labour market, many say 'I want to do as well as possible, so I'll study hard now in order to get a good job.'

Studying hard in order to ensure they get the 'good', well-paying jobs, 'investing in oneself', leads many youth, already early in their school careers, not to choose the type of school corresponding most to their gifts, but the type of school that (they think) will allow them to react best in a given labour-market situation. At the same time Polish public opinion often criticizes the excessive numbers of young people studying (particularly university) fields for which the demand for professionals is very low or non-existent (Sztanderska 2010).

Some respondents stressed the need to be both well-educated and experienced at the same time – an impossibility at a young age. 'Today, a good education is paired with experience".

Early contact with the world of work

For many it is self-evident that already in earlier school years they can get occupational experience, be it through more or less formally organized internships, or by taking vacation jobs. Often these activities have nothing or little to do with their prospective goals for a degree or profession. The money is thus important, if not the main thing here. The money earned is used for special purposes such as an automobile driver's course or simply for 'their own pleasure'.

In looking for vacation jobs, youth can already collect various forms of experience, and often such that force them to give up early their illusions about the fairness of the work world. In any case these are experiences that help to permanently form their vision of the occupational world. For many in Poland it is relatively simple to find vacation jobs, because:

> *We're very compliant workers – employers don't have to pay social security for us. It's often said they can easily cheat young people, and don't need to pay insurance for us* (M,Igs).

But this does not necessarily mean that the work is illegal ('We all get a contract'), but pupils and students still often get the feeling they are being unfairly exploited.

For others it is simply difficult to find work. 'I looked here in the region, but only found something 30km from home, and only through a friend of my uncle – normally you can't get anything'.

Preferred are also vacation jobs in nearby countries: Germany, the UK or Netherlands are considered favorably. For many, geographical vicinity is relevant – it reduces for example travel costs when someone misses family and friends and wants to go home for a visit. Also relevant are the already existing contact networks in these countries which traditionally, or at least in recent decades, have become migration destinations for many Poles. And finally, there is the economic attractiveness of countries known to be those where Poles can earn relatively well.

For youth temporary foreign jobs can provide pocket-money and/or at least valuable experience. '[A]nother reality' are the words pupils questioned often used to describe their foreign work experience. In Germany for example 'they work less and earn much more' than in Poland. The work atmosphere is often quite familiar: When asked about relations with work-mates, one young Pole who had worked for two weeks in Bavaria, reported: 'We were above all Polish, since almost only Poles worked there in Munich; out of ten workers there were seven Poles, only two Germans, and one Turk'; or, 'There were ten thousand workers, out of which for sure three thousand were Poles. So at work we spoke only Polish'.

Vacation jobs in other countries are not hard to find – many youth claim. 'There are many 'temps" firms, so it's very easy. I went to one where they sent out workers only to BMW'.

Working abroad

Although many young people in our study told us that: 'in Poland you can also get rich', many of them imagine their future workplace as more likely to be abroad:

> *If nothing changes in our country, then I'll leave here because it makes no sense to stay. I've spoken to people who have worked in England. They are more satisfied there than with living here in Poland, and in general they [...] come back just because of friends and family and only during the holidays* (S,Igs).

> *My sister emigrated and she and her husband found work and are still there, and have started a family* (M,Ivs).

These two quotes are characteristic of the description of the situation of many thousands of young people who have left Poland in recent years. It is estimated that two million mainly young people have emigrated because of the difficult situation on the Polish labour market. Most of the emigrants of both sexes (57 per cent male, 43 per cent female) were between 18 and 29 and saw themselves with no job prospects in Poland (Trappmann 2011). This not only has to do with poor earning potential in Poland, but also because of the high formal and financial barriers put in the way of starting up one's own company, or simply being self-employed. Moreover, the social climate that has recently prevailed in Poland – mainly since the 2010 'Smolensk catastrophe' – has played a role in their considerations to leave the country and build their futures abroad. Many seem to be tired of the ever-deteriorating political climate and worn-out issues.

They want to live in peace and prosperity. The reality abroad, however, is sometimes different: Often they have to work below their qualifications. Only about 10 per cent of those with a university degree work at their level of education. Therefore, the migration of the educated young Pole is both a 'brain drain' and a 'brain waste' (Szafraniec 2011: 80)

Nevertheless, emigration is seen as positive in Poland (Szafraniec 2011:131). On the one hand the subjective, personal effects are generally positive. Young people can earn money and gain experience, and living abroad is for many a great opportunity to perfect language skills and learn about a different everyday reality, which can be beneficial for future economic activities. One has the opportunity to form new cultural capital and it's a possibility for escaping at times oppressive family and other social structures.

After being abroad, those who decide to return to Poland often bring home their 'foreign" lifestyles and show certain positive mentality changes. And finally, they contribute their acquired know-how and earnings to help revive the Polish economy.

Migration – permanent and temporary – may be considered to have been almost a normal event in the lives of many young people in Poland. At the macro level, Polish sociologists and politicians see the migration of young people in its both positive and negative aspects (Iglicka 2010; Jończy 2010; Kaczmarczyk 2008; Slany 2011).

It was seen as positive at the time when the baby-boomers entered the labour market, and the state actually supported emigration to help resolve tensions existing because of high unemployment. The migration abroad was in a sense [thus also] a 'safety valve' for the political system (Szafraniec 2011: 81).

Today, when the wave of 'demographic highs' is receding and is being followed by a 'demographic hole', a progressive migration of young people is proving to be very bad for the functioning of the state.

Under the aspect of the future professional activity of young people, the opportunity to study abroad is often assessed in terms like those of this respondent:

> *When you study abroad, you can then more easily find a job than if you had studied in Poland. Additionally, you acquire language skills that are now essential – without that, there is practically nothing to hope for* (X,IIvs).

It's tough without connections

In trying to get a good job, many young job candidates find the importance of their competence somewhat depreciated. While also in Poland it is sometimes said that 'whoever wants to, can find work', often in practice it is observed that connections and luck seem to be almost more important than actual job skills.

> *Good contacts are needed, because some who have completed their studies have hopeless jobs, while others who have prosperous or well-connected parents or friends have much better jobs than those who studied and worked very hard to improve their knowledge* (X,IIvs).

They may find this unjust, but their indignation over it is moderated by the reality of the relatively great numbers of those who in fact profit in some way from this 'Vitamin C' (for 'connections').

The phenomenon 'connections' seems to be especially important in the case of professions. Some youth even seem to think that there are several professions that are practically inherited, such as medical doctor or lawyer:

> *Today in Poland it's just very hard to become a lawyer without connections. Practically, they take only those who have a lawyer in the family. You can finish law studies but that doesn't help* (S,IIIgs).

> *You can't say either, once you've finished, how it's going to be with finding work, because the situation can change, you never know. [As a] lawyer or doctor […] you've got to have support […] just got to, because it's hopeless as it is. Without connections you don't get anywhere* (M,Ivs).

But also jobs considered by the pupils to be less demanding are available only to people who 'know somebody' in the particular sector or institution. This concerns, among other areas, public administration.

> *It's the same in administration – very hard to find work, because everybody there is hired only on the basis of who you know* (S,IIIgs).

Jobs in lower-level administration are rarely described as interesting. Also the pay is generally considered 'nothing special'. Actually, there 'they don't work much, just sit around' and yet, one must 'have good contacts to get those jobs'. Although this work is considered hardly attractive, youth find it better than, for example, living from unemployment benefits.

In a few of the interviews a remarkable relation emerged between 'connections' and education. On the one hand, not education, but 'talent' and connections are important to success.

> *In my opinion education is a means that's supposed to help us achieve something in life, though actually, if somebody is intelligent enough they'll get on somehow if they've got contacts and know a lot of people, or if they are really good at something – for example, somebody who's a good graphic designer doesn't need an education at all in order to make good computer games* (M,IIIgs).

Other pupils however, to the question of important values in life, replied 'education', because it not only helps secure 'a good job and life perspectives for the future', but also *znajomości* – 'connections', 'acquaintances', 'contacts'. Bourdieu's theory of social capital is impressively confirmed in this example: The reproduction of social capital takes place here through quite specific forms of exchange relation and in that way ensures the continuation of society.

The following quotations are the responses of pupils in a large Polish university town to the question 'How do you see your occupational future?', and can be considered representative for the views of many young people throughout Poland:

> *'Quite simply – black."*
> *'You can have whatever education you want, but in reality everything is hard."*
> *'In Poland it's enough to have connections."*
> *'Honestly, you've got to have luck to find the kind of job you want. Or you've got to have connections!"* (X,IIIvs).

Achieving a work-family balance

As highlighted at the beginning of the article, in young Poles' hierarchy of values 'family' occupies a very high position. But if young people are faced with the question of what is most relevant to them – among family, career and money – they usually name the following order of priority: first education, then career, and then family. The last can be achieved only when a solid financial basis is guaranteed, e.g. 'a child only if you can offer him all that is necessary'.

Achieving a balance between work and family is especially important to young women in Poland. On average they are better educated than men, and the investment they make in their education not only affects their careers and the importance of work in their lives, but also influences their decisions about family life. They see no need for career and family values to be in opposition to each other:

> *My sister has a degree from a school of art, and now she studies economics and business administration, has two children and works as an advertising manager for a magazine. She is ambitious and because she has a family she is motivated to work and study. She does not work to have money, but to live well* (S,Igs).

The influence of the pattern of modern-age individualism and the need for autonomy will also enhance and magnify the dilemmas of young women in Poland (Szafraniec 2012: 6). But this – if one keeps the statements of the interviewed students in mind – does not imply a rejection of having their own family. They are convinced of the possibility of a career and a successful familial life. Nevertheless, they usually count on the support of their husbands. Overall we can observe many transformations in values and notions of morality: in some areas there are liberalizing tendencies, in others, conservative notions dominate. Young people also admit that there are discrepancies between what they would like, what they consider right, and how it actually is in life.

Conclusion

Commenting on the results of the analysis of the Polish research results up to 2011, Krystyna Szafraniec concludes that

> *Youth who have been prepared to develop the economy may be doomed to fight for their own survival. If they have the feeling that they have fewer opportunities than previous generations, they might come to believe that not they themselves wasted their chances for a better future, but that this was independent of their influence. Under these conditions, resentments and anxieties in youth are a real danger* (Szafraniec 2012: 6).

This view, however, cannot be entirely accepted in this article. We have, it is true, found in our study indications that a serious discrepancy between living conditions and real possibilities is triggering frustration and spreading the feeling of a relative deprivation among young people – conditions which may find expression in emotional disorders such as apathy and depression. However, we do not believe that this will manifest itself as militant behavior as was observed for example in France.

Though in Poland young people have not yet taken protested to the streets, for example against precarious working conditions, in the autumn of 2012, the trade union *Solidarity* launched a media campaign with a poster under the heading 'SYZYF' (the mythological Sisyphus), which word also can be read as 'SYF' (rubbish). The poster features a figure pushing uphill a huge boulder, and is flanked by the slogans *Nie chcę codziennie zaczynać od*

zera (‘I don't want to start each day from zero’) and *Stop umowom śmieciowym* (‘Stop trash contracts’) – a reference to the precarious labour contracts now commonly used to employ the young.

But it is not expected that the *Solidarity* trade union will incite young people to any revolutionary action. Much more likely, they will find their own personal solutions, such as in turning their backs on their country and building their future careers abroad. Young people are being welcomed with open arms there, where today’s demographic change is seen in its true dimensions.

Notes

1. The study was financed with the support of the Deutsch-Polnische Wissenschaftsstiftung.
2. I thank my colleague in Poland Sylwester Zagulski for his contribution to our study.
3. We differentiate between (school) ‘pupils’ (those in secondary-school or vocational education) and ‘students’ (those studying at university level). Our study concerned only school pupils.
4. The results of the 1990–91 study were published in Melzer *et al*. (1991).
5. This study was conducted together by the University of Warsaw, Poland, the Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung in Leipzig and the University of Bielefeld, Germany. Immediately after publication of its first results, an enormous, long-lasting interest in the topic was registered among researchers as well as in the general public.
6. The 2001 study results were published in: Koseła and Jonda (2005).
7. All short quotations with no reference to origin in this text come from school-pupil interviews conducted within the German-Polish youth study by Jonda and Zagulski as mentioned here. In order to guarantee respondent anonymity, longer quotations are accompanied only by the following information: 1) size of the city in which the interview was done (S = small city <20 000 population, M = medium-size city >20 000 <120 000 pop., L = large city >120 000 <350 000 pop., X = very large city >350 000 pop.); 2) Information about the region (I = northwest region of Poland, II = northeast reg., III = southwest reg., IV = southeast reg.) and 3) Information on the type of school where group discussions were held (vs = vocational school; gs = general secondary school).
8. A press story appearing in various Polish media in November 2012 makes this context drastically clear: More and more people in Poland choose suicide as the ultimate solution to problems in life. In the course of nine months of 2012 there were over 3.8 thousand suicide attempts – nearly 20 per cent more than in the same period a year before. Experts in the field stress that, more often than just a few years ago, the causes of such desperate acts will be found in economic problems. The vision of a dim economic future together with the lack of ready cash or jobs can lead people to the point of taking their own lives (Prażyk 2012).
9. See footnote no. 7.
10. In comparison to Spain, where this number in the same period was 52.9 per cent, this is no especially remarkable value, since the EU-27 average was 22.7 per cent, but it was over three times higher than in next-door neighbor Germany, the country with the lowest unemployed rate in the EU (in summer 2012: 8.1 per cent). It was at this time also more than double the unemployed rate in the total population, which at 10.1 per cent in Poland was under the EU-27 average of 10.5 per cent. Nevertheless, there are scientists who have a critical look at the significance of statistical figures on youth unemployment (Hill 2012), available at: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-01102012-AP/DE/3-01102012-AP-DE.PDF [24.10.2012] and

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&plugin=1&language=de&pcode=teilm020 [24.10.2012].

11. 'Młodzi ludzie bez pracy', available at: http://www.solidarnosc.org.pl/pl/aktualnosci/mlodzi-ludzie-bez-pracy.html [24.10.2012].
12. Data from the first quarter of 2012.
13. As of the end of October 2012; http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/5840_1446_PLK_HTML.htm [30.11.2012].
14. The Polish title is: Szafraniec, Krystyna (2011), Młodzi 2011, ed. by Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów Warszawa. In English: Szafraniec, Krystyna (2011), Youth 2011. Poland, ed. by The Chancellery of the Prime Minister, Warsaw. The report can be found at: http://zds.kprm.gov.pl/sites/default/files/youth_2011_internet.pdf.
15. In West Germany the corresponding figures were: 35.5 per cent worked, 10.8 per cent pursued studies and 36.6 per cent attended school (including vocational school). In East Germany 51.6 per cent worked, 8.5 per cent studied and 39.9 per cent attended school (incl. vocational). Melzer *et al.* (1991), cited after Koseła (2005): 34.

References

GUS (2011) *Rocznik Statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2011* [Statistikal Yearbook of the Republic of Poland 2011], Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny.

Hill, Steven (2012) 'Youth unemployment is overstated', *Social Europe Journal* (SEJ), 25/07/2012. Available at: <http://www.social-europe.eu/2012/07/youth-unemployment-is-overstated> [accessed 10.11.2012].

Iglicka, Krystyna (ed.) (2002) *Migracje powrotne Polaków. Powroty sukcesu czy rozczarowania?* Warszawa: Instytut Spraw Publicznych.

Inglehart, Ronald (1977) *The Silent Revolution. Changing Values and Politic Styles among Western Publics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Joas, Hans (1997) *Die Entstehung der Werte,* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Jończy, Romuald (2005) *Wpływ procesów migracyjnych ludności autochtonicznej na rynek pracy (i dysharmonię rozwoju) w województwie opolskim*, Opole: Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy.

Kaczmarczyk, Paweł (ed.) (2008) *Współczesne migracje Polaków – aspekty regionalne i lokalne*, Warszawa: Ośrodek Badań nad Migracjami UW.

Klages Helmut (2001) 'Brauchen wir eine Rückkehr zu traditionellen Werten?', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte,* B 29: 7-14.

Koseła, Krzysztof (2005) 'Wstęp. Przebieg i teoretyczne podstawy badania', in: Krzysztof Koseła and Bernadette Jonda (eds) *Młodzi Polacy i młodzi Niemcy w nowej Europie*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFIS PAN: 7-45.

Koseła, Krzysztof and Jonda, Bernadette (eds) (2005) 'Młodzi Polacy i młodzi Niemcy w nowej Europie' [Young Poles and young Germans in the new Europe], Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFIS PAN.

Melzer, Wolfgang, Lukowski, Wojtek and Schmidt, Lutz (1991) *Deutsch-polnischer Jugendreport. Lebenswelten im Kulturvergleich*, Weinheim/München: Juventa Verlag.

Prażyk, Paweł (2012) Fala samobójstw w Polsce. Available at: <http://www.polishupdate.com/?p=7492> [accessed 15.11.2012].

Rożnowski, Bohdan (2009) *Przechodzenie młodzieży z systemu edukacji na rynek pracy w Polsce*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL.

Slany, Krystyna (2011) 'Europa w perspektywie demograficznej: wzajemne uwarunkowania społeczno-ekonomiczne i demograficzne w społeczeństwie wiedzy', in: Barbara Gęsiarz and Marzena Mamak-Zdanecka (eds) *Rynek pracy i organizacje w gospodarce wiedzy*, Łódz: Wydawnictwo PRINTPAP: 55-86.

Striker, Małgorzata (2011) 'Współczesny rynek pracy a oczekiwania pokolenia Y wobec zatrudnienia – wyniki badań empirycznych', in: Małgorzata Gablota and Agata Pietroń-Pyszczyk (eds) *Człowiek i praca w zmieniającej się organizacji w kierunku respektowania interesów pracowników*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu: 30-7.
Szafraniec, Krystyna (2011) *Młodzi 2011*, Warszawa: Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów.
—— (2011a) *Youth 2011*, Warsaw: The Chancellery of the Prime Minister.
—— (2012) '"Jugend 2011" – der Regierungsbericht über die junge Generation der Polen', Polen-Analysen, Nr. 105 (20.3.2012): 2-7. Available at: <http://www.laender-analysen.de/polen/pdf/PolenAnalysen105.pdf> [accessed 22.10.2012].
Sztanderska, Urszula (2010) *Kwalifikacje dla potrzeb pracodawców. Raport końcowy*, Warszawa: Wydział Nauk Ekonomicznych Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.
Thomas, W. I. and Znaniecki, Florian (1918) *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, Volume I, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Trappmann, Vera (2011) 'Precarious employment in Poland - A legacy of transition or an effect of European integration?', *Emecon,* 1/2011. Available at: <http://www.emecon.eu/current-issue/second/vera-trappmann> [accessed 12.10.2012].
Van Deth, Jan W. and Scarbrough, Elinor (eds) (1995) *The Impact of Values*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.