

UNDERSTANDING THE DEMAND FOR SCHOOLING

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DRAFT COUNTRY REPORT: POLAND

DEMAND FOR SCHOOLING

Country report - Poland

Introductory remarks

The following report presents the situation in Polish education on the basis of research which has been conducted since 1999. It must be stated, however, that issues described here are a part of the whole process of changes started in 1989, that is when the first non-communist government was created. In the period between 1989 and 1999 the following changes took place:

- Legal basis was developed for creating civic schools (non-profit organizations run by NGO's) and private schools,
- The Ministry of Education's monopoly for creating curricula and textbooks was abandoned (before 1989 they could be created in one institute only and printed by one printing house controlled by the Ministry),
- State schools' teachers were given the possibility to create curricula individually (so-called "authoring" curricula),
- It was made possible for parents to become members of school councils and thus to have influence on the decisions concerning their children's schools,
- Decentralisation of state schools' management began – units of local government started to gradually take over the control,
- Massive promotion of teaching and learning foreign languages (a number of colleges preparing foreign languages teachers were created in 1990)
- A growing number of primary school leavers continue their education in secondary schools leading to the *Matura* certificate, which means lowering the number of schools offering short, vocational education,
- Legal basis was developed to run a school according to *International Baccalaureate* requirements,
- The number of students at universities, academies and higher education institutions more than tripled,

In 1998 the Ministry of National Education and Sport decided to start the reform which meant introducing in 1999 changes in the whole system of education. The following list of events gives a short history of what happened:

- May 1998 – presenting a preliminary concept of reforms,
- July 1998 – introducing changes to the Act on the System of Education: shortening primary school education from eight to six years, introducing gymnasia (three years of lower secondary education) and shortening education in upper secondary schools from four to three years. The Minister of Education was obliged to create the core curricula for general and vocational schools as well as settle the standards of requirements for tests and exams.
- January 1999 – end of the process of decentralization – units of local government take over the managing of schools,

- January – March 1999 – establishing the Central and eight Regional Examination Commissions,
- August 1999 – publishing a new list of textbooks approved for use in schools,
- September 1999 – the reform starts working, first year gymnasium students start education in new schools; new six-year primary schools start operating; new curricula are introduced for the first four years of primary schools and first year of gymnasiums,
- December 1999 – new *Standards of Requirements for Tests and Exams* in primary schools, gymnasias and upper secondary schools are presented for public debate,
- February 2000 – new rules of teachers' promoting are created,
- September 2000 – the second year of education in gymnasias begins, new curricula are introduced for the last two years of primary education, the new rules for developing professional career by teachers are introduced,
- September 2001 – the third year of education in gymnasias begins, the process of introducing new curricula continues,
- April – June 2002 – the first national test after the sixth year of education in primary school and the first national exam at the end of gymnasium are conducted.

The reform will reach its final phase in May 2005 when upper secondary school students will first take the New *Matura* exam.

1. Demand and Views about Schooling in Society.

How does demand feature in educational debate, how are schools regarded by society, and how well are expectations met?

The respect for education is growing among Polish society and so are the hopes and expectations connected with it. There is a common belief that it is worth learning and studying - during the last decade the number of the polled for whom education is important increased from 76% in 1993 to 91% in 2002 and the data concerns all groups in society. What is more, the position of education in the hierarchy of important aims in Poles' life is changing – from the tenth position in 1996 (11%) to the sixth in 2002 (18%). Also during the last few years the number of people who think that their education is inadequate in the present situation has grown.

However, a closer analysis of reasons why the Poles undertake educational efforts shows that nowadays much more often there is economic motivation behind it. Reasons connected with financial profit, job security and avoiding unemployment have gained importance in comparison to the year 1993, while motives such as intellectual development, self-development, social and professional prestige have become less important at the same time. In 2002 the most common answer to the question about motivation for getting educated was high salary (70%) and also better chances for an interesting job and for easier life (ca. 40%). More than one third of the polled pointed at job security and avoiding unemployment as some of the most important reasons for studying (36%), almost the same number of the polled stressed the need to become independent and self-reliant (33%).¹

1.1 Does the notion of “demand” feature in policy discourse and public debate in your country? How commonplace is it now to propose that schooling should be more

¹ CBOS, *Polacy o swoim wykształceniu – wzrost niezadowolonia* (*The Poles about their education – growing dissatisfaction*), 2002; CBOS, *Czy Polacy cenią wykształcenie?* (*Do the Poles value education?*), 2002.

‘demand-sensitive’ – by whom, and what is that taken to mean? How important are the distinctions between ‘social’, ‘individual’, and ‘private’ demand?

The notion of “demand” features in Polish society only in the economic context and since for many years, and for obvious reasons, the free market economy was not at the centre of its interest, “demand” has never reached a broader, social meaning. Another word with similar meaning: “needs” was much more often used within this context and it became an important part of socio-political debates, also in the area of education. There is, however, a crucial difference in meaning between these two words: “needs” suggests lack of certain goods and “demand” means being active in claiming for it.

Educational needs of Polish society became a subject of debate during the period of great political and economic reforms in the late eighties and early nineties. There is a basis for a statement that changes in the system of education introduced between 1990 and 1998 answered the “demand” expressed by the society. Also the educational reform started in 1998 was preceded by public debate and social research.

It must be admitted, however, that the debate on education, its aims, institutional forms and its methods did not become an issue at the national level, it was always restricted to a group of specialists and the more active groups of teachers. Research conducted regularly by CBOS (The Centre for Social Opinion Polls) since 1998 shows that a majority of Poles saw the need for reform since the very beginning and they were open for the Ministry of Education’s new proposals and solutions, expressing their growing support for them. An urgent need to reform the educational system was most often expressed by the polled with the highest social status: highly educated people, managers, intelligentsia, students, people with the highest economic status and also inhabitants of cities and big towns. The rate of the polled supporting the need of urgent reforms was decreasing among the worse educated citizens with lower professional status; the least supportive of all were the farmers, only 16% of whom said that the educational reform was crucial and 26% claimed it was unnecessary².

The level of support for the educational reform was at its highest level at the very beginning of the public debate on it (April 1998) but it started to decrease rapidly together with the first steps to implement it (March and April 1999). There is actually nothing strange in it as in 2000 the level of information about the reform was still rather low: 57% of the polled said that they heard about the educational reform but they did not really understand what it was about, 14% admitted they did not know anything about any reform and only 29% stated that they understood its fundamentals. The best informed were the higher educated people. The lower educated the polled the more often they stated that they knew nothing about the reform and also that they were not interested in it.³

The educational reform which was aimed at creating a more demand-sensitive system of education, to meet different social needs, has not quite brought the expected results. Growing social activity, ‘awakening’ to self-organizing, better realization of the power of society to get things done – all these tendencies appeared and developed gradually during the

² CBOS *Reforma edukacji – pierwsze doświadczenia, nadzieje i obawy* (Educational reforms – first experiences, hopes and fears), 2000.

³ CBOS *Reforma edukacji – poinformowanie i poparcie społeczne* (Educational reforms – the level of information and social support), 2000.

1990s. Schools, especially the non-public ones, develop in this direction by trying to meet the expectations and needs of parents and children treated at last as real partners.

1.2 Have studies addressed changes in the way schools and education in general are presented and discussed in the media? What do such analyses show about the nature of public demand on education?

The position of issues connected with education and the public debate about schooling in Polish media has not been deeply analysed although media as such get more and more attention from a growing number of researchers. That is why a study of the media's position on educational issues does not have a proper scientific support and is based on data from minor analysis and on the authors' intuition.

According to a publication in 2000 based on an analysis of articles published in four national dailies (right-wing *Nasz Dziennik*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Rzeczpospolita*, and left-wing *Trybuna*)⁴ during the period of introducing the educational reform the press interest with the topic was very intense and it reflected the intensity of governmental debates concerning the transformation of the system of education and the social tension caused by protesting teachers who demanded higher salaries and parents fighting against closing down schools. After this period of fierce debates the subject almost disappeared from press but it came back at the beginning of the school year 1999/2000 although the realization of reform did not really bring about an avalanche of press articles. Half of the articles concerning the reform were originated by government debates, conferences or media-involved events and only on a few occasions the newspapers wrote about conflicts caused by closing down some of the schools.

Teachers were the main subject of every third article concerning the educational reform and the most often discussed issues were their salaries, dismissal and conditions of employment. Following the political options they represent, the newspapers presented and commented on the teachers' situation putting them at the same time in the context of their own orientation:

- In the liberal, right-wing discourse the teachers' position was analysed against the broader background of the transformation of the whole political system, and the *new teacher* was seen as an antithesis of an obedient state official, a symbol of the defeated regime;
- The vision of a teacher as created by the left-wing press focused on the present situation when teachers under the burden of reforms need more than anything else job security and higher salaries guaranteed in the state budget.

Another example of "ideological filtration" of arguments were at that time articles about changes in the content and methods of teaching.

- Newspapers supporting the reform presented the need to introduce it as obvious and recognized by the whole society, and the changes in curriculum were advocated without expressing any doubts. The arguments put forward by the authors pointed at dysfunctional aspects of the existing system which does not prepare individuals to function properly in social structures, such as economy and family, and it also kills their potential, individualism and creativity which are the basis for development of both individuals and the whole modern society.

⁴ Beata Zawadzka, *O czym milczy prasa? Analiza dyskursu oświatowego w prasie ogólnopolskiej i regionalnej (What is avoided in the press? The analysis of educational discourse in national and regional press)*, Warsaw University, Department of Sociology; master thesis written under the supervision of Professor Renata Siemieńska.

- For the catholic *Nasz Dziennik* the fight to defend encyclopaedic methods of teaching and traditional values in raising the young generation was a part of broader campaign to fight the liberal, pluralistic, supporting the free market society symbolized generally by “the West”. The main plot in the conservative discourse was unmasking of the hidden, false ideologies endorsed by the dominating class and accepted by the unconscious majority.

When the national press presented the changes in the system of education within the perspective of different political orientations and different visions of *public good*, the discourse in the regional dailies focused mostly on particular problems which local communities had to face. The reform was not discussed here in the context of its aims and strategies but it was presented mainly in articles about changes in the local school network or controversies connected with closing down some of the schools and situating gymnasiums. The author of the analysis concludes then: *Both national and regional press specialize in integrating social groups, the former brings together spiritual communities, people with similar opinions and beliefs and the latter strengthens the bonds among local communities.*

Presently the press and other media’s interest in the educational issues is much lower than five years ago and a temporary increase of the number of articles on this subject is naturally connected with the school calendar (beginning of the school year, holidays, exams and tests, enrolment) and with media-involved events (conferences, presenting data collected in opinion polls), it also grows sporadically when media presents local conflicts concerning schools. However, the two biggest national dailies (*Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*) publish regularly supplements on education which are important forums for opinion presenting, also local press often publish educational supplements. Moreover, in the three most popular socio-political weeklies (*Newseek*, *Polityka*, *Wprost*) articles on education-related issues appear regularly every few weeks.

There were a lot of articles in the Polish press commenting on the results of international PISA tests – the authors tried to decide on their basis about the strengths and weaknesses of our educational system. One can also find publications about the regular analysis from *Education at a Glance*. A number of Polish magazines present their rankings of different educational institutions: from kindergartens to universities. The rankings raise wide interest among the readers, especially those who are considering the choice of institution to realize their own or their children’s educational plans. Magazines try to present their criteria in creating the rankings and thus they help the readers to change from “passive recipients” to “well-informed consumers” of the system of education.

The present position of educational authorities, focusing more on supporting the stability of the system of education rather than on radical changes, helped to ease the social tensions. A fierce ideological discourse has practically disappeared, together with arguments about fundamental choices in the field of education and the possibility to discuss them in public. It seems to be a natural course of events as education cannot function properly in constant tension and eventually any form of stability is better received by the public opinion than a permanent revolution.

1.3 What is known about how society values the different aims of education? Are there major differences between different sections of society, defined in terms of political affiliation, age, gender, and cultural and ethnic background? What evidences is

there to suggest how society in general, and different groups in society, believe that these aims are achieved?

The following three main areas of the educational reform have also become the targets of the new Polish system of education during the last few years⁵:

- **Raising the level of society's education by developing secondary and higher education:** this target was to be achieved by introducing gymnasias and prolonging the period of compulsory schooling by one year, and also by creating a new type of secondary schools with professional profile which ensured secondary education for the majority of students and made it possible for them to continue studies at the higher level.
- **Creating equal educational opportunities for all children and teenagers:** the obstacles which do not let some students get well educated (parents' economic status and their level of education, place of living, disability) were to be overcome by the system of scholarships and by creating better conditions for integrating students with special educational needs. In order to equalize the level of schools in different social environments (e.g. make it possible for all students to use the Internet and learn foreign languages), the medium stage between the primary and the upper secondary school – gymnasium – was introduced to the schooling system⁶.
- **Improving the quality of education:** this included changing the curricula, developing the schools' role in bringing up the young generation, preparing the graduates both for adult life and for permanent self-developing. The new curricula were created so as to provide each graduate with basic skills necessary for adult life: skills necessary for further learning, interpersonal communication, teamwork, creative attitude towards problems solving, good command of computer programmes and foreign languages. The most important educational targets which were advocated by the authors of the reforms can be found now in documents created by schools, such as statutes, curricula, or schools' plans for development⁷. The most often mentioned targets are: acquiring social skills (functioning in the society, cooperation, taking care about common good, tolerance); increasing self-consciousness and self-control (emotional development, self-esteem); moral development (shaping the system of values, teaching respect for the rules of law, creating proper ideals); patriotism (national identity, learning about the history and culture of both the country and one's region, active participation in cultural life); making students aware of dangers; healthy life style; getting ready for life in democratic society and in family; cooperation of teachers, parents and students; developing culture and good manners.⁸

The level of social support for the aims of the reform and the methods to achieve them can be assessed on the basis of opinion polls conducted by CBOS from 1998 to 2001. Polish society supported the general idea of the reform, especially at the beginning. 42% of the polled said that the reform was necessary and urgent (in 1999 only 37%), 47% thought that it was necessary although not urgent (40% a year later). The level of acceptance was

⁵ *Edukacja. Raport 1997-2001 (Education. Report 1997-2001)*, MEN 2001, pp. 15-16.

⁶ The new system of education consists of six-year primary school, three-year gymnasium, three-year upper secondary school.

⁷ Schools are obliged to create certain documents: school's statute (including rules of pupils/students assessment, pupils'/students' code of rights and duties, program for pupils/students development, prevention programme), the set of school's chosen curricula, the program of school's development. Schools can also write other documents, for example concerning the mission and vision of the school.

⁸ E. Putkiewicz, A. Wiłkomirska, *Szkoły publiczne i niepubliczne. Porównanie środowisk edukacyjnych (Public and non-public schools. A comparison of different educational environments)*, ISP 2004, p. 87.

highest among the polled with the highest social status (highly educated people, managers, intelligentsia, students, people with the best economic status, inhabitants of big cities and also people with the right-wing political views).⁹

On the other hand there was a high level of criticism, especially at the local level, connected with introducing a number of changes in the system of education, necessary to start the reforms. Many Poles expressed their fear and lack of approval. In 2000 only 6% of the polled (and the rate was the same in different groups of society) were pleased with the effects of the reform, especially with: introducing computer science to the curriculum and computers with Internet connection to schools, possibility to learn foreign languages and generally improving the level of schooling and conditions in schools, the change of educational priorities (bigger stress on bringing up not only schooling, individual approach to students, motivating them to learn, developing self-responsibility, active participation in school's social life), raising the level of teachers' professional qualifications. The most often stressed negative results of the reform were: creating a new network of schools and, following this, closing down of small primary schools), problems with children's transportation to schools, financial and location problems, problems with equipment for schools, with new curricula, grades, textbooks, and finally teachers-related problems (difficulties to carry through the new curricula, redundancy connected with closing down schools). The rate of criticism was growing among the highly educated polled, also rural dwellers were more critical.¹⁰

Research conducted in the next year showed even higher level of dissatisfaction with how the targets of the reform were being achieved. A majority of the polled in 2001 expressed negative opinions about the changes: 37% said that the system of education functioned worse than before the reform, and only 14% noticed a change for the better, a quarter of all the polled did not have a clear opinion on it. The changes were assessed better by people living at higher economical level, more critical were the polled from the economically weakest groups of society; even more dissatisfied were highly educated people (11% of positive opinions and 52% of negative) and especially representatives of intelligentsia and management. Political affiliation was also an important factor: the polled with right-wing orientation were less critical (21% of positive opinions and 33% of negative) than those with left-wing sympathy (11% and 43% respectively).

A majority of Poles stated also that they could not see any chance for themselves in the reform: 25% decided it was disadvantageous for them, 44% thought it was meaningless for people like them, only 13% said they could benefit from it. The most critical were the economically weak and low educated groups in society but also the polled who were best educated, well-informed and most competent to express a valid opinion.¹¹ When six months later the same question about changes in the system of education was asked, among all the socio-demographic groups prevailed negative opinions pointing at deteriorating of the system rather than improving it, and in each of the groups there was a number of polled who claimed that nothing had really changed. The better educated the more critical the polled were, yet apart from the intelligentsia, managers and white-collar

⁹ CBOS *Reforma edukacji – pierwsze doświadczenia, nadzieje i obawy (Educational reforms – first experiences, hopes and fears)*, 2000.

¹⁰ CBOS *Reforma edukacji – pierwsze doświadczenia, nadzieje i obawy (Educational reforms – first experiences, hopes and fears)*, 2000.

¹¹ CBOS, *Szkolnictwo i reforma edukacji po trzech semestrach (The school and the reform after the first three semesters)*, 2001.

workers, also farmers were highly dissatisfied. The younger the polled the more often they expressed positive opinions about the reform, and the most approving of it were supporters of the political right.¹² This was, unfortunately the last of the series of polls conducted to monitor the subject of the educational reform – following the change of educational authorities and their policy, CBOS withdrew from this area of research and focused on polling the public opinion about secondary schools and about the value of education.

It is possible to compare opinions expressed by the public with those by representatives of the system of education (teachers and headmasters mainly) thanks to the most important research conducted within this area by the Institute of Public Affairs since the beginning of the school year 1999/2000. When polling the teachers, the researchers focus on those working in primary schools and gymnasia. When asked about changes introduced by the reform, a majority of them answered they did not really notice any, which was understandable at its early stage. Among the teachers who noticed the changes there were more positive than negative opinions, especially about better equipment for school, discipline at work, cooperation among teachers and with headmasters. There were fewer positive opinions on the changes in relationships between teachers and in their cooperation with counsellors (methodological advisers), which can be connected with lower job security and following on from that stronger competition about employment or promotion; the status of counsellors (methodological advisers) was considerably challenged when they became subordinates of local authorities. Generally, gymnasium teachers were more optimistic than primary school teachers – the former felt that their workplace was more socially appreciated and they identified more with it.¹³

When asked about the role of gymnasia in equalizing students' chances for better life, the majority of primary school teachers expressed a negative opinion and the gymnasium teachers were usually positive about it. According to K. Konarzewski, the former draw their opinion from "stereotypical resentment against educational reform and probably also from feeling of envy, natural for people who feel that neither they nor their institution got promoted in the process. (...) Gymnasium teachers' optimism can be exaggerated by their tendency to overestimate the place one identifies with. (...).¹⁴

The authors of the report feel that the chance to include a majority of Polish society in the process of reform was not really used – the high level of social enthusiasm at the beginning could later ease the negative reactions connected with introducing the changes. The biggest disadvantage of the process is the loss of trust of the people on the highest social level – best educated and economically strongest.

It must be admitted, on the other hand, that thanks to the reform, education became an important issue in the political programmes of different parties during the campaign before parliamentary elections in 2001.

2. The Attitudes and Expectations of Parents

What do parents expect of schools and how satisfied are they?

¹² CBOS, *Czy polskie szkoły wywiązują się ze swoich zadań? (Do Polish schools meet their goals?)*, 2001.

¹³ K. Konarzewski (ed.), *Szkolnictwo w pierwszym roku reformy systemu oświaty (Schools in the first year of the education system reform)*, ISP 2001, p. 105.

¹⁴ K. Konarzewski (ed.), *Szkolnictwo w pierwszym roku reformy systemu oświaty (Schools in the first year of the education system reform)*, ISP 2001, p. 107.

2.1 What is the evidence relating to levels of expressed parental approval of/satisfaction with what is achieved by:

- a) schools in general**
- b) those which their children actually attend.**

As there has been no regularly conducted research focused on a group of parents and concerning their opinion about the schools which their children actually attend, it is necessary at this point to call for data from different research where this issue appeared. It is impossible, however, to create on this basis a full and coherent picture.

Conducted in 2000 *The social view of the reform*¹⁵ is one of the first opinion polls showing the level of parental satisfaction with the newly reformed educational system of primary schools and gymnasium students' parents. A large number of the people polled gave the positive answer to the question: *Does the school give your child an opportunity to develop its skills?* – 76% for primary schools and 80% for gymnasiums. Similar results – around 80% of positive answers were given when parents were asked whether the school helps students to overcome problems connected with the learning process and whether it respects the students' rights. Rather an unusual level of optimism here reflects the wave of enthusiasm and support for the reform, characteristic for its early phase.

Because of the structure of changes in the Polish educational system, most researchers focused on parents of newly created gymnasiums' students, those being monitored for a few years by the Institute of Public Affairs. More than a half of parents asked to assess the changes introduced in the 1999/2000 school year were glad that their children attend a gymnasium rather than a primary school and one fourth was disappointed because of that.¹⁶ Also the parents' opinion concerning cooperation with school was very favourable – the majority of 84% thought that they were well-informed by the school about their children's progress. Moreover, the gymnasium, in parents' opinion, gives better chances for educational fairness. A large majority of parents decided that gymnasium teachers do their best to let each student learn as much as possible. They do not see gymnasium as a place for separating the good students from the weaker ones but rather as a place which can help their child achieve the planned level of education.¹⁷

Another research called *Do Polish schools meet their goals?*, conducted in June 2001 by CBOS (The Centre for Social Opinion Polls) is probably the best source of information on the general opinion of the society about schools. There is almost an equal number of the satisfied and the dissatisfied with the Polish educational system – 43% and 42% respectively, which means that the number of people satisfied decreased when compared to the situation from before the reform and during its early phase. Difference in the level of parental approval depends mostly on their own level of education – the polls show biggest approval, more than 50%, among the lowest educated parents among whom there was also the biggest group of people without clear opinion. The higher educated the parents the more critical they were (managers, the intelligentsia, white-collar workers, business people and also farmers).¹⁸

¹⁵ *Spółeczny obraz reformy, Edukacja 1997-2001. Raport (The social view of the reform. Education 1997-2001. Report)*, Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej, Warszawa 2001, chart 9.

¹⁶ K. Konarzewski (ed.), *Szkolnictwo w pierwszym roku reformy systemu oświaty (Schools in the first year of the education system reform)*, ISP 2001.

¹⁷ K. Konarzewski (ed.), *Szkolnictwo w pierwszym roku reformy systemu oświaty (Schools in the first year of the education system reform)*, ISP 2001, p. 143.

¹⁸ CBOS, *Czy polskie szkoły wywiązują się ze swoich zadań? (Do Polish schools meet their goals?)*, 2001.

Similar data had been collected one year earlier in a poll conducted by OBOP (The Public Opinion Polls Centre) when 51% of Poles expressed their satisfaction with educational possibilities for children and teenagers in their own town or region and 41% were dissatisfied with it.¹⁹

A detailed analysis of some chosen functions of schools done within the same research shows that positive opinions prevailed in the following areas: creating good conditions for comprehensive development: intellectual (highly qualified teachers, high level of students' knowledge, developing individual thinking and interests), spiritual (religious and patriotic education) and physical. There were also mostly positive opinions on the cooperation between school and parents.

Parents were more critical about other functions of schools: caring (medical care, ensuring students' safety, protection against drugs and violence, preparing students for real life this including family life), preparing children to be active society members at the local level and to participate in the country's social and political life. There were most fears concerning the schools' ability to ensure equal opportunities for young people from different social groups.

The focus of another research conducted by CBOS in 2002²⁰ was narrowed to upper secondary schools only and it showed that according to the public opinion those schools prepared their students best to continue education at the higher level (more than 50% of the polled), to using a computer, to self-education, to developing one's professional skills, to participating in cultural life (making students interested in literature, music, theatre, cinema and arts) and also to speaking foreign languages. The majority of the polled agree that upper secondary schools prepare well for further education but in other respects their opinions differed and depended mostly on their socio-economic status (education and income) and, secondarily, on the size of their place of residence. Generally, the higher the status of the polled and the bigger their town or city, the more critical they are about upper secondary schools and how they meet their goals.

2.2 What evidence exists on the priorities held by parents in general, as well as different groups of parents, about the main aims of schooling and on how well they assess that these priorities are actually achieved? Is anything known about parental satisfaction with the demands made on their children by the school system?

The low level of education of the Polish society in the second half of the 20th century did not foster parents' ambitions concerning their children's education. A research conducted after the year 1995 demonstrated considerable changes in this field following the political and economic transformation.²¹ However, the ambitions differ between social groups, the main differentiating factors being parents' education, their income and their own opinion on their financial means.

Another research conducted four years later shows that majority of Polish parents would like their child to get university education, both daughters (73%) and sons (69%). More than a half

¹⁹ OBOP, *Opinie o reformie oświaty w lutym 2000 roku (Opinions about the educational reform expressed in February 2000)*, 2000.

²⁰ CBOS, *Do czego przygotowują absolwentów polskie szkoły średnie? (What do Polish upper secondary schools prepare their graduates for?)*, 2002.

²¹ CBOS, *Aspiracje edukacyjne Polaków. Ocena wykształcenia narodu i kosztów edukacyjnych. Komunikat z badań (Educational aspirations of the Poles. The level of education of the nation and the costs of education – assessment. Report from research)*, 1996.

of the society believes there are differences between well educated and lower educated people, and the most often named characteristics of the previous are: intellectual level, opinions, way of thinking and the world view (54%), culture and social skills (34%), social status and better possibilities of employment, being promoted and higher income (29%), better resourcefulness and self-confidence (9%).²²

The priorities held by parents about the main aims of schooling are determined by their desire that their children get higher education and they are thus compatible with the main aims of the reform of education. This parental attitude follows from a natural need to assure their sibling of high socio-economic status, to protect them against the negative effects of economic transformation, unemployment being the main one, but also against other forms of social exclusion, for example following inadequate ability to use computers.

Students' chances of success at different stages of education seem to follow directly from high or low demands made on them by the school system, yet the parents' opinion on this problem is slightly ambiguous. Because of the already mentioned lack of proper research on this subject it becomes necessary to concentrate on the data concerning gymnasium students' parents. In the school year 1999/2000 gymnasium was generally viewed as more demanding than primary school and the parents reported more symptoms of educational burden on their children, such as being tired and afraid of school. This opinion, however, did not go together with lower approval as parents believed at the same time that gymnasium teachers work better than primary schools teachers. The parental satisfaction with high demands made on their children went against a natural worry about their good physical and mental condition, yet deep down the parents expected new schools to set as high standards of education as possible, an expectation generally met.²³ The situation in primary and upper secondary schools has not been surveyed properly yet.

Opinions on how the schools meet their education goals depend mostly on the level of education of the polled parents. The better educated they are the more often they express a negative opinion. Low educated people are usually less critical but this is probably connected with their lack of competence as very often they are unable to support their own opinion on the discussed subject. The most critical are the parents living in big cities who hold high expectations that schools will help their children start professional career. However, parents from small towns and villages are also critical when it comes to ensuring by schools high level of knowledge and equal standards for students from different social groups. A great majority (72%) of the polled parents from towns with fewer than twenty thousand inhabitants reckon that schools do not create for their students equal chances for better life. The most critical in this respect are farmers (80% of negative and only 16 % of positive opinions).²⁴

2.3 Is there any basis to the assertion that parents tend to be conservative as regards their children's education? Is anything known about the extent to which parents regard schools as a 'public good' or instead as a 'private consumer good'?

²² OBOP, *Wykształcenie – szansa czy przeżytek (Education – a chance or a relict of the past)*, 2000.

²³ K. Konarzewski (ed.), *Szkolnictwo w pierwszym roku reformy systemu oświaty (Schools in the first year of the education system reform)*, ISP 2001, pp. 123-5. Parents opinions about their children's (those who attend schools) condition collected in 2001-2001 do not show big changes but their direction is towards growing tiredness (55%) and stress (28%).

²⁴ CBOS, *Czy polskie szkoły wywiązują się ze swoich zadań? (Do Polish schools meet their goals?)*, 2001.

Discussions about new character of school in the perspective of social changes started in 1998 together with the creation of first private schools and the main issue of the discussions was the problem of educational inequality. The debate was started by the authors of the idea of non-public schools themselves, among whom there were two main groups. Members of the first one supported the idea of school as a *centre of social work and cultural activities*, a place to foster developing of trust, loyalty and solidarity. The second group held opposite ideas and supported schools focused on meeting the growing demands on the educational market. *The first group saw the main aim of schools in abating educational inequality. That meant the possibility to attend them for all students, which was connected with both state and private financing, for example by local governments and private sponsors and not by parents only. (...) The second group (...) tolerated inequality and accepted financing schools mostly by parents calling at the same time for considerable lowering of taxes for those who pay for their children's education themselves.*²⁵ For members of the first group the school is a *public good*, for the second it is a *public consumer good*.

The difference between the two sides of the debate opinions is reflected in the existing of two types of non-public (non-state) schools: civic and private ones. Civic schools declare focusing on the needs of local society and, what follows from that, good cooperation of parents, teachers and students to create a school's community. Private schools stress their professionalism in offering educational services to students and parents treated as individual clients.

The situation is different in public schools where there prevails treating the school as a public good but not in the meaning supported by civic schools. Because of the long tradition of total state control of education, parents of public schools' students hardly accept another meaning of 'public good' than treated rather unconcernedly 'social interest', a phrase often used during the communist era. On the other hand many parents believe that a good school is just everybody's right.

The crucial change in the meaning of 'public good' in the context of education is visible in parents' opinions about public and non-public schools. The latter assess schools as good and friendly much more often than parents of children attending public schools. Research conducted in 1997 proved that among the advantages of non-public schools are: smaller number of students in classes, focus on developing students' individual interests, innovative curriculum and methods of teaching fostered by young teachers. Another important fact is that both teachers and students get much more involved in developing their own school; and parents, although still slightly casual, were generally more active than in the case of public schools. On the whole, parents opinion on how schools meet their new educational and social goals was considerably higher in the case of non-public schools.²⁶

2.4 How well do particular groups of parents feel they are served by the school system? How equitable do different groups of parents believe the system to be – in general and in relation to their own children?

The phrase *being served by the school system* makes one think about relations between language and life – *being served* is most often used by people connected with private schools,

²⁵ E. Putkiewicz, A. Wilkomirska, A. Zielińska, *Szkoły społeczne i szkoły państwowe. Dwa światy socjalizacji (Civic schools and state schools. Two models of socialization)*, Społeczne Towarzystwo Oświatowe, 1997;

²⁶ E. Putkiewicz, A. Wilkomirska, A. Zielińska, *Szkoły społeczne i szkoły państwowe. Dwa światy socjalizacji (Civic schools and state schools. Two models of socialization)*, Społeczne Towarzystwo Oświatowe, 1997; B. Przyborowska, *Szkoły niepubliczne w Polsce. Oczekiwania i rzeczywistość (Non-public schools in Poland. Expectations and reality)*, Adam Marszałek, 1997.

which are a minority among the non-public schools. The phrase *being served* has in Polish strong economic connotations and as such is rather unpopular when it comes to debating education because it suggests parents' right to demand. A parent who sends his/her child to school is both a teacher's client and, in a way, his/her employer thanks to whom this workplace can exist. As has already been stated, among this group of Polish parents who really care about their children's education the debate is based on social rather than economic values. The feeling of being served well can thus be reduced to their approval of what is achieved by their children's school and satisfaction with it. These issues have already been discussed in points 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3. There have been no more detailed research on this subject.

3 Participation in Decision-making in the Schooling Process

How open to external influence is decision making in schooling – in local governance and day-to-day influence – and who exercises such influence?

3.1 What light does research shed on the *level* of involvement of parents and other members of the community in the directions taken by schools in the:

- a) **day-to-day directions taken for the education of different classes and pupils**
- b) **local governance of schools as institutions?**

Historically thinking one of the earliest common initiatives of teachers, parents and students at the early stage of political and economic transformation were the Public Educational Society and the Malopolskie Educational Society. They were the first to found civic (non-public) schools, based on the principle that state control should be restricted to abiding the law and checking the results of schooling. Decentralization of state education conducted in the 1990s brought about growing parental interest in their ability to influence the form, range and control of schools functioning. Bad conditions in many schools (overcrowded classes, not well-prepared teachers, poor equipment and hygienic conditions, outdated curricula) caused a lot of criticism but also fostered active reactions such as creating school councils, foundations or societies to collect funds for improving conditions at schools. Yet the Polish society's involvement in helping schools achieve their educational targets is still quite low. Although organizations acting in the field of education, caring about the development of children and teenagers (including parents' councils and other organizations supporting directly educational institutions) are among the three most often chosen areas of social activity (after labour unions and religious and parish communities), and only 2,3% of adult Polish citizens belong to them.²⁷

From the legal perspective, parents' influence on schools' functioning is possible through representative bodies, such as parents' council or school council.²⁸

Parents' council can put forward petitions and opinions to the school council, teachers' council and headmaster concerning all issues connected with schools, they also have the right to collect funds in order to support schools in fulfilling their statutory obligations. The rules of parents' council functioning are written down in schools' statutes.

School council is a body with much broader possibilities and public competence to control educational institutions, it can be created by a motion from at least two of the three democratic bodies functioning at school – teachers' council, students' self-government or parents' council. It is constituted by equal number of representatives from each of the

²⁷ SMG/ KRC *Wolontariat i filantropia Polaków 2003*(*Voluntary service and charity of the Poles 2003*), 2003.

²⁸ Educational System Act (Ustawa o systemie oświaty) (2000), chapt. 4.

organizations (in primary schools it does not concern pupils and in gymnasia students' participation is not compulsory) and the headmaster cannot be its member. School councils can deal with: writing down the statute, putting forward petitions and opinions concerning the school's budget, applying to organs which exercise pedagogical control for assessing the school's functioning, presenting opinions on all plans about school's functioning and innovations, assessing the extra and supplementary classes organized by school, collecting funds for the school.²⁹

In most Polish schools the school councils do not exist. There is a legal basis to create them at any time but it takes initiative and active participation of parents, because one cannot count on headmasters' initiative to do it. In the schools where the school council does not exist its duties are performed by teachers' council. According to the National Cooperative of Parents and Parents' Councils "school councils only exist in every tenth Polish school, yet many of them stopped working, usually because of withdrawing representatives of teachers' councils (often under pressure from schools' headmasters)"³⁰

Another legally recognized organization can be public school council to be created by local governments at all the three levels of local administration (*gmina, powiat, województwo*). It was assumed when the reform was being introduced that they will deal with studying and recognizing educational needs at the local level, presenting opinions on the local budget in its part concerning education, on projects of changes in the school network and on local regulations on educational issues.³¹ Just like school councils, public school councils in Poland are few.

In order to foster the process of making schools more democratic and public-sensitive there are documents (different than curricula) to be written down by all the bodies functioning at school in cooperation. These are documents such as statute, educational program, development and prevention programmes. In half of the surveyed schools, mainly non-public ones, the documents are created by representatives of all school institutions, but just as often the school statute, written down by teachers' council, is not discussed with parents and students, the mission and vision for the school are most often created by teachers' councils in the process of discussing propositions prepared by teams of teachers. Not in every school the drafts of documents are presented to and discussed with the public bodies functioning there. Documents such as school mission rarely deal with cooperation among teachers, parents and students, usually public and private schools have it written down in their programmes of development.³²

²⁹ In some non-public (civic) schools the above institutions take different forms, e.g. the function of the school council or both school and parents' councils is performed by the managing board of the founding body, for example the local branch of STO (Społeczne Towarzystwo Oświatowe – Public Educational Society) or the general assembly; schools can also decide to create their self-governing bodies with the whole school's community which sets up the parliament, government and court (consisting of teachers, parents and students); or they may dissolve the school's council and have a 'tripartite division of power' instead: teachers' council, parents' council and students' council coordinated by a headmaster. E. Putkiewicz, A. Wiłkomirska, *Szkoły publiczne i niepubliczne. Porównanie środowisk edukacyjnych (Public and non-public schools. A comparison of different educational environments)*, ISP 2004, p. 75.

³⁰ Opinion of Krajowe Porozumienie Rodziców i Rad Rodziców (the National Cooperative of Parents and Parents' Councils).

³¹ *Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej o reformie. Do samorządu terytorialnego (The Ministry of National Education about the reform. Information for local authorities)*, Biblioteczka Reformy, Warszawa.

³² E. Putkiewicz, A. Wiłkomirska, *Szkoły publiczne i niepubliczne. Porównanie środowisk edukacyjnych (Public and non-public schools. A comparison of different educational environments)*, ISP 2004.

The level of parents' involvement in planning and supervising schools' functioning is still rather low although during the last few years in different regions of Poland (Śląsk, Zielona Góra, Szczecin, Warszawa, Bielsko-Biała) groups of parents started working actively. They integrate their activities by creating regional and national organizations, e.g. the National Cooperative of Parents and Parents' Councils located in Katowice (Krajowe Porozumienie Rodziców i Rad Rodziców – KPRiRR) or Zachodniopomorskie Parents' Society in Szczecin. In the research of parents' influence on schools' educational programmes 76% of primary schools and 80% of gymnasia studied parents' expectations before creating them but actively involved in the process of creating the programmes were only 25% of parents.³³ To the next question in the poll, if parents ever tried to make any changes in school's functioning, there were only 18% of positive answers.³⁴

According to the KPRiRR one of the major obstacles against parents' self-organizing within institutional framework and thus allowing them to exercise real influence on the system of education is the lack in the „Act on the System of Education” of procedures for democratic election and organization of their representative bodies. Another problem is exercising political influence by local authorities who often treat public schools and their environment as reserved for them and carefully watched area for campaigning and gaining political supporters. Also the Citizen Rights' Spokesman in his annual reports in the Polish Parliament has often pointed out the diminishing role of parents and parents' organizations and very low level of the broad public influence on the system of education.³⁵

3.2 Are there clear *patterns* relating to which groups of parents or other members of communities tend most to be involved and which least involved, and in what kinds of decision-making? What does the evidence show about *who* exercises available choices over school enrolment?

Although there have been created legal basis for parents self-organizing, the position of parents within the system of education is still rather low, their interest in school functioning is usually limited to problems connected directly with their own children and parents' activity at school and is carefully and strictly controlled by headmasters and their subordinate teachers. This situation was reflected in a public opinion poll on the role of parents' self-government in school. The collected data show that the polled supported parental influence on schools' functioning within the following seven areas: setting the level of a yearly paid voluntary contribution to school (92%), organizing school trips and other events (91%), solving difficult educational problems with individual students (85%), schools' important financial decisions (77%), organizing extra and additional classes (76%), creating the school's program for children and teenagers development and influence on the choice of educational methods (65%). The polled were definitely less supportive of parents' sway over assessing teachers work (53% for, 39% against), they were clearly divided on the issue of creating curricula and choosing the subjects to be taught at school (46% for and 46% against) and the negative

³³ *Spoleczny obraz reformy. Edukacja 1997-2001. Raport (The social view of the reform. Education 1997-2001. Report)*, Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej, Warszawa 2001, part C.

³⁴ K. Konarzewski, „*Drugi rok reformy strukturalnej systemu oświaty: fakty i opinie*” (*The second year of the structural reform: facts and opinions*), ISP 2001, p. 45.

³⁵ Information was collected and edited by Krzysztof Śnioszek (a member of a social movement to make Polish system of education more public-sensitive, coordinator of KPRiRR, founder and editor of a free magazine *Rodzice w Szkole (Parents at School)*) on the basis of his own observations and experience, and documents supplied by organisations and groups of parents constituting the Krajowe Porozumienie Rodziców i Rad Rodziców (National Cooperative of Parents and Parents' Councils) – KPRiRR.

opinions prevailed when it came to parents' sway over the choice of teachers to be employed by school (39% for, 53% against).³⁶

Founding of the first non-state schools during the period of socio-political transformation in Poland showed that there exist groups of parents actively involved in educational issues, not only directly connected with their own children's education but also willing to participate in the process of decision-making. Non-state schools were created by representatives of the highest educated social group and their children constituted the majority in the first years of these institutions' operating but soon (in 1990) another social group – private entrepreneurs, started to send their children there. Research done in 1994 showed that 23% of non-state schools' pupils were intelligentsia's children and 46% were private entrepreneurs' children.³⁷ Research conducted in 1995 in Warsaw in order to compare the level of parents' education of public and non-public schools' pupils showed that there were almost twice as many highly educated parents' children in non-public (61%) as in public primary schools (33%). The difference was smaller in high schools: 52% and 43% respectively. The non-public primary schools' pupils were most often children of parents with professional jobs: highly educated specialists, and people with liberal professions; almost 40% of them were employed by private business and only 25% worked in state institutions; 30% of the polled were private business owners. In the case of non-public high schools 20% of parents were private business owners, 33% were employed by private business, and 42% worked in state institutions.³⁸

In 2004 an interesting research has been done to check both in public and non-public schools the “index of public involvement” – an evaluative tool consisting of five surveyed elements: (1) the number of public bodies operating at school, (2) cooperation with parents or cooperation of the three school's self-governing bodies set as a main target in the school's program, (3) availability of school documents, (4) the procedure of creating important school documents, (5) ways of celebrating important school events. The research has shown that in non-public schools the index is definitely higher.³⁹

The level of parental involvement is not so strictly connected with place of residence. The difference in parents' willingness to exercise influence on schools functioning between urban and rural dwellers is only three percent (40% and 37% respectively), on the other hand 30% of parents living in cities and 35% of those living out of cities believe that the level of involvement is satisfactory. Probably not all of those who expressed this opinion are ready to start working actively in order to improve schools functioning. It is worth mentioning, however, that quite a big group of parents (20% in the rural, 15% in cities) held some functions in public institutions managing schools' functioning (school's council, parents' council etc.). Half of those 'active' parents call for more rights to exercise influence on schools – those who decided to do something would like to have more power.⁴⁰

³⁶ CBOS, *Reforma edukacji – poinformowanie i poparcie społeczne (Educational reforms – the level of information and social support)*, 2000.

³⁷ M. Zahorska-Bugaj, „Szkoła prywatna czy państwowa”(Private or state school?), in: R. Siemieńska (ed.), *Szkoły niepaństwowe w systemie edukacji w Polsce (Non-public schools in the system of education in Poland)*, „Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny” 1-2 Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 1994.

³⁸ E. Putkiewicz, A. Wilkomirska, A. Zielińska, *Szkoły państwowe a szkoły społeczne. Dwa światy socjalizacji (Civic schools and state schools. Two models of socialization)*, Społeczne Towarzystwo Oświatowe, Warszawa 1997.

³⁹ E. Putkiewicz, A. Wilkomirska, *Szkoły publiczne i niepubliczne. Porównanie środowisk edukacyjnych (Public and non-public schools. A comparison of different educational environments)*, ISP 2004, pp. 100-101.

⁴⁰ K. Konarzewski, „Drugi rok reformy strukturalnej systemu oświaty: fakty i opinie” (*The second year of the structural reform: facts and opinions*), ISP 2001, p. 46.

The choice of school for a child.

Instead of obligatory enrolment of a child to the nearest school, the reform of the educational system gave parents freedom to choose a school for their children. 'The very possibility to make a free choice of school for one's children was treated as democratic gain and the main condition to make education public sensitive'.⁴¹ In great majority of cases, parents who care about the quality of education their children will receive and who make choices based on exams carried out by educational supervising institutions and on press rankings and thus decide sometimes on the choice of a far away non-public school are people with the highest socio-economic status. What follows from this fact is fear of growing social selection of pupils. Data collected in polls and research conducted so far do not show that parents' freedom of choice can add considerably to the already existing social inequality although there have been signs of schools' differentiating as some schools try to achieve more than average level and become 'elite'. Gymnasias are willing to enrol outstanding students out of their own area and later sometimes put them into separate classes offering better educational conditions. Researchers notice that many gymnasias segregate students into separate classes according to their earlier achievements, abilities, place of residence and sometimes even on the basis of students' participation in additional, often paid, 'afternoon classes', which reflects the social differences between students in the school's structure.⁴²

4. Pupil Choices and Values

What do we know about the aspirations of young people themselves, and how well these are met through schooling?

4.1 What do young people think about their schooling – its relevance and quality? What is known about what motivates them to study, in particular the balance between intrinsic interest and seeking extrinsic reward? How do the views of young people match with the views of others, including their parents and teachers, about what is important in education?

In public opinion polls about the value of education pupils and students much more often than the general public point out education as an important target in their lives – 43% of eighteen-year-olds and 60% of university students said so (the average rate in the whole society was 18%), they also more often claim that education is the most important target in their lives (14% and 19% respectively).⁴³ During the last eight years the number of young people who believe that in 10 – 15 years' time they will be highly educated has grown more than twice (it is 57% now) and at the same time a decreasing number of people plan to finish their education after graduating from upper secondary school. A great majority of general secondary schools' students are certain that they will get university education (96%) and similarly think students of technical and profiled secondary schools (78% and 77% respectively) among whom there has been an increase by 20 – 22% in this respect since 1996. The most certain to get a university degree are the young people living in cities and towns who describe their families' economic status as at least average. Girls seem to be more ambitious than boys. Secondary education satisfies 11% of technical secondary schools' students, 9% of profiled secondary schools' and only 1% of those from general secondary schools. We can draw a general

⁴¹ E. Putkiewicz, A. Wilkomirska, *Szkoły publiczne i niepubliczne. Porównanie środowisk edukacyjnych (Public and non-public schools. A comparison of different educational environments)*, ISP 2004, p. 21.

⁴² R. Dolata, K. Konarzewski, E. Putkiewicz, *Rekomendacje dla polityki oświatowej po trzech latach reformy szkolnictwa (Recommendations for educational policy after three years of educational reform)*, ISP 2003.

⁴³ CBOS, *Czy Polacy cenią wykształcenie? (Do the Poles value education?)*, 2002.

conclusion then, that young people are no longer satisfied with finishing education after technical or profiled secondary schools. Also the students from basic vocational schools have growing ambitions reflected in the decreasing number of the polled who plan to finish education at this level, more and more of them plan to continue their education.⁴⁴

The aspirations are manifested in growing demand – more young people choose nowadays secondary schools after which they can continue education at higher level, there are also many more students in higher education. However, the demand for education has not increased equally in all social groups, it is typical for children of employees and self-employed⁴⁵ while it has actually decreased among teenagers living in villages. Although in a research conducted in 2003 by CBOS⁴⁶ among pupils and students from rural schools on goals important for happy life, education and knowledge was on the sixth position and it was chosen by 96% of the polled, it is worth mentioning that during the period from early eighties to late nineties the ratio of primary schools' graduates from peasant families who later became university students went down from one in fourteen to one in a hundred and forty.⁴⁷

Young people's opinions on the quality of their schooling reflect also changes in the structure of educational system: in the first year of gymnasia operating they were assessed by a huge majority of students as a source of greater and more important knowledge than primary schools.⁴⁸ About 80% of gymnasium students polled during the research on "Social view of the reform" (2000) said that this school gave them better possibilities to develop their individual interests and almost 50% of the students attended afternoon activities. Data collected in the following year showed the same level of satisfaction, moreover, 58% of the polled students assessed highly the value of knowledge learnt at gymnasium and 34% decided that their own willingness to learn was higher than in primary school.⁴⁹ Yet, when it came to assessing the educational conditions, the students were much more critical than teachers: the number of students claiming that didactic equipment in gymnasium was better than in primary school decreased from 47% to 34% among rural students and from 46% to 28% among urban, there was also bigger number of students (increase by 2% and 4% respectively) who had never made any use of didactic equipment.

After the first year of gymnasia functioning students' opinions about teachers changed for the worse: not so much when students assessed teachers' sympathy towards them and their interest in their problems, but the number of students believing that gymnasia teachers are fair in their grading diminished from 26% to 17% among rural students and from 23% to 12% among urban. There are more students who believe that gymnasia teachers are more prejudiced than those who held the opposite opinion. Even the opinion on textbooks deteriorated, especially among rural students. One year earlier 36% of students thought they were more interesting and easier to learn than primary school textbooks, in the next year only 26% thought so. An optimistic fact which improves slightly the broad picture was that only

⁴⁴ CBOS, *Plany dążenia i aspiracje życiowe młodzieży (Plans, aims and aspirations of youth)*, 1999.

⁴⁵ *Raport o rozwoju społecznym. Polska 1998. Dostęp do edukacji (Report on social development. Poland 1998. Access to education)*, UNDP 1998, p. 53.

⁴⁶ OBOP, *Spoleczne i kulturowe determinanty wyboru szkoły ponadgimnazjalnej przez młodzież z terenów wiejskich (Social and cultural determinants of the post-gymnasium school choice in rural areas)*, 2003.

⁴⁷ *Raport o rozwoju społecznym. Polska 1998. Dostęp do edukacji (Report on social development. Poland 1998. Access to education)*, UNDP 1998, p. 51.

⁴⁸ K. Konarzewski (ed.), *Szkolnictwo w pierwszym roku reformy systemu oświaty (Schools in the first year of the education system reform)*, ISP 2001, p. 110.

⁴⁹ K. Konarzewski, „*Drugi rok reformy strukturalnej systemu oświaty: fakty i opinie*” (*The second year of the structural reform: facts and opinions*), ISP 2001, p. 40.

11% of students accused teachers of being careless whether their students understand the material presented during lessons.⁵⁰

Research shows that gymnasias students have high expectations connected with their school: both about being well prepared for further education and about additional activities offered by schools to give them a chance for developing their interests, for entertainment and social contacts.⁵¹ The general picture of gymnasias students' stance on their schools differs depending on the place of residence: young people living in the country have the most positive attitude towards their school, it is for them a chance to get valuable education, worth of efforts in spite of growing obstacles such as higher educational requirements and longer distance from home to school; teenagers from small towns usually have similar attitude; the most critical about gymnasias are students living in cities, which can result either from too high expectations or from very good memories from primary school, however, also this group notices more changes for the better than for the worse.⁵²

Students finishing upper secondary schools and university students are very critical about the qualifications they received at schools. The young people polled by CBOS assess qualifications acquired at school higher than representatives of other social groups in one respect only: their ability to work in a team (56%). Many students (19% - more than adults), not having finished their education yet, think that schools do not prepare well for university studies, they are also more critical about the level of qualifications for operating computer programmes (62% of positive and 36% of negative answers) and about being prepared for life in the European Union (40% and 50% respectively).⁵³

Students' assessment of the quality of their school cannot be reduced to educational aspects only. The results of PISA tests bring data concerning not only the level of fifteen-year-olds' competence but also their feeling of belonging to school – 41% of the surveyed students said yes when asked if they had experienced the feeling of loneliness and isolation, 29% admitted having come late and play truant. What is interesting, in conducted in the same year poll *The social view of the reform* 82% of primary school pupils said yes when asked if they liked their school and 66% admitted having many friends, 12% said they felt lonely at school and 76% of students expressed positive opinions about their teachers.

Generally, parents' and children's values and aspirations concerning education match, both in public and non-public schools, although in different social groups there are sometimes considerable differences in priorities, especially when it comes to ways of achieving success, freedom of choice, self-reliance, ambition, initiative and ability to fight for one's aims and views.⁵⁴

Research conducted from 1993 to 2002 on what motivates young people (in the last year of secondary education and university students) to study show significant changes connected with the change of economic situation in Poland. In 1993 most of the polled pointed at the

⁵⁰ K. Konarzewski, „*Drugi rok reformy strukturalnej systemu oświaty: fakty i opinie*” (*The second year of the structural reform: facts and opinions*), ISP 2001, p. 42.

⁵¹ K. Konarzewski (ed.), *Szkolnictwo w pierwszym roku reformy systemu oświaty* (*Schools in the first year of the education system reform*), ISP 2001, p. 117.

⁵² K. Konarzewski (ed.), *Szkolnictwo w pierwszym roku reformy systemu oświaty* (*Schools in the first year of the education system reform*), ISP 2001, p. 119.

⁵³ CBOS, *Czy Polacy cenią wykształcenie?* (*Do the Poles value education?*), 2002.

⁵⁴ E. Putkiewicz, A. Wilkomirska, *Szkoły publiczne i niepubliczne. Porównanie środowisk edukacyjnych* (*Public and non-public schools. A comparison of different educational environments*), ISP 2004, p. 22.

possibility to get a well-paid job (66%), less important were: independence and self-reliance (37%), easier life (36%), interesting job (36%), intellectual development and self-fulfilment (34%), and on the sixth position there was avoiding unemployment (16%). In 2002 this last argument gained much more account among the polled (46%), together with well-paid job (73%) and easier life (42%), the number of the polled pointing at interesting job did not change (36%), fewer of them chose independence and public respect and recognition as important motivating factors (13%) and the biggest decrease was observed at intellectual development and self-fulfilment (13%).⁵⁵ The need of economic security became more important than non-material ends.

Young people's motivation to study is obviously influenced by TV news, press reports and information from internet about salaries and wages. "You must be well-educated to be well-paid" reads a headline in *My career. Education and work*. – a supplement to *Rzeczpospolita* daily. "Young people with university diploma earn more than their lower educated peers. The longer the professional career, the bigger difference in salaries of the employed with university degree and those who finished education after secondary school".⁵⁶

4.2 What are the rates of absenteeism from compulsory school and how does this vary from the beginning of the primary cycle to the end of the lower secondary cycle? What are the characteristics of those who are most persistently absent? Is there evidence about boredom among the young?

Research on rates of absenteeism from compulsory school shows that it is a strongly age-related phenomenon. The average number of not excused absences (in the school year 2000/2001) is one per a primary school pupil and 13,2 per a gymnasium student.⁵⁷ Research conducted by Krzysztof Konarzewski two years later (2002/2003) on a representative sample of primary schools and gymnasia shows that playing truancy is one of the most often committed offences against the school rules, especially in gymnasia. The problem is bigger among rural than urban students.

No research has been done on the characteristics of pupils and students who are most persistently absent.

Boredom is not treated by the young as an important reason for playing truant, although data collected in 2000 (*The social view of the reform*) shows that when asked why they do not like their schools 64% of primary school pupils pointed at boredom. Among gymnasium students 23% described the level of boredom as higher than in primary school and 37% said it was at the same level.⁵⁸

4.3 What is the room for students and their parents to choose different programmes of study, and how far are these primarily in the hands of schools and the education authorities? How far do young people participate in the decision-making of schools? Is

⁵⁵ CBOS, *Polacy o swoim wykształceniu – wzrost niezadowolonia* (*The Poles about their education – growing dissatisfaction*), 2002.

⁵⁶ „Rzeczpospolita”, 18.02.2004, „Z dyplomem największa pensja” (*The highest salary with a higher education diploma*).

⁵⁷ K. Konarzewski, *Drugi rok reformy strukturalnej systemu oświaty: fakty i opinie* (*The second year of the structural reform: facts and opinions*), ISP 2001, p. 32.

⁵⁸ K. Konarzewski, *Drugi rok reformy strukturalnej systemu oświaty: fakty i opinie* (*The second year of the structural reform: facts and opinions*), ISP 2001, p. 48.

anything known about such influence or participation by young people in any of different types of schools referred to in 5.1?

Started in 1999 the reform of educational programme introduced new curricula in the first stage of primary education (first three grades), in the fourth grade, and in the first grade of gymnasium. The Ministry of National Education and Sport created the core curriculum for general education, settled the standard requirements (tests and exams) and also approved 198 programmes of study to be used by schools (out of more than 500 offered before April 2001) – the choice was made by a team of consultants. The Ministry purchased sets of programmes of study and sent them to pedagogical libraries, regional teacher-in-service training centres, offices of regional superintendents, teacher training colleges, Higher Pedagogical Schools and University Pedagogical Departments. By the end of May 1999 all teachers had participated in methodological conferences where they could get all necessary information about the new programmes.

The educational reform set new targets and tasks for the authors of curricula and methods, for publishers and for teachers. Before 1989 there was only one programme for teaching of each subject, created and imposed on schools by the Ministry of Education. In the 1990s there was freedom for teachers to create their original programmes but rather few teachers actually did that. Presently teachers can choose from the range of ready programmes or create their own ones, they only need to agree on the choice of programme with other teachers of the same class. A school's set of programmes is approved for use by the headmaster on the basis of opinion of teachers' council and school or parents' council.

The reform of curricula opened the market of textbooks and programmes of study for the rules of free-market economy and started competition between publishers, who in consequence became the co-authors of the reform. Yet, the necessity to compete for position on the market of programmes and textbooks quickly changed into dramatic fight for clients. Data collected by the Institute of Public Affairs shows that more than a half of gymnasium teachers of Polish language get cheaper or free books, sometimes the methods of sale are close to bribery – as it is in the case of “promotional benefits” offered to teachers, for example free audio and video equipment, trips, free packages of additional teaching materials. There have also been cases of “stealing” logos of well recognised publishers.⁵⁹ Even the teachers who are not tempted by these methods have a problem to choose from a huge range of offers as it takes a lot of time to read the programmes and assess the textbooks.

The new curricula are not as ‘encyclopaedic’ and detail-oriented as the old ones, they aim at teaching essential skills. One of the main principles of the reform was to create in students' minds an integrated system of knowledge, skills and views and it was thus the target of the new curricula: in the first stage of primary school (grades 1-3) integrated teaching was implemented (there are no separate subject lessons, teachers follow their own flexible schedule adjusting the educational activities, duration of lessons and breaks to pupils' activity), in the next three grades of primary school and in gymnasia together with subjects thought separately there are integrated classes (humanistic and scientific) which present the material from different subject so as to let students better understand the more complicated phenomena. There have also been introduced cross-curricular themes:

⁵⁹ E. Putkiewicz, „Programy i podręczniki gimnazjalne – proces powstawania oraz ich ocena przez nauczycieli” (Curricula and textbooks for the gymnasium – the process of their drafting and evaluation carried out by teachers), in: *Zmiany w systemie oświaty. Wyniki badań empirycznych (Curricula in the education system. Results of empirical research)*, ISP 2002.

- in primary school: health education, ecological education, reading and media education, education for society,
- in gymnasia: philosophical, reading and media, health, ecological, regional education (cultural heritage of the region), civil defence, European education, Polish culture in the context of Mediterranean civilisation.

The cross-curricular themes are taught both during separate classes and together with other subjects.

Teachers can choose both the programme and textbook which are usually written by the same author (in 1999 there were 199 textbooks approved by the Ministry to be used at schools, in 2001 there were more than 700). There is no doubt, however, that only teachers can exercise the freedom of choice; this does not concern parents, who have no real influence on the choice of teaching programme, textbook, or even foreign language for their children. What is more, research concerning parents' expectations from their self-governing bodies do not show that there is a wide-spread need to exercise such influence.⁶⁰ Many parents take teachers' decisions for granted and buy the textbooks without questioning their choices. The only area of parental activity in choosing textbooks is actually a side-effect of introducing the system of external examinations. Parents' interest focuses on materials concerning the system and methods to get well-prepared for the exams.

Pupils and students of institutions of compulsory education have no influence whatsoever on the choice of teaching programmes and textbooks. They have sometimes the possibility to choose the additional ('afternoon') classes.

5. Diversity in the Structure of School Systems and Influence over the Curriculum

How is diversity of demand recognised in the „supply” of schooling and how broad is the influence over the contents of formal education?

5.1 What formal distinctions, if any, are there between types of school distinguished in terms of such factors as ability/selectivity of the students intake, public/private, religious affiliation, or specialisation based on linguistic or curriculum grounds? What is the scale of participation in private schooling and what does 'private' mean? Is 'home-schooling' legal and under what conditions? Where such alternatives exist, what proportion of the child and youth cohorts are involved in each?

School System

The compulsory education of a child starts at the beginning of the school year, in the calendar year in which a child turns seven, and lasts till the person is eighteen.

There are the following schools for children and youth:

- **Primary schools:** six-year education finishes with the test entitling children to continue their education in gymnasium; before the transformation changes in Poland these schools constituted the most uniform element of the education system. This was changed as a result of subjecting the finances of schools to other, non-budgetary sources – from local self-government and private. This factor brought about the differentiation of provided educational services (exceeding the curriculum minimum), social and protective functions

⁶⁰ CBOS, *Reforma edukacji – poinformowanie i poparcie społeczne (Educational reforms – the level of information and social support)*, 2000.

of a school, and the quality of teachers' work. A public school is obliged to enroll all pupils from its prescribed area, but parents are not obliged to choose this particular school.

- **Gymnasia:** following the reform requirements, they were separated partly from the primary and partly from the secondary school structures. Three-year education finishes with an exam and gives the opportunity of further education in basic vocational schools, secondary schools of general education, secondary schools of profiled education, or secondary technical schools. Recruitment for gymnasia is not based on any obligatory selection, but in reality better gymnasia use some methods of selection such as an interview or best certificate contest.
- **Post-gymnasium secondary schools** (vocational schools, secondary schools of general and profiled education, secondary technical schools); since 2002 gymnasium pupils do not take entrance exams to post-gymnasium schools, but apply to three chosen schools – recruitment criteria take into account pupils' grades from the final class certificate and the results of a two-day external test taken at the end of gymnasium education.

The Polish system of secondary education was for many years dominated by vocational schools, set up with a view to help the plans of accelerating the industrialization of the country. This type of education reached its peak in the 1960s and the 1970s, when 50-60% of primary school leavers continued their education in basic vocational schools.⁶¹ However, until the 1970s educational reform, graduates from such schools did not have any possibility of continuing their education at a higher level. The reform gave them this possibility, but the percentage of those who made use of it was very low, probably due to the pay system valid at that time (skilled workmen enjoyed higher salaries than representatives of jobs in which you had to acquire higher education). Because the offer of vocational schools was much richer for boys, girls went to secondary schools of general education and then to universities, thus reaching a higher level of education. During the time of transformation at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s the situation was reversed – more youth chose secondary schools of general education and secondary technical schools which enabled them to continue their education at higher education institutions and universities: in 1998 31% and in 2002 – 44% of pupils chose secondary schools of general education, whereas 34% and 40% respectively, chose secondary technical schools. Education in basic vocational schools was chosen by 34% in 1998 and only 16% in 2002. **Secondary schools of general education** offer different quality of education, which results from considerable freedom in choosing the curriculum (the so-called “authoring” curriculum), differentiated possibilities of payment and ambiguous criteria of evaluating their work. Schools from big cities are in the privileged situation, because competition there is strong, and school rankings, popularized by the media and based on external criteria, help to maintain appropriate quality of education. The gap between these schools and provincial ones is widening, mainly because of problems with language teaching in provincial areas.

Public and non-public schools

In 1989, when the state lost its monopoly for running schools, all state schools were gradually taken over by local self-government, and then, after the administrative reform, other units of territorial self-government. Public school is defined as an educational institution set up on the basis of a founding act by government administration structures or a territorial self-government unit (commune, district or region) or other corporate or individual body. Such a school provides free education based on curricula approved by Ministry of National

⁶¹ *Raport o rozwoju społecznym. Polska 1998. Dostęp do edukacji (Report on social development. Poland 1998. Access to education)*, UNDP 1998, p. 59.

Education and Sport (MENiS) as well as on principles of evaluating and classifying defined by the Ministry. At present almost all public schools and educational institutions are run by territorial self-government units.

Public schools. Being public schools, schools run by local self-government units offer free education, but only within the so-called core curriculum and the curriculum which is based on it. All additional classes are paid for. Free education exceeding the curriculum minimum, covering language teaching, subjects developing pupils' interests and physical development, can be provided only in richer communes. Similarly, limiting the social and protective functions of the school, which had made it not only an educational but also a social and development center in local environment, differentiated considerably the educational chances of children from poor and disadvantaged areas. Social help centers are not able to substitute for many functions of a school, especially in rural areas.⁶²

Non-public schools. During the communist period private schools, with an exception of a few schools enjoying special status, did not exist. Social and political changes that took place in Poland after the fall of the communist system brought about a lot of criticism directed at public education system, which was seen as ideologically subservient to the old system, teaching obsolete content and using educational methods which were not suitable for the civilization level and job market needs. The education system also preserved hierarchical relations, in which pupils had extremely limited rights to voice their opinions. The bill from 1991 regulated the existence and the principles of financing non-public schools. 'Establishing the first non-public schools was one of important symbols of political victory, and an element of a newly-built democracy and hope for improvement in various fields of social life.'⁶³ In the first two years of transformation, civic and religious organizations as well as other units of private sector applied for permission to set up their own schools, quoting recently created legal opportunities (1989 economic freedom legislation and 1990 education system legislation).⁶⁴ At the beginning most non-public schools were of general education – primary and secondary; in the next years the number of vocational schools grew faster, especially at the post-secondary level.

The changes in the 1995 Act on the System of Education introduced the division of non-public schools into: (1) those having the powers of public schools (such as the right to issue certificates and state diplomas) as long as they implement the curriculum minimum (core curriculum) obligatorily in public schools and use the classifying and promoting principles introduced by MENiS, and (2) non-public schools without such powers and obligations. Primary schools and gymnasia in Poland can only be public or non-public with the powers of public schools. Taking into account the ownership structure, non-public schools can be divided into: (1) private schools being the property of individuals or private entities; (2) civic schools, founded and owned by civic organizations; (3) religious schools run by Catholic Church, orders and religious organizations. Non-public primary and secondary schools are mainly civic schools, established by organizations of interested people (parents and teachers), which function as *non-profit* organizations.

⁶² K.W. Frieske, P. Popławski, D. Zalewski, „Marginalność i procesy marginalizacji społecznej” (Marginality and processes of social marginalization), in: S. Golinowska (ed.), *Polityka społeczna państwa w procesie przebudowy ustroju i systemu społeczno-gospodarczego (Social policy of the state in the process of rebuilding of the political, social and economic system)*, IPiSS, „PBZ”.

⁶³ E. Putkiewicz, A. Wilkomirska, *Szkoły publiczne i niepubliczne. Porównanie środowisk edukacyjnych* (Public and non-public schools. A comparison of different educational environments), ISP 2004.

⁶⁴ *Raport o rozwoju społecznym. Polska 1998. Dostęp do edukacji (Report on social development. Poland 1998. Access to education)*, UNDP 1998, p. 79.

Non-public schools are financed from pupils' fees – in civic schools the fees are lower than in private schools. The burden of high fees, resulting from high costs of running the school in free market reality, was partly eased by subsidy from the national budget, initially amounting to 50% in 2001. The subsidy now covers 100% of expenses incurred per one pupil (subsidy is allocated only to schools having the powers of public school); tax relief in the form of writing off some expenses on fees and commuting to school was abolished, but a new regulation on donations was introduced.

Non-public schools cannot obviously be mass schools, due to fees and their location (they are mostly set up in big and medium-sized cities). Civic schools population is dominated by children of white-collar workers and business people. Because there are many candidates to such schools (costs of education here are lower than in private schools), they are selected by means of tests and exams which may also aim at discovering the candidates' predispositions to learn in such a place. Such schools take up many extra-school activities aiming at development of education for special groups of pupils, promoting innovatory curricula, and developing scientific and other interests of pupils. Private schools, on the other hand, are often exclusive places due to high monthly and entrance fees which enable the school to offer rich curriculum, comfortable classrooms and organization of classes in order to meet parents' expectations.

The research directed by Professor Renata Siemieńska (1992) aiming at showing the functions of non-public schools in creating a new social system, indicated that parents from Warsaw were more positive towards civic schools than parents from smaller cities; in fact, most of them considered these schools to be better than public schools. In the same survey parents explained the reasons of their choice of such schools for their children. The opinions in small cities were less favorable – as much as 1/3 of respondents claimed that the creation of private schools was a negative phenomenon, though at the same time the majority of respondents considered such schools to be better than state ones. Parents who send their children to such schools were accused of being economically snobbish. More detailed investigation into the criteria of choice of non-public schools revealed that in those schools the relations between the teacher and pupils were better, teachers displayed individual approach to pupils, the classes were not overcrowded and the educational offer was richer.⁶⁵

As far as educational aims are concerned, the differences between public and non-public schools are not substantial. They become visible, however, in the choice of curricula or textbooks. Teachers in non-public schools are actively involved in work on curricula, textbooks and examination tasks and value the possibility of choice in this area.⁶⁶

In accordance with the above-mentioned explanations, the term “private school” can be understood strictly as non-public school (though usually having the powers of public school), belonging to an individual or private entity. Sometimes this term covers the whole category of non-public schools, therefore it is worth quoting here statistical data concerning both private schools (in the GUS data under the heading ‘other’) and the whole category of non-public schools. Schools run by ‘civic organizations and societies’ are to a great extent civic schools organized ‘not for profit’.

⁶⁵ E. Putkiewicz, A. Wilkomirska, *Szkoły publiczne i niepubliczne. Porównanie środowisk edukacyjnych*” (*Public and non-public schools. A comparison of different educational environments*), ISP 2004.

⁶⁶ E. Putkiewicz, A. Wilkomirska, *Szkoły publiczne i niepubliczne. Porównanie środowisk edukacyjnych*” (*Public and non-public schools. A comparison of different educational environments*), ISP 2004, p. 156.

Non-public primary schools (number of pupils):

School year	Civic organisations and societies	Religious organisations	Other
2002/3	21 832	6 762	10 114

Non-public gymnasia:

School year	Civic organisations and societies	Religious organisations	Other
2002/3	12 789	10 707	8 086

Non-public secondary schools of general education:

School year	Civic organisations and societies	Religious organisations	Other
2002/3	10 462	9 184	10 753

Non-public basic vocational and secondary technical schools:

School year	Civic organisations and societies	Religious organisations	Other
2002/3	9 947	2 026	7 977

[Source: GUS 2003, table 9]

In the school year 2003/2004 private sector units ran 4% of all primary schools, attended by 1.3% of all pupils; 8.3% of all gymnasia, attended by 1.8% of all pupils; and 19% of post-primary schools (from the old system) and post-gymnasium secondary schools of general education (from the new system), attended by 4.1% of all pupils.⁶⁷

Home-schooling is legal in Poland. Parents who want to exercise this right must obtain the permission from the headmaster of a public school within the boundaries of which the child lives. The headmaster specifies the requirements that must be met while teaching and determines the way of checking the child's development to enable the child to progress to the next form. Home-schooling is still a marginal phenomenon, but interest in it has been growing steadily.

Schools for pupils with special educational needs

Special schools are organized for children and youth with special educational needs, including the disabled pupils. Education at the primary level in the school system takes place mostly in about 800 special schools. Since the beginning of the decade the number of special schools has decreased,⁶⁸ however, in the school year 2002/2003 the number of primary special schools rose slightly (by 3.4%). Pupils with special educational needs also attend other schools accessible to everyone (mainstream schools), in which special classes were created for them (214) or attend integration classes (2326 classes). Such pupils also attend other all-accessible, therapeutic and compensatory classes. Additionally, there exists a possibility of individual education for the disabled pupils (about 10,000), as well as education in special education and development centers and healthcare centers.

⁶⁷ *Oświata i wychowanie w roku szkolnym 2002/3 (School education in the school year 2002/03)*, GUS, s. xlv.

⁶⁸ This also influences the decreasing number of children each year, whose age is appropriate to go to primary school.

The number of special gymnasia has also grown. Now we have 805 of them (6.6% increase since last year). Secondary education for the disabled is mainly based on special vocational schools: 423 basic vocational schools (24% growth), 67 upper secondary vocational schools (secondary technical schools) and upper secondary profiled schools (59.5%). There are only 31 upper secondary schools of general education (20% growth). The number of post-secondary special schools remains at a very low level (only 3 schools). It should be pointed out that the number of special schools is much higher in the city than in the country. We should also add that the overwhelming majority of these schools are public. However, there are a few non-public schools – special, integrational or schools admitting children with slight development deficiency. Over 30% of civic school teachers claim that some of these children would not cope in public schools due to various reasons – intellectual, oversensitive attitudes or due to health reasons.⁶⁹ In this way the gap created by insufficient network of public special schools can be at least partly bridged.

Sports schools (primary, gymnasia, upper secondary), implement the curriculum of primary school, gymnasium, post-primary or post-gymnasium school. These are schools which run at least two sports classes in various sports disciplines or in a particular discipline. **Sports master schools** run at least one sports master class in several disciplines or in one particular discipline for pupils who meet the criteria imposed by Polish sports associations.

Schools of fine art: primary (with general education, do not offer vocational qualifications), post-primary (offering vocational qualifications): they enable the pupils to obtain upper secondary vocational education and (with an exception of second degree schools of music) upper general secondary education. Education in them lasts 2-6 years, depending on the kind of school. This group of schools consists of: secondary schools of music, second degree schools of music, secondary schools of fine arts and secondary schools of ballet. Post-gymnasium schools of fine arts, apart from artistic education, implement the general education curriculum of upper secondary level (being the continuation of the gymnasium curriculum).

Bilingual schools: gymnasia and upper secondary schools of general education. Bilingual teaching (Polish and a modern foreign language) can be conducted within the obligatory educational activities with the exception of the following subjects: Polish, History and Geography of Poland, and an additional foreign language. Such schools are attended by pupils who already know the foreign language which is the second language of instruction or those who do not know the language (there is a special introductory form for them).

National minority schools

The clearly visible renaissance of national and ethnical identity has been reflected in the educational system in our country. The 1990s witnessed a rapid growth of education within some national and ethnical groups. The education of national (the most numerous groups are: German, Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Lithuanian, Slovakian and Romany minorities) and ethnical groups (Kashubian group) is mainly conducted at the first level of the education system. The communes have set up and maintained the schools or separate forms for children from national minorities.

⁶⁹ E. Putkiewicz, A. Wilkomirska, *Szkoły publiczne i niepubliczne. Porównanie środowisk edukacyjnych (Public and non-public schools. A comparison of different educational environments)*, ISP 2004, p. 20.

In order to indicate important problems faced by national minorities we attach (Appendix 1) the text “Parents vs. the problem of preserving the ethnic and religious identity of their children in the Byelorussian-Polish environment”, written by Professor Elżbieta Czykwin from the University of Białystok.

The number of primary schools which teach national and ethnical minorities in their mother tongue and the number of pupils receiving such education in the school year 2002/2003:

	Byelorussian	Lithuanian	German	Slovakian	Ukrainian	Ruthenian	Romany	Kashubian
Number of schools	24	13	261	6	80	14	4	48
Number of pupils	1 826	395	26 128	213	1 656	118	117	3 482

[Sources: GUS, 2003 table 12.]

Religious schools

Although the Education Bill of 1961 allowed various organizations to establish and run the schools, till the end of 1980s only the Catholic Church had several upper secondary schools of general education and theological seminaries. The importance of religious schools among non-public schools has grown only since 1990 – in the school year 1999/2000 they accounted for 23% of non-public primary schools, 35% of gymnasias and 47% of upper secondary schools of general education.

5.2 What are the legal/constitutional possibilities for the exercise of choice by parents and students, as regards attendance at, or foundation of, the different types of school described in 5.1 or enrolment at different public schools of the same type?

The education reform created the possibilities of choosing the school for a child or moving a child to another school as well as broadened the school offer for parents. From the legal point of view, parents are free to choose any school, but in reality, for obvious reasons, this choice is limited by the territory (greater choice in the city than in the country), finances (non-public schools charge tuition fees) and by admission procedures.

5.3 In what way, if at all, are all groups representing civil society and parents involved in defining the school curriculum? Is their influence on curriculum guidelines and the contents of schooling significant?

This aspect has already been analyzed under point 4.3. Generally speaking, we can talk of the influence of parental groups on the curriculum of some civic schools. However, we do not see in Poland groups representing civil society and parents involved in defining the school curriculum as far as public schools curricula are concerned. We suppose that this situation will gradually change. Two social phenomena may support our opinion:

* The recently created Silesian Social Education Board in Katowice. This independent organization was created by the pupil representatives, parents, teachers, school headmasters, psychologists and educational supervision workers. The founders of this council claim that ‘if Polish education has still got any clear perspective and hope for improvement, it is due to such authentic civic movements and associations, whose members cooperate with each other in the interest of education, defined as their common wealth’.

The Citizen Rights’ Spokesman, together with a team of social activists and scientists, has been working on the proposal of establishing the National Education Council, the institution

which – in close cooperation with various social groups - could provide the outlines of long-ranging, long-term strategic aims for our national education policy, and which could guarantee the fulfillment of these aims regardless of ever changing political situation.

5.4 Are values explicitly treated in curriculum guidelines and in what way? Is there explicit reference to citizenship/citizenship education? To different philosophical or religious beliefs?

In the country whose overwhelming majority of inhabitants declare to be catholic, various norms and values propagated by the Catholic Church, are treated as ‘general norms’.

Religious education, connected mainly with the Catholic Church teaching, has become a permanent element in the educational landscape of Polish schools. A considerable part of participants and supporters of a new political system welcomed this fact as an ideological achievement, because formerly religion was taught only outside the education system, within the parish activities. The change that placed religion in the school curriculum was soon criticized by liberal circles, which feared that Catholicism would win the ideological and religious monopoly. They also raised the issue of church’s influence on the decisions concerning human sexual life, using contraceptives, and attitudes towards abortion. According to the regulations concerning the teaching of religion (MEN from 1999), parents decide whether a child should attend religion classes or, alternatively, join ethics classes.

The catholic religion curriculum in Poland is defined by “Catechetical Directorate of Catholic Church in Poland” (2001), a document supplementing the Vatican instructions (‘General Catechization Directorate), on which *Core Curriculum of Catechesis* is developed by the Catholic Education Committee. Kindergartens can choose from three national curricula, the first three classes of primary school have two curricula, similarly the last three classes and post-gymnasium schools; gymnasia have five curricula, and vocational schools – one. The choice of the curriculum and textbooks is made by the diocese bishop, who can adopt one national curriculum for the whole diocese or accept the curriculum and textbooks prepared especially for the diocese needs.⁷⁰

Apart from religion, another “value-saturated” subject in the Polish core curriculum is “Preparation for the family life”. MEN instructions from 2001 are the last regulations concerning the methods of teaching and the content of knowledge of human sexual life, principles of deliberate and responsible parenting and the values of family and life. “Preparation for the family life” is not an obligatory subject. Again, parents decide whether their child should attend it. The research (“Social picture of the reform” 2000) presents the statistics concerning the attendance during these lessons. In primary schools, 25% of pupils attended the classes, while 66% gave negative responses. In gymnasia 57% of pupils attended while 34% responded negatively. There may be various reasons why so few pupils attend these classes: maybe the offer did not meet with approbation from parents and pupils, or the school may not have introduced the classes due to some organizational reasons. The controversy, which could influence the class attendance, concerns mainly the textbooks and the way they depict the human sexuality. Some years ago several textbooks created media hype because conservative circles accused them of propagating pornography and having bad influence on the youth. This issue is still the cause of hot debates. Liberal circles claim that

⁷⁰ K. R. Jaśkiewicz, „Sztuka układania puzzli. Uwagi o rynku podręczników do nauki religii katolickiej w Polsce” (*The art of jigsaw puzzles. Remarks on the market of catholic religion textbooks in Poland*) Notes Wydawniczy, 11 (139) 2003.

the curricula and textbooks on “Preparation for the family life” propagate the one-sided catholic point of view, especially as far as contraception is concerned. These circles opt for the introduction of a regular “sexual education” subject.

“Education for Society” is a subject, or a cross curricular theme, taught in the gymnasium or at upper secondary level. It focuses on civic development, prepares the pupils to active participation in the business life, and teaches them of the region and its cultural heritage as well as offers the knowledge of other European countries and the idea of European Community.⁷¹

Philosophy (apart from the above-mentioned ethics being the alternative to the teaching of religion) is taught in the gymnasium and upper secondary general school as a cross curricular theme or a subject. For example, “Philosophical inquiries with children and youth” is a cross curricular theme in gymnasium, integrated with other fields of knowledge and based on the dialogue between the teacher and pupils.⁷²

Final remarks

Two years ago a very valuable public initiative called “School with class” came into being in Poland. It is an action promoting public support for Polish education organized by Fundacja Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej (the Centre of Civic Education Foundation) together with our most influential daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Schools participating in this action (more than 4500) fulfill very ambitious educational tasks getting thousands of parents and other citizens from their area involved. Every ‘school with class’ creates its own programme to meet the specific local needs. They all try to function in accordance with the following rules: the school educates well every individual student, assesses him/her fairly, teaches to think and to understand the world, teaches its students to become active members of the society, develops their sensitivity and self-esteem, prepares them for the future. “Schools with class” have their own network in the Internet to inform the public and to give account for their pupils/students, parents and their other clients about their functioning. The action is very popular and it fosters in an unobtrusive way high standards and features of a good school.

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⁷¹ Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej o programach nauczania (*The Ministry of National Education about curricula*), Biblioteczka Reformy, 12, 1999.

⁷² Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej o programach nauczania (*The Ministry of National Education about curricula*), Biblioteczka Reformy, 12, 1999.

6. CBOS *Reforma edukacji – pierwsze doświadczenia, nadzieje i obawy (Educational reforms – first experiences, hopes and fears)*, 2000
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Appendix 1

Parents facing the problem of preserving their children’s ethnic and religious identity in the Byelorussian-Polish environment.

For the last few years parents of children from rural areas and small towns near the eastern border have faced the growing economic degradation of their standards of living. In an attempt to fight this they often choose emigration to big cities (Warszawa, Białystok) or abroad. Having decided to emigrate they also, not quite consciously, decide that assimilation to the new conditions is easier if they give up their cultural attributes, especially language and rural traditions. The strongest barrier to get fully assimilated with the Polish society is the feeling of belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church which lets them preserve their specific identity and is also a source of pride. Step by step the Byelorussian language is being given up (especially since it is not socially respected and treated more as a patois) and instead of identification with the Byelorussian nation they develop the feeling of identification with Russian Orthodox Church.

This general, rather pessimistic, picture is slowly changing. The decrease in the number of children who want to learn the Byelorussian language (typical for the seventies and eighties) has stopped. More and more real opportunities for economic cooperation with Poland’s eastern neighbours is an incentive to learn the Russian language and get more familiar with the reality of life across our eastern border.

In school the attempts to keep the Byelorussian tradition alive are most often exercised through dancing and singing folk groups presenting the traditional themes in modernized setting. The annual event called ‘Basowiszczce’, when Byelorussian avant-garde folk groups present their music, is undoubtedly appealing to young people as it gives them a chance to be shown in media and to perform before interested young audience. Another important event is ‘Przeгляд Białoruskiej Pieśni’ (‘Byelorussian singsong’) organized annually under the

patronage of Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, by Białoruskie Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne (Byelorussian Socio-Cultural Society). The event shows how rich and diverse this culture is, it also proves very high level of performance (also by school bands). The leading institutions participating in it are secondary schools with Byelorussian language of instruction in Bielsk Podlaski and Hajnówka.

Thanks to newly published interesting upper secondary school textbook for Byelorussian history by Professor Eugeniusz Mironowicz (*Historia Białorusi*, published 2002) the historic awareness may start to grow. The book is highly appreciated both by students and by parents who express the need for more such publications.

When it comes to textbooks for Byelorussian language the situation has definitely improved. All the necessary textbooks for gymnasia and most of those for primary and secondary schools have already been published.

Getting more and more popular *Przegląd Prawosławny (Orthodox Newsletter)* is often used during Religion classes in secondary schools to spur a discussion on subjects concerning the modern world within the perspective of orthodox theology. The most often discussed issues are ecology (including Puszcza Białowieska – the Białowieska Woods), ecumenism, terrorism, war (e.g. in the former Yugoslavia) and many others. The young people are vividly interested in the position of the Autonomous Orthodox Church in Poland on the above mentioned issues. One of the ‘hottest’ topics was the problem of catholic-orthodox marriages widely discussed by the young Catholics and Russian Orthodox on the Internet.

Together with introducing religion (also Russian Orthodox) to schools and kindergartens it became necessary to write the curriculum and publish textbooks for Russian Orthodox Religion classes. Both parents and teachers claim that it is an urgent need because of widely differing level of students’ knowledge that makes running the lessons really difficult. Following that many methodological problems arise. Parents’ expectations of the subject “Russian Orthodox Religion” almost exactly reflect the same expectations of religion classes from parents representing the dominant Catholic Church. It is thus expected that teaching religion will take over the function of shaping young people’s moral standpoints and, most of all, preventing all social evil (taking drugs, drinking alcohol, growing brutality of life, etc.). These expectations are much bigger than the possibilities of educational offer put forward by the Russian Orthodox Church.

The undeniable renaissance of Orthodox Religion in Poland is visible through growing more and more active culture and developing knowledge of the theology. Organised annually ‘Orthodox Theological Competition’ is very popular among secondary school students and every year the level of participants’ knowledge is higher. Winners of the competition are treated by educational authorities with respect equal to winners of other subjects’ competitions and they are awarded in the same way.

Falling birth rate brought about closing down of many rural kindergartens and put at a risk their existence in small towns. It is a real success then that in Bielsk Podlaski there is a Ukrainian kindergarten which, although fighting financial problems, uses very interesting educational methods: children’s grandfathers and grandmothers are active participants in the process of passing on values and tradition from generation to generation.

On the motion from young Byelorussian intelligentsia a Byelorussian kindergarten was opened a few years ago in Białystok. In close cooperation with parents it runs activities for children in Byelorussian and teaches them about their nation's tradition and folklore.

One can point at several important factors which prove the growing self-esteem among representatives of this national minority:

- they are present in media, especially TV and radio, they also have their own magazines,
- Russian Orthodox Religion was introduced to schools,
- the supply of school textbooks has improved,
- they have their own MP's in the Polish Parliament,
- there is a growing number of participants in Russian Orthodox celebrations and pilgrimages,
- folk festivals and happenings become more and more popular,
- 'Festiwal Muzyki Prawosławnej' (The Orthodox Music Festival) in Hajnówka is a source of pride because of its high level and importance,
- the problems of Byelorussian minority are discussed in the broad context of national culture,
- social advancement of intelligentsia with Orthodox-Byelorussian roots who publicly identify with their national origins, also in Polish environment,
- local self-government based on local traditions is developing,
- old, traditional recipes, architecture, language, folk songs, church music etc, become interesting again, especially as local tourist attractions fostering the development of eco-tourism (e.g. in Białowieża),
- there is a growing range of businesses using the national tradition for commercial reasons (e.g. there are restaurants offering organization of Orthodox New Year's Eve),
- part of the Polish majority has changed its attitude towards 'the East' and started to see a chance for themselves and the whole country in both economic and cultural close cooperation with Belarus, the Ukraine, and Russia.

Although the Orthodox-Byelorussian minority is not as active as other national minorities in Poland, its growing awareness of national identity and perceiving it as something valuable puts pressure on the educational authorities to take its aspirations into consideration.