



This paper is taken from

*Human Rights and Citizenship Education
Proceedings of the eleventh Conference of the
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe
Academic Network*

London: CiCe 2009

edited by Peter Cunningham, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 978-0-9562789-6-8

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Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz, B. & Zalewska, A. M. (2009) Citizens of the Future: How young people perceive social problems from both local and global perspectives, in Ross, A. (ed) Human Rights and Citizenship Education. London: CiCe, pp 383 - 391

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Lifelong Learning Programme

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a collection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- The CiCe administrative team at London Metropolitan University
- London Metropolitan University, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The Lifelong Learning Programme and the personnel of the Education and Culture DG of the European Commission for their support and encouragement.

Citizens of the Future: How young people perceive social problems from both local and global perspectives

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Research was supported by the State Committee of Scientific Research (KBN) - Grant ESF/84/2006

Introduction

Poland is a country of developing and consolidating democracy. The transformation process of the last few years has resulted in a sense of disappointment in Polish society. This led to the decline of optimism and the withdrawal of a large group of citizens from the participation in both political and social spheres (Grzelak, 2005; Krzemiński, 2005), a serious obstacle in the process of building of social capital based on the sense of trust and bonds (Sztompka, 2007). The phenomenon of social anomie can be observed not only in Poland. Both political and academic circles in most European countries are debating the reasons for the loosening of social bonds and the decrease of the citizens' interest in politics (Beck i Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Bauman, 2001). In the current situation, the building of civic activity among children and teenagers, both groups being on the point of gaining their first civic experiences, becomes a crucial issue.

It is worth noticing that, in its popular understanding, the meaning of civic activity is quite narrow – it is associated with participation in elections and referenda (government, local government, etc.) and readiness to foster national symbols. In order to clarify the meaning of citizenship, it is worth referring to Kerry Kennedy's description (1997; 2006), which divides citizenship into active and passive. National identity is the source of passive citizenship, which is manifested by eagerness to foster national symbols, myths and the history of one's own nation. As a consequence, the sense of national identity and belonging is created, which in turn is transformed into sense of community and establishes the readiness to defend common values, stimulates respect for the law and readiness to protect it.

Active citizenship is linked to the need for participation and influence on the social and political realities. It may assume a political, social or personal form. Civic activity of a political nature is manifested through conventional actions, such as participating in elections or being a member of a political party. Civic activity in its social form is connected with the involvement in all types of formal and informal movements or organizations working for the community – from the participation in all kinds of social campaigns and voluntary jobs, to sending petitions or protesting. Civic activity on a personal level is connected with responsibility for oneself and for one's own future. This activity is realized in a common saying 'my fate is in my hands'.

Kennedy's concept offers interesting guidelines for educators seeking ways of developing civic behaviours and pondering over the question of stimulating civic activity.

Passive citizenship is created mostly by traditional school education (classes in history, literature, geography, etc.). Our knowledge of the national history, myths and symbols is acquired at school, which, to a large extent, shapes national consciousness which is the basis for national identity (Ross, 2008).

However, if we reflect upon the way in which active citizenship can be developed, especially in its social form, we should observe how children and young people understand social problems of the changing world. So far we do not know much about young people's opinions and their understanding of social phenomena, the sources of their knowledge and feelings towards key social issues. According to Hicks (2002), the way we imagine the future is reflected in the way we measure the quality of life and the society's well-being. Our visions of the future mirror the times we live in. Young people's opinions about the future allow for certain conclusions regarding the roles young people want to assume as the citizens of the future (Holden, 2006). The attitudes of young people towards the burning issues existing in the contemporary society are especially significant. These issues include: **violence, conflict, unemployment, tolerance, environmental protection and health** (Holden, 2007).

We can guess that young people's opinions on the above issues as well as the level of optimism they demonstrate towards vital social problems greatly influence the creation of attitudes associated with willingness to participate in social life. The media often present young people as a group of pessimists

characterized by a pretentious attitude towards reality. Therefore, it is crucial to perform a systematic research that would demonstrate young Poles' level of optimism in relation to social phenomena as well as factors influencing optimism, such as age, sex and ecological niche (cities – towns). In such analyses, age seems to be an especially important factor since, as we may assume, understanding of certain phenomena (for example concrete – abstract), the role of different sources of information (direct ones – media) and the level of optimism depend on age-related factors like a period of development (childhood, early or late adolescent) or a level of education (primary, grammar and high school education) (Bee, 1998). Sex may also play a significant role as it modifies the development process in the periods under consideration (Bee, 1998, Vasta i in, 1995).

The aim of the research is to find out how young people understand key social problems, identify sources of their knowledge of them and describe their reaction towards them. More precisely, the study aims at establishing the answers to the following questions:

1. How do young people understand key social issues?
2. Where does the young people's knowledge about these issues come from? Does the role of different information sources depend on age, sex and ecological niche?
3. Does the level of optimism towards key social issues seen from a local perspective depend on age, sex and ecological niche?

It is worth noticing that until now in Poland this type of research has not been carried out systematically and on such a large scale. As for Europe, the tests have not included age variables that allow for comparing development factors influencing the perception of social phenomena.

Method

372 pupils and students of primary schools, grammar schools and high schools aged 11 – 14 – 17 from large urban areas and towns underwent the test.

During the research the following data was collected: (1) opinions and beliefs about the said issues, (2) the level of optimism versus pessimism towards the issues from both local and global perspectives, and (3) the sources from which the pupils/students get the information about the issues.

The research was conducted with the use of qualitative and quantitative methods, which constitute a rarely implemented triangulation method that helps to select key questions and relationships as well as to explain their sources and mechanisms. Opinions and beliefs were collected during partially structured group interviews, that included questions such as: 'what does (violence, conflict, unemployment, etc)... mean to you; tell us more about ...; how do you understand ...; give examples of ...'. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and then analyzed by competent judges. There were 16 interviews conducted (4 in each age group and 8 in each of the social environments).

Quantitative data on the level of optimism and sources of information were gathered with the use of the 'What do you think about the future?' questionnaire (Holden, 2007).

The level of optimism was analysed according to a 5-point scale with the questions such as:

- 'Do you think that in the future in your area the level of violence will increase or decrease?' – local perspective
- 'Do you think that in the future in the world the level of violence will increase or decrease?' – global perspective

The sources of knowledge were examined using a 3-point scale (a lot – a little – nothing) which measured the extent to which each of the named elements (e.g. Family, Peer Group/Friends School, TV/the cinema, the Internet, newspapers.) provides knowledge about social issues.

Results

How do young people understand the key social issues?

The group interviews resulted in the collection of opinions of children and young people regarding the key social problems. The opinions illustrate the way the children and young people understand and explain problems.

Violence

Young people understand violence in both its forms, i.e. physical ('beating, kicking, all types of mobbing') and psychological ('humiliating somebody, this is worse than physical violence because it stays for longer, a bruise comes off'). The children give more examples of violence from everyday life ('they rub us with snowballs; I'm given a hard time quite often and because of that violence [...] I ended up in hospital'). Young people give more examples of violence from outside their personal reality, pointing to local violence ('another child has been mercilessly beaten up by its parents') and a global one ('Russia, the USA, China - they are getting stronger and stronger, they rule in the countries they occupy'). The subjective feeling of experiencing violence fades with age. The grammar school students, when asked if they often witness the acts of violence all answer that they do not. The grammar school students

recollect their personal past as more marked with violence, stating that 'it was horrible in grammar school! There would be fights during each break. The police once a week; now it's different, maybe because we are more serious'. Children see the source of violence in the media ('cartoons have a big influence'). In the opinions of young people one can notice the multidimensional aspect and complexity of the sources of violence – 'it depends on culture, awareness, the family, country's political system, religion, the media, just on us alone'.

Younger children point to their own responsibility in coping with violence. According to them, one should undertake certain self-defence actions ('they call her names and she then cries, [...]. She should go and talk to the Headmaster and do something herself'). Young people see the chance to reduce violence with the help of the family ('everyone should be able to exert influence on his or her own children, (...), [introduce] higher discipline, inculcate some rules').

Poverty and unemployment

When describing poverty, children pay attention to living conditions above all – no place to live, no means to live. As for young people, they perceive poverty in a more complex way and indicate the subjectivity of the phenomenon ('somebody may not feel poor because he or she doesn't feel like going to the cinema or somewhere but his/her income is very small. And so he/she is poor but doesn't feel like that; someone may earn a lot and spend a lot on what not but may feel poor'). In contrast to children, poverty for young people is not limited only to poor countries ('the USA is a very well developed and rich country but even there there are such districts, slums. It doesn't work like that if a country is rich, everyone there is rich. Because in every country there are the poor and the rich').

The causes of poverty are placed in both groups of factors, i.e. external ('poverty may just come upon us – because of some bad, unfortunate events, like someone may have his/her house burnt down, the life property') and individual ('alcohol, drugs, laziness').

Unemployment is usually linked with individual factors that people can exert influence upon ('it is not true that there is no work, it's just that people do not want to work'). Young people notice the causes of unemployment also in certain system factors ('bad food distribution; it is the country that should ensure the workplaces for its citizens'). What is worth noticing is the fact that understanding of the unemployment problems by young people is far more thorough. For them the work is not only a major source of satisfying the material needs but also the personal ones ('thanks to work we can set up a family and take care of it (...), we can develop our interests, make our dreams come true').

According to children, the solutions to poverty may be found both in system solutions ('this poverty can be reduced, but it all depends on the government, on with they do') and in our own responsibility, especially the one for education ('you can find a better a job but if we don't learn we won't find a good job, we'll be dustmen').

Tolerance

Children understand tolerance as acceptance of cultural otherness, ('different skin colour), looks (if you are small or you are tall, and we shouldn't nickname people') and opinions ('I don't mind what others think; maybe it isn't only about minding, I just accept that'). Young people understand tolerance as acceptance of a largely understood otherness ('respect for otherness, accepting the different'), including sexual otherness or a different life-style ('someone leads a life that seems to be completely different from what we would expect to be a nice, happy life ...'). Older students notice the limits of tolerance referring to those actions that do not have a pernicious influence on the environment ('it's about the acceptance but to a point, that is the things that don't have a negative influence on the environment'), although they apparently may be negative for a given person ('if he is like that and he doesn't harm anyone around, even if he harms himself, it's none of my business').

The factor that helps to create acceptance is, according to children, the knowledge about the person ('there is this girl [in our school]. All of them call her names (...). I tolerate her now more than before since I've got to know her better').

The lack of tolerance is caused by the deeply rooted conviction that one's own views are always the right ones, the unwillingness to talk ('our WOS [Social Science] teacher shows intolerance for some issues, (...) he thinks he knows everything and if someone challenges his opinion, he is not tolerant about it [he doesn't accept it] at all'), creating stereotypical images of others on the basis of a single event ('one learns that some Arab terrorist in the Far East blows himself up in the name of Allah. And everybody frowns at the Arab people, maybe one of them is going to blow up soon') and a group identity ('folks here flock together (...) they simply stick to the people they know').

Experiencing otherness helps to develop tolerance ('there are couples where one person is a foreigner, (...) now people begin to get used to that').

Older people are perceived as less tolerant, especially when otherness is manifested ('there is a man in the centre who says that he likes a different religion, in this situation immediately a group of elderly people gathers and tells the man that there – uuu, God is the most important, (...) that Jesus rules! Or there are

two girls walking and holding hands, then again people, the old ones and not the young ones, give them strange looks’).

Environmental protection

Young people understand the environmental protection especially in terms of littering (‘keeping the environment unspoiled equals its protection’) although they are also aware of preventive actions (‘saving the electric light, collecting paper for recycling, not leaving telephone chargers plugged in ...’). Their opinions include many references to both local (‘they cut down trees for fear that they may fall on cars’) and global questions (air pollution, acid rains, the hole in the ozone layer’).

Environmental pollution is perceived as an unavoidable aftermath of the civilization development (‘the problem is that this can’t be reversed and so far we haven’t found another planet, we still haven’t found the second chance’).

The students stress that what matters in the environmental protection is the development of certain attitudes and not merely the participation in some campaigns (‘we should rather take care of our everyday reality, for it doesn’t really count if once a year some school management sends the pupils out to a park to put the gloves on and collect rubbish’).

The opinions show clearly that the education system is involved in some environmental protection propaganda campaign on a large scale (‘from kindergarten till the end of grammar school there was constantly something about that environment protection (...) I’m fed up with it’).

Health

Young people describe health in physical (‘immunity to germs’), psychological (‘being in a good mood’) and social terms (‘when you are ill then (...) you lack energy to do something’). The older ones also point to the illnesses caused by civilization (‘obesity also counts as a civilization illness’).

Regardless of age, young people point to one’s own responsibility for health (‘if you knock about some dens, then you may catch (...) for example HIV, from dirty syringes; but if you live cleanly, healthily, eat well, then you can be healthy’). The teenagers see the causes of health problems in many factors: a certain lifestyle (‘people have to work (...) they don’t have time to cook something’), inability to use the medical achievements (‘they are oversensitive because when they feel a slight pain they immediately take a pain killer instead of trying to bear it’) and unequal access to health care (‘in bigger cities there are some clinics where you can get some treatment and here where we live one has to pay for everything’).

Young people see a difference between the younger and older generations in their attitudes towards own health. The young ones in their opinion, due to education, are more conscious about their health (‘for example the teenagers have (...) all the time this education at school about the harmful effects of smoking and so on, and people do care about it; the older generation, well they for sure didn’t get something of that kind at school... and so they don’t give a damn, the younger you are, the...more aware you are and so you care more about yourself’). On the other hand, however, they comment with ignorance on school health promotion campaigns (‘a nurse comes twice a year and tells us that we shouldn’t smoke cigarettes. [laughter]. And she asks us to feel the mummies to detect breast cancer’).

Where does the young people’s knowledge about these issues come from? Does the role of different information sources depend on age, sex and ecological niche?

In the research questions about the role of six different sources of information (family, friends, school, cinema/TV, Internet, newspapers) and their role in gaining the knowledge about each social issue were asked. In order to analyze the function of different sources of information, two more general indicators were created and analyzed further on:

- An average value describing the role of a given source of information for all the examined phenomena is the indicator of the role of that particular source of information;
- On the basis of the factor analysis (principal components method, Varimax rotation with Kaiser’s normalization) that selected the two factors (characteristic value higher than 1), the following two categories of information sources were established: indirect - ‘the media’ and direct - ‘other people’.

Figure 1 presents the role of respective sources as well as the role of the two information categories in learning about the key issues within the whole group under examination.

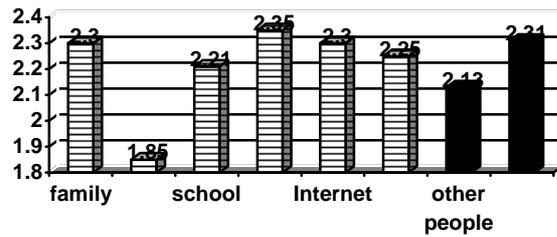


Fig. 1. The role of different information sources in learning about the key issues

Table 1. Essential correlations (above the diagonal) and the differences among the sources (below the diagonal) – values of Student's t-test for dependable tests

Sources	Family	Friends	School	Cinema	Internet	Newspapers
Family	---	0.40***	0.41***	0.17**	0.19***	0.19***
Friends	16.25***	----	0.31***	0.27***	0.20***	0.16**
School	3.06**	-12.37***	---	0.07	0.11*	0.14**
Cinema	-1.81	-16.22***	-4.00***	---	0.47***	0.50***
Internet	-0.19	-12.86***	-2.34*	1.81	---	0.56***
Newspapers	1.39	-11.32***	-1.01	3.89***	1.93	----

Legend: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 1 shows that the role of all of the sources is positively correlated – the more important one source is, the more important other sources are, too. The cinema, the Internet, newspapers and the family are the major sources of information related to the key social problems. School and friends are the least important.

In order to check whether the role of the two source categories depends on age, sex and ecological niche, two 3-factor analyses of variances (ANOVA) were performed – cf. Table 2.

Table 2. The effects of age (A), sex (S), ecological niche (E) and their interactions with the role of the media and other people as the sources of information about the problems

Effects	A	S	E	AxS	AxE	SxE	AxSxE
the Media	3.88*	0.45	1.22	0.33	1.14	0.32	0.38
Other people	4.39*	1.54	2.86	0.67	5.49**	0.49	0.41

Legend: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p < 0.001

The results of the analyses show that the role of the media depends on age – they are less important for the 11-year-olds (M=2.21, SD=0.42) than for the 14-year-olds (M=2.35, SD=0.42) and the 17-year-olds (M=2.35, SD=0.44) – post-hoc Bonferroni tests are essential when p<0.05.

As for the role of the information gathered from others, it depends on age and the interaction of age with the place of living: in a town its importance increases with age and in a large city it decreases. The differences stemming from the place of living manifest themselves at the age of seventeen: other people are a more important source of information about social questions for those who live in a town than for those who live in City: F/1.108/=9.30; p<0.01 – cf. Fig. 2.

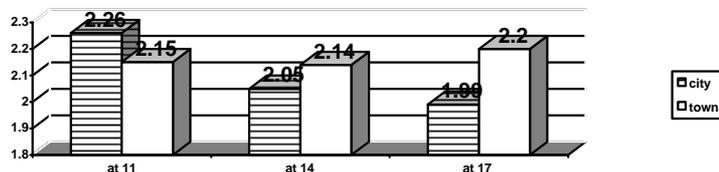


Fig. 2. The role of other people as the source of information about the key issues

Does the level of optimism towards the key social issues seen from a local perspective depend on age, sex and ecological niche?

In order to check whether the level of optimism towards the key social issues depends on age, sex and ecological niche, the 3-factor analyses of variances were conducted. The answers to the questions were recorded in such a way that a higher result implies a higher level of optimism. Apart from the indicators for each of the problems, the general indicator was also considered.

Table 3. The effects of age (A), sex (S), ecological niche (E) and their interactions on the level of optimism towards the social issues viewed from a local perspective

Effects	A	S	E	AxS	AxE	SxE	AxSxE
Violence	0.97	0.01	9.09**	1.08	0.34	0.93	0.49
Unemployment	4.25*	1.89	8.07**	2.61	0.14	6.51*	0.35
Tolerance	0.61	0.10	10.13**	0.71	2.02	0.12	0.22
Environment	0.04	2.38	0.52	0.62	0.42	0.01	1.51
Poverty	2.52	0.00	3.25	5.64**	0.18	7.04*	0.39
Health	6.17**	9.85**	13.42***	3.12*	1.78	0.70	0.50
overall	1.64	3.24	13.51***	3.16*	0.58	3.96*	0.18
Df	2; 330	1; 330	1; 330	2; 330	2; 330	1; 330	2; 330

Legend: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p < 0.001

According to the results (table 3), the general level of optimism towards the local problems depends on three factors. The first factor is the place of living – in a bigger city young people are more optimistic towards the majority of key social problems. The second factor is the interaction of sex and the place of living – the highest level of optimism is demonstrated by boys from a bigger city (this refers especially to poverty and unemployment). The third factor is the interaction of sex and age. It shows that the youngest girls are the most optimistic. As for the local issues, the highest level of optimism is manifested among the boys aged 14 (fig. 3).

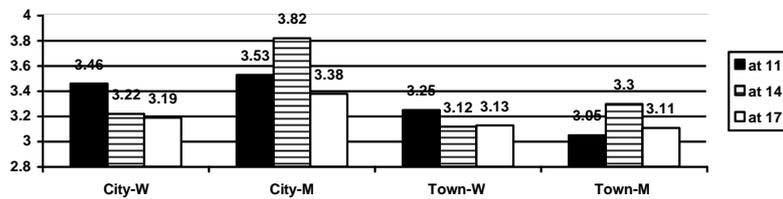


Fig. 3. The level of general optimism towards local problems in relation to age, sex and the place of living.

Does the level of optimism towards the key social issues seen from a global perspective depend on age, sex and ecological niche?

As we can see from the results (table 4), optimism towards all global problems depends on age – younger children are more optimistic than teenagers. The interaction of age and sex and the interaction of age and the place of living also play a significant part – as for girls, the youngest of them are the most optimistic, and as for boys, the oldest ones are the least optimistic (especially when it comes to violence and unemployment); in a big city the oldest teenagers are less optimistic than children aged 11, and in a town they are less optimistic than the 14-year-olds (especially with regard to violence).

Table 4. The effects of age (A), sex (S), ecological niche (E) and their interactions on the level of optimism towards social issues in a global perspective

Effects	A	S	E	AxS	AxE	SxE	AxSxE
Violence	5.60**	0.23	1.13	5.35**	4.02*	0.19	1.59
Tolerance	5.15**	3.75	1.79	1.20	1.27	2.22	2.53
Environment	3.22*	0.01	0.00	2.51	2.63	0.33	1.52
Poverty	9.64***	0.00	3.14	5.13**	0.71	5.56*	0.68
Health	12.07**	3.92*	4.11*	2.65	1.68	2.98	0.72
overall	13.76***	0.00	3.39	7.25***	3.56*	1.32	1.93
Df	2; 328	1; 328	1; 328	2; 328	2; 328	1; 328	2; 328

Legend: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p < 0.001

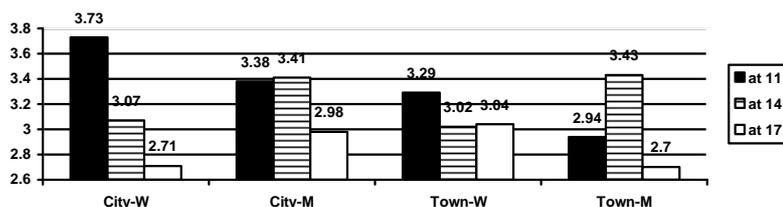


Fig. 4. The level of general optimism towards global problems in relation to age, sex and the place of living.

Can we observe any differences in the level of optimism for respective problems in local and global perspectives in the groups which differ according to age and sex?

The level of optimism (fig. 5) in relation to respective problems is similar – young people are the least optimistic when it comes to local as well as global future in regard to environment and violence. The highest level of optimism in the two perspectives is demonstrated in relation to tolerance and living conditions questions (poverty and unemployment).

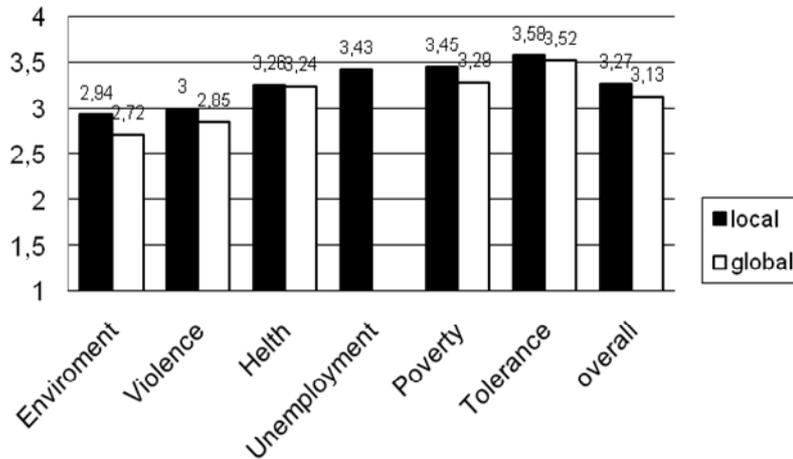


Fig. 5. Average level of optimism for respective problems in local and global perspectives

In order to compare the levels of optimism towards both the local and global questions, a series of Student's t-tests were conducted for the dependable tests in the groups diversified according to age, age and sex and age and niche. The analyses focused on the comparison of optimism connected with similar problems and the general indicators of optimism in both local and global perspectives (local and global optimisms).

Table 5. Differences in the level of optimism in local and global perspectives – the results of dependable Student's t-tests in the groups diversified according to age

Problems \ Age	11 years old Df = 108	14 years old Df = 122	17 years old Df = 110
Violence	0.07	0.48	3.26***
Tolerance	0.33	-0.79	2.63**
Environment	0.41	2.15*	3.48***
Poverty	-0.26	2.81**	3.65***
Health	-0.66	-0.66	1.80^
Overall	-0.04	2.98**	6.18***

Legend: ^ p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

t-value with a positive sign indicates the predominance of the local optimism over the global one.

According to the detailed analyses, age, sex and ecological niche exert influence on the differences between the local and global optimisms. With age, the predominance of the local optimism over the global one increases. There is no difference observed in the group of younger children; at the age of 14 the difference refers mainly to poverty and environment; and as for the young people, it is generally connected with social issues.

The predominance of the local optimism over the global one appears first in the girls' group – at the age of 14 it is observed only among girls (especially in the question of poverty), and at the age of 17 a clear predominance of the local optimism is visible in the groups of both sexes.

The predominance of the local optimism over the global one appears first in the group of young people from big cities – in the group of the 14-year-olds it refers mainly to poverty, and in the group of the 17-year-olds it is related to all the problems except health. In towns, in the group of the 14-year-olds there is a visible predominance of the global optimism over the local one when it comes to health, and only as late

as at the age of 17 there is the predominance of the local optimism over the global one, especially in the questions of environment and poverty.

Conclusions

Young Poles represent a large scope of all social problems. However, with age this representation clearly becomes multi-dimensional and besides personal conditions it starts to include also system conditions. The causes of most of the problems are internally located and thus point to a personal responsibility for health, unemployment and environment. With age, young people begin to notice more objective and social conditions of the problems described, however, the influence of a person on one's own life still seems to be the most important factor of the change. The areas within which young people see the possibility to eliminate the problems are the family, which is connected with certain values, and education (including school) which exerts the strongest influence on the social issues awareness.

The media are a more important source of information about social problems than other people. Their importance increases with age. Among the personal sources of information young people point to family, which may lead us to an assumption that social issues are included in family discussions. It is significant because family (as it is stressed in the interviews) is perceived as an important sphere of social problem solving.

Friends are the source of information about social problems only to a small extent. This may lead us to a conclusion that social problems do not form a part of peer discussions.

The significance of school as a source of information is especially interesting. On the one hand, according to the questionnaires, school appears to bear little importance as a source of information. Yet, on the other hand, young people stress in their opinions (the interviews) the multitude of information campaigns conducted at school. It might be that the form of supplying the information about social problems by schools is too much of the transmitting and canvassing character. This results in aversion towards the information presented in such a way. Thus young people tend to ignore them or feel surfeit instead of willingness to discuss them. A few times during the interviews the students referred to the school propaganda campaigns with irony (e.g. when talking about health, environmental protection or tolerance) and underlined the lack of openness of teachers towards the different opinions presented on various social questions raised during classes.

It is worth noticing the proportion when it comes to the significance of the media and people in forming the opinion on social questions in different environments. The role of different sources of information increases with age for the young people in towns. The role of the media increases but the importance of other people as the sources of information decreases for the young people in big cities, especially the importance of the role of the family is smaller. The opinions of young people from local areas remain thus under the influence of different sources of information, while the teenagers from large urban areas depend on the one-sided, 'medial' picture of reality.

An important question posed during the research is the question about the level of optimism of young people towards social issues. It may stimulate the future decisions about performing civic roles. The level of optimism in relation to the local future is higher when compared with the global one. The inclination for a more positive evaluation referring to local problems matches the tendency observed in the adults' world, even in a culture of complaining (Wojciszke and Baryła, 2005). Considering the possibility of a direct influence on the local reality, it can stimulate young people to be actively involved in the life of their own communities. The most optimistic perception refers to the issues connected with living conditions and also to tolerance which, according to young people, will increase in their personal environment as well as globally. The opinions collected during the interviews show that the questions related to living conditions will be solved by the increase of education which gives an opportunity to find a job. And tolerance for young people is a natural process of encountering cultural otherness.

High optimism referring to tolerance does not result in optimism as for violence which, beside natural environment, gives rise to most fears. From what the students say one can deduce that their strongest fears are linked to violence connected with hostile aggression (Vasta et al., 1995) which is based on causing a disinterested harm. Turning to the environmental protection, young people regard it as an unavoidable aftermath of the development of civilization. Perhaps this is why it is perceived in the most pessimistic terms in both the global and local perspectives. Optimism in the local perspective depends to a large extent on the place of living – young people from big cities demonstrate a higher level of optimism in the local perspective than those who live in towns. This is most probably connected with different objective standards of living offered by a big city and a town respectively. In a large urban area there is a higher level of healthcare and a better access to various healthcare institutions, lower unemployment and more possibilities of coming across otherness which stimulates tolerance. It is also possible that despite the fact that violence is more frequently observed in a big city than in a town, the campaigns directed against violence are more visible.

Optimism towards all global problems depends most of all on age – the 17-year-olds are less optimistic than younger students. This makes one think that perhaps young people at the age of 17 lose faith in solving social problems in the global perspective but manifest a higher level of optimism when it comes to coping with these problems in the local perspective. This might be related to two factors. Firstly, it is linked to the awareness which increases with age and which is connected with the complexity of social problems. This kind of awareness was observed during the interviews. Understanding of not only personal but also social and system factors affecting violence, health, poverty, etc., results in the decrease of the feeling of influence, creating thus pessimism. Secondly, the increase of the ability of the conceptual and abstract thinking allows for the perception of global problems as multidimensional and thus depending on many factors that are difficult to foresee. Yet, the preservation of a higher level of optimism related to the local issues may become the basis of the actions performed for the community and the creation of civic activity (Hicks, 2002; Holden, 2006).

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