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EDUCATION AND VALUES OF RURAL YOUTH

In the years 1980-1981, within the framework of Research Project II 4 the "Toruń Group" carried out a study on existential values regarded by rural youth as the most important in life that could be credited with high quality features. The study included inhabitants aged 20-35, of 20 villages, in one of the communities of the Płock province¹.

As much as 29.1 percent of the 346 subjects related indispensable existential values to family life: correct relations between family members, proper upbringing of children, restraint from alcohol abuse. A relatively large group of youth, 21.6 percent, coupled them with material and financial aspects of life. The third most generally mentioned quality was good health, 15.0 percent. Another syndrome of the most important life values, accepted by 14.7 percent of young village dwellers, reflects these opinions and views, which connect opinions about good, successful life with inter-human relations in far and near human environment; in the local community, the country and the world. The last group of opinions typical of 6.3 percent of all respondents concerned such issues as rational planning of leisure time,

¹ Empirical studies on rural youth's quality of life (basic existential values and degree of life satisfaction related to their accomplishment) consisted of two parts. The first, completed in 1980, comprised questionnaire interviews with 346 young inhabitants of 20 villages (representatives of majority of young families inhabiting the region covered by the study) on their most important values in life. The second part, carried out in 1981, comprised free interviews with the same respondents on subjects tackled in the first part and also on work, family, society and cultural activity as realized and acknowledged life values.

ability to participate in cultural life at the level approximating that of city dwellers and preparation for social promotion to desired professions and work².

Research aimed at finding the most important features of youth's image of desirable life qualities, in my opinion, has multiple links to the education process.

While diagnosing basic existential values that are - perhaps even primarily - the effects of socialization processes we are carrying out, a diagnosis of some sectors of education point to the ups and downs of the education system, negatives and positives of particular groups of educational institutions that function in the society and at its recommendation. That enables us to correct groundless assumptions and mechanisms of education, to enforce and spread desirable aspects of the education system, and leads to harmonious development of the individual's personality and society. The signaled feedback between educational activity and youth's quality of life is neither the only one nor the most optimal. Applied in control and adjustment of discrepancy between educational reality and premises of the educational ideal, it is usually a secondary and delayed reaction that reduces negative effects of errors but only too late enables suppression of the structures that permitted the discrepancy.

In the more optimal variant, functioning foundations of educating society are earlier codetermined by scientifically plausible demands of youth's desired life quality formation process. The existing feedback actualizes and optimizes the educational process, putting it in harmony with far-winged development plans for the complete human personality. Its presence is marked already at the preparatory phase of theoretical foundations of the education system's reform.

² Opinions and views of 2.9 percent of the respondents escaped classification into any of the five categories discussed and 10.4 percent young village dwellers did not give their answers.

The manifold and complex character of the phenomena we cope with seems to give substance to making use of both views on educational processes through the rural youth life quality prism in future considerations.

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Looking for premises to characteristics of educating society through analysis of rural youth's existential aspirations, we encounter complex issues that do not yield to unequivocal interpretation, much less to evaluation. Life goals of the rural young are at variance with the existential ideas desired by educators, the social system religious doctrines, etc. Most of them seem to be perfectly harmonized with the so called educational goals, some contradict socialization models and some are the ideas as yet not acknowledged that function within pedagogic theory and ideology but do not surface in youth's life orientation.

To begin with, let us cope with the first group of rural youth's life values - the values in tune with socially desirable effects of education. It comprises: aspiration for family happiness, good relations among people, attractive and useful spending of leisure time on cultural participation, life in a stable and well-organized country and the world rid of the threat of war. Health is regarded as the value facilitating achievement of many other life values. The mentioned existential aims of youth are not in opposition to needs and socializing aspirations of society. Quite on the contrary, for many areas of collective life they are socially desirable behavior stimulators enabling life to continue and develop. There certainly belong here harmonious family life or proper interhuman relations largely responsible for, e.g. the character of social links, quality and form of economic and political processes going on in the society. The values indicated also guarantee - with great, daily verified empirically probability - accomplishment of personal happiness, achievement of so-

cial approval for individual's actions which are important not only for an individual's psychic frame of mind but also to the well-being of society as a whole, its integrity, creative capacity or cultural outlook.

There are also in rural youth's life orientations values divergent from desirable forms of social personality, as if ousted from, official targets of socialist education. Here belongs the wide-spread opinion among the examined subjects that high material consumption level is the most or a very important factor of existential satisfaction conditioning achievement of a number of other life values related not only to recreation and entertainment but even to position in a social group and overt or covert power. This opinion - though not desirable as the result of the educational process - does not yield to unequivocal evaluation from the social interest point of view. A high material consumption level is a declared and realized target for economic policy reflected in ideology, propaganda, social and cultural policies as well as in the real behavior of a majority of Poles who believe that to live better they must possess more. The desire for constant improvement of living standards is also the basic stimulus motivating better, more efficient, organized and more modern work. It promotes inventiveness and progress in many areas of life, greatly determining the country's civilization level and its place in the family of other nations. Also from the point of view of an individual's personality development, the setting of comfort seems much more advantageous than poverty, because - as real life and scientific studies show - increasingly more often a shortage of money, rather than will, limits the ability to participate in even the most common forms of cultural contacts, such as movies, press or books, not to mention the prospects of becoming acquainted with the country, the world, other nations and cultures. If, in addition to all the arguments I quoted above, we add that rural youth's material desires have less to do with the so called ostentatious consumption and more with adequate living standards at the level warranted by the historical stage of civilization and economic standing of the country,

then even in this type of attitudes we will not find many moments that would be evidence of any particular disfunction between social life requirements and existential values of the rural youth.

There also exists a group of undisclosed values, or not often disclosed, in the opinions and views of rural youth that interest us but are especially exposed for educational purposes. Here, primarily belongs work. Work - according to the fundamental premise in socialist social doctrine reflected, among others, in educational objectives - is not only a citizen's duty and an individual's right but also one of the main life values forming satisfaction, granting an individual great capacity for self-development and enhancing the possibility for appearance of a number of additional values: respect for one's self, satisfaction with one's actions and transformation of existing reality, one's dignity, development of abilities and interests, contacts with other people. It would not be trustworthy if said that work as a value is completely alien to the youth in study, but it would also be improper to try to prove that work is regarded as the value indispensable or even principal to the desired life value. It is invariably found to a greater or smaller extent to be a more or less accepted necessity in life, an acknowledged or merely tolerated way to gain subsistence. It almost never represents the particular life value wished for and generally is expected to give nothing more than money to facilitate accomplishment of other, more important existential purposes. Apparently, education failed to implant a more desirable attitude to work, which from both social and individual points of view created a highly unfavorable situation affecting social and personality processes in many ways.

Another serious disharmony of this type is found in youth's attitudes to broader social phenomena and processes as sources of important existential values. I believe it is unnecessary to elaborate on the thesis that the cultivation of prosocial attitudes is particularly important in the socialist education process. Let us point out only that the social activity of individuals, active participation in transforming and improving social relations,

partnership in collective activities and authority, supervision of social practice to be adequate to principles and ideals; should constitute that dimension of man in which he will not only be interested in achieving individually desired existential values but also make possible proper accomplishment of the most honored principles of socialism - equality, social justice and co-responsibility for conditions of social life. So defined attitude to society is rather alien to youth or, at least, it is not broadly reflected in their existential desires and aspirations. Though the young people commonly notice various inaccuracies in social life, postulating even constructive ways of amendment, they do not see the necessity for active involvement in public affairs, not willing or not knowing how to oppose the various existing inaccuracies, preferring instead to find satisfaction in the cosy privacy and warmth of home.

The signalized similarities and discrepancies between the most general ideas that underlie educational aims and existential attitudes of rural youth prove a varying degree to which social educational system achieved its educational tasks. This however, is not identical with the degree of youth's preparation to life in society, because society's far more variable requirements only in small portion overlap the more static and rigid educational patterns. From that point of view, there is no contradiction in the statement holding that life values of the youth in question harmonize far more with real expectations of society than with ideal requirements of personality patterns. To restate it, the education system did a better job of its adaptative tasks than prospective one. And in a relatively wider range, it managed to adapt a young generation of village dwellers to the rules and norms of social reality rather than to prepare it for activities aimed at promoting changes by implanting the values that on a massive social scale are not yet implemented but instead declared desirable for educational patterns and valid ideology.

There are at least a few important reasons for this state of affairs.

The first is placed within the structures of the education system, its particular elements - educational institutions - to a varying degree identify themselves with declared aims of social education and in their practical performance execute mainly particular goals reflecting their own ideological, political, economic or cultural interests. Youth's existential desires and aspirations are the result of those overlying institutional particular - a reflection of peculiar consensus of educational processes of family, state and church origin as well as spontaneous educational phenomena and processes such as mass media impact. Thus, they transgress none of the fundamental interests of any organizers of the educational process, while at the same time being an exemplification of trends and cooperation range favorable from the point of view of each partner. Since this cooperation accomplishes only a part of the designs of the educational ideal, none of the educational process co-organizers - not even the state - are seriously interested in literal transplant of proclaimed ideal into reality. The effects of this cooperation - among others in the form of specially preferred life values - also partly correspond with model assumptions. In the case of the youth under study - as we have reason to believe on the basis of empirical material - merits of works and authentic social activity are outside the educational consensus sphere, which has been reflected in rural youth's views on quality of life.

Also material consumption was placed outside the consensus, though it was strongly manifested in youth's existential desires and aspirations. Some existential values - as empirical studies show - are assimilated without participation of educational institutions or even in opposition to their official declarations. Such a situation takes place when social environment drastically differs from the educational environment especially in terms of preferable and awardable life attitudes.

Educational environment is simulative one, preparing for life in the social environment but itself unable to satisfy any of the individual's important life desires. For this reason, education - that is contradictory to real life requirements or does not take

them into account becomes pointless and uncalled for, even damaging, because it hinders the individual's adaptation to obligatory rules of life to which sooner or later the individual will have to adapt if he wishes to materialize his own vision of life and win social acceptance for his existential projects. In practice, only very rarely do we encounter total disfunction between educational objectives and social life demands. Much more often we cope with partial discrepancies including only some more or less significant matters in life. Nevertheless, they are generally eliminated to suit the individual's interest, which is less related to what education "says" or "does not say" and more to adaptation to binding reality. Consumptionism - as an important existential value of the rural youth - is a classic product of the mechanism described. Rather poorly exposed in institutional education - perhaps with the exception of family education, which to the greatest extent adheres to reality - consumptionism finds strong support from the attitudes of youth. Because in common consciousness and social hierarchy of values, material standing is an extremely important indicator of success, and not in theory (as e.g. education or professional accomplishments) but in practice. It is verifiable by comparing life standards of those who have not, or have little. Social opinion of this kind has no genetic ground, naturally - it has been acquired as a result of a certain community organization throughout centuries of civilizations development, and to the present day it is solidified by socio-economic policy, valid morality, religious dictates and also culturally conditioned methods to satisfy needs.

Let us ask then - if we had been able to set up objective conditions identically enhancing the creation of other life attitudes, would they have been reflected in the existential desires and aspirations of the young people we examined?

In spite of appearances, the answer to that question is not simple. In the light of obtained empirical material and comparative studies the thesis stating decisive influence of social relations upon the desirable and materialized youth's existential values and possibly indirect, supportive but not decisive influen-

ce of intentional education seems to raise no substantial doubts. However, this is not to say that harmonious feedback between social and educational environments always forms such a type of social personality in which desirable life values are manifested. Also, even drastic disfunction of socialization environments, social and intentional, does not entirely eliminate possibility to create life attitudes opposed to social reality and departing from commonly realized existential standard. Many confirmations of this state of affairs are found in accumulated empirical material in the form of relatively few youth groups that have fundamentally different concepts of life quality than the majority of their peers, in spite of similar social conditions in which they grew up and were brought up. These phenomena are - in my belief - not only the result of individual character differences and complexity and uniqueness of socializing stimuli differently affecting different individuals but also the result of a kind of cultural readiness to accept new life models and styles of behaviour. Life models and values in violent opposition to tradition, requiring violent or far-reaching changes in manner of existence, too radically transforming current moral norms even under the so called optimal socialization conditions may be rejected or accepted but not manifested in real life attitudes. However, we relatively seldom encounter such situations, and they did not come out in the case of the young people we studied. Rather, we dealt with the opposite phenomenon, resulting from the influence of fragments of the local rural community's cultural tradition, which survived to the present day. The tradition in which work and community were acknowledged - among others - as autotelic life values, is certainly the factor that increases rural youth's cultural readiness to accept similar existential satisfaction models flowing from educational ideal. The fact that the values did not surface significantly in the youth's life orientations is another proof confirming the importance and inconsistency of the socialization processes that go on in contemporary educational institutions and society as a whole.

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It follows from my discussion above that the quality of life of the examined rural youth is primarily the product of real conditions and chances of social life. To a much smaller degree it reflects the influence of educational institutions, especially the range of their operation related to promotion of values and personality models resulting mainly from notional foundations and not confirmed by a real course of social phenomena. Thus, in education processes, formation of life values fully autonomic in regard to existing reality is not attained, and particular educational institutions cooperate in preservation rather than transformation of socially accepted and realized life patterns.

In that case, can the education system form an instrument effectively transforming youth's life orientations? In light of what has been said, are the hopes to generate "new awareness" of young rural inhabitants through education well-founded? Do actions of that kind have any rational founding in existing social needs?

It seems, the answer to the last question is the most easily formulated. We find that answer in everyday reality, in press, radio and TV messages, in scientists and experts increasingly pointing out dangerous trends in mankind's development and quite tangible threats to civilization's existence. Such an answer is determined by rapid changes in the way most goods are manufactured that affect directly social life organization and transform the conditions and possibilities for individual's development. Its basic premises are finally related to our socioeconomic crisis, to overcome which not only changes in the country's economy are required, but deep reevaluation in social and individual morality is foremostly vital. The challenge from present reality may only be taken by a man who has altered his thinking, more pro-social and open to everything that goes on around him, putting up before himself and others not so earthly-minded goals and tasks, aware of threatening dangers and personal responsibility

not only for his dearest ones but for the entire community among which he lives.

However, we encounter much more difficulty in answering two other questions in which the necessity for reorientation of human existential values is referred to educational institutions.

Let us first consider whether only such references are fully substantiated, thus solving the question whether or not there exist possibilities to change the youth's system of values outside the system of educational institutions.

Didactic sciences - and especially sociology of education - point to two basic ways of cultural competence acquisition that is also the acquisition of social values indispensable for proper progress of social life. This process may take an unreflexive and unplanned course. In order to acquire desired personality features it is sufficient to merely stay in a social group and mimic the seniors. We call it spontaneous social education, because its objectives, methods and results are not planned beforehand and not completely realized by educators and pupils. The other manner of cultural competence acquisition is based on planned and deliberate actions of certain types of social institutions - specialized in passing definite cultural models considered for different reasons important to existence and development of community - which we call educational institutions. Their activity - directed towards usually precisely defined goals - is socially managed and controlled.

In social life practice, both elements of socialization processes function alongside each other (only in early primitive societies there was exclusively spontaneous social education) which does not mean equal distribution of influence. We usually deal here with lack of balance expressed with predominance of one type of acculturation and diversification of goals and methods preferred in both socialization environments. At the present stage of civilization, however, there is no practical possibility to resign from any of them. Spontaneous education is an immanent part of human social environment and its influence grows out of social activities - the background of people's social life. Histori-

cally later intentional education makes its appearance alongside the process of complication of social structures and is intended to replace spontaneous education that grows inefficient as social changes accelerate. The functions it fulfills have, under the circumstances, vital social importance. They serve development and facilitate not only an individual's preparation for life in reality as he finds it (it is the adaptative function of education to which spontaneous education is limited) but also to transform his environment, which nowadays becomes the most indispensable condition for survival and development of social groups, societies, nations and even entire civilizations.

In the same context, I think, we should consider the question of changes in life attitudes and values of youth. Postulated transformations cannot take place outside intentional education institutions because that would be equal to further adaptation of youth's life orientation to the reality as they found it, which, for reasons I already mentioned here, should not be preserved. This type of spontaneous educational process has dominated and dominates the socialization of the young. Some effects of the situation, with reference to young country dwellers, I tried to describe in preceding fragments of this work. Therefore, necessary changes must be generated by intentional education institutions, and pedagogy - I enhance my reasoning with the one of Z. Kwieciński's theses delivered during a seminar of the "Toruń Group" within Research Project II,4 - becomes under such circumstances the most reliable warranty of overcoming the social crisis³.

³ This idea is elaborated by Z. Kwieciński in the works "Edukacja jako podmiot, instrument i przedmiot regulacji społecznej. Propozycja badań skoordynowanych" and "Wokół idei i szans edukacji humanistycznej" - typescripts written within Research Project II,4-I are in Sociology Institute Library, N. Copernicus University of Toruń.

However, can it be that pedagogy and that education that dominated and unfortunately still dominates our social reality?

Both urgent, demands of social life and stage of young generation's social awareness (life orientations of rural youth are symptoms of phenomena with far broader reach and far more serious consequences than the ones that surfaced in presented empirical studies) call - in my belief for deep reorientation of axiological foundations of educational and real system and not only declarative one, and setting it in the socialistic humanism ideology.

Such reevaluations, I think, should include primarily the sphere of education targets. The point is, first of all, to modify the so far existing criteria of modern man, who is the aim of educating operations; to develop premises enabling him to determine personality features; giving an individual the confidence that he will accomplish his tasks both, in regard to his individual development and to other people, society, nation - even civilization.

The complex of rules determining principles for the functioning of educational institutions and forms and range of their subordination to state and society also requires fundamental changes. They cannot restrict or block the system capabilities but should support its actions for formation of desired personality structures and social conditions.

The rational solutions of the following issues are of special importance here:

- educational egalitarianism: educational institutions should be equally available and functionally uniform and should create equal conditions and opportunities for lifestart to members of all classes, layers and social groups;

- humanization of education: taking into account individual's good and dignity both in the dimension of socialization goals and methods and its content;

- socialization of education: educational institutions should serve all society and implement progressive social ideas for the good of the nation and its state;

- selfgoverning of education: deciding on rules and principles of education at the authority of majority's will, with respect to the principle of the common good;
- educational dynamism: system's capability to internal transformations under the influence of newly generated social demands it co-creates itself;
- wholism and harmony in education: ability to permanent educational actions upon all generations and associating interes of community with individual development.

Fundamental transformations should be made in the currently valid socialization conception that - generally speaking - consists in growing into existing cultural values and assimilation of valid norms and behaviors. However, under the conditions of the necessity of rapid social changes, I think, more desirable would be cognitive-structures-oriented socialization consisting not so much in preparation for certain social roles but rather in acquiring certain competences, more liberal and independent use of received cultural equipment in various life situations. Many drifts of such socialization concept coincide with foundations of cognitive political socialization⁴. This coincidence deals not only with the common opinion about socialization as a process shaping a style of thinking (not merely acquisition of knowledge) or the necessity to perceive individual development in socialization processes as a certain logic of forming pupil's identity. Also commonly shared is the hope to achieve desirable socialization effects in the form of relatively autonomic social personality of a pupil who - as A. M. Kaniowski writes - "...if he is to develop fully he will be able to think in general categories (i.e. social, system, state or class categories) but will not thoughtlessly identify with those global values and will maintain the sense of his own individuality: he will dri-

⁴ A. M. Kaniowski, *Edukacja i socjalizacja a sposób u-
prawomocnienia ładu społecznego*" - typescript written within
Research Project 11.4-I is in the Sociology Institute Library,
N. Copernicus University of Toruń.

ve at accord between individual and social perspectives"⁵, and implanting a certain model of humanistic attitude consisting in "...ability to treat others as partners (and not as objects who are means to one's own aims or as enemies whom one should fight or subordinate to, and find with them the common good"⁶. So far postulated changes are connected mainly with transformations inside educational institutions, in the sphere of intentional education - primarily, as we have said, responsible for generating "new" existential orientations of youth. This does not mean the lack of interest in the sphere of spontaneous education, which in case of defect in intentional education automatically takes up vacant positions and highly efficiently - this is shown by empirical material collected for the purpose of the present work - adapts young generation to life within the found social structures. Since we have no possibility of total elimination of natural education from the sphere of socialization influences - such elimination would bring about unimaginable social damage - actions should be taken to include it into planned educational activities thus enforcing the system of intentional education. This calls for far reaching cooperation between educational institutions and state that while regulating social life processes should also care for educational ideals to find possibly full confirmation in a concrete political, economic, cultural etc. reality. The necessity for strict cooperation between state and all other institutions responsible for socialization of the young generation is not a particularly revelational and novel postulate, though unfortunately deformed in daily educational practice. It results from the social nature of any education which states that certain socialization objectives may be obtained sooner when their realization is set in social structures supporting intentional education.

In educational reforms - I have tried to express my views on this subject here - it is not advisable to leave out values

⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

⁶ Ibid., p. 16.

and attitudes presently predominating youth's existential orientations. Taking this type of knowledge into consideration on the one hand safeguards reformers against idealization of newly constructed socialization structures (especially in the area of educational objectives) and on the other hand facilitates their adaptation to those whom they are to serve.

The young generation's existential orientations may in this respect yield interesting premises for theoretical and practical steps to construct a new model of education that takes into account present interests and perspective aspirations of youth and enables preparation of the young generation to solve difficult problems brought with the development of civilization not only of Poland.