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Youth from Rural Communities: Social Inequalities in Access to Education¹

Abstract

The process of commodification of education, which consists in "regarding education as an investment in the future, a diploma as a market commodity, and the sector of higher education investment as a field of industry and market economy"² presents both positive (e.g. contributes to the universality of education, increase in education aspirations) and negative consequences, by strengthening social, cultural and status quo diversification in access to it.³ These are especially visible in rural communities. Despite changes from the reform of the Polish education system introduced in 1999, there are still great differences between city and countryside.

Keywords: social inequality, youth, education, educational aspirations, reproduction of social barriers

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Introduction

Inequalities in access to education, depending on the adopted interpretation, may be valued differently because of the dimensions and methods of their elimination. The following dimensions may be listed here:

1. inequality of participation of representatives of particular social groups in the reserves of places in schools of different type and level,
2. inequality of making use of intellectual potential in particular social layers,
3. inequality of opportunities in fulfilling one's own dreams, desires and aspirations (whether they are justified and realistic or not), depending on the place of residence or belonging to a specific social category,
4. inequality of educational initiation understood as economic, social and cultural inequality of conditions, in which the child develops, grows and learns, which impairs development of his/her intelligence, skills and interests and moving up to higher levels of education⁴.

The Polish countryside, despite mass migration (mostly youth) to cities over the last several dozen years, continues to be the living environment for more than 38% of the citizens, 37.8% of whom are children and youth below the age of 24⁵. Despite the popularisation of education at different levels, education inequalities in the countryside persist. Many factors at different levels of education affect inequalities in access to education in the countryside. These include barriers related to the functioning of the educational system (restricting access to pre-schools, less qualified teachers, lack of teaching aids, minimisation of the syllabus, poorer educational offer for post-primary education), barriers related to financial standing: growing impoverishment of rural families, as well as educational aspirations of the parents. The cultural capital of the rural community also plays a vital role. According to Collins (1971) and Bourdieu (1986), while for children from intellectual families the cultural capital received from home is a trump card, for those born in the country it is a barrier strengthening the selection which takes place between secondary schools and universities.

⁵ Rocznik Statystyczny (Statistical Yearbook), Warsaw 1999, pp. 95—97.
Even at pre-school, the first stage of education, the propagation index of which in Poland is one of the lowest among OECD and EU countries, there are serious limitations in the countryside in comparison with cities. In rural areas, only 16.7% of this age group was covered by this type of education in the school year 2003/04. In urban areas, 52.3% of children attend pre-school. In comparison, as early as 1990, city children constituted 77.7% and rural children 23.3%, of the total number of those attending pre-school. This situation results from the organisation of the network of pre-school education facilities, which was reduced in the years 1990—2000. The number of pre-schools was reduced in total in Poland by 30.9% (including 23.2% in cities, but this index in the countryside was as high as 40.5%).

Young people from rural areas have poorer access to all types of education. Discussion of this issue should be preceded by a brief characteristic of the Polish system of education, which was modernised after the 1999 education reform. Until 1999, the Polish system of education included pre-schools, 8-year primary schools and secondary schools (4-year grammar schools, 5-year technical colleges and 4-year vocational schools and art schools) as well as 3-year vocational schools and special basic vocational schools.

As from 1999, in accordance with the premises of the education reform programme related to the expansion of the educational offer and the extension of the duration of compulsory school education, lower secondary schools were introduced after the 6-year primary schools. This is a compulsory 3-year school for pupils aged 13 to 16. Lower secondary school leavers can continue their education in post-lower secondary schools: 3-year secondary schools or 2-year vocational schools.

For those completing secondary school, the next level of education may be in a college or studies (3-year undergraduate studies and 2-year master’s supplementary studies, in accordance with the Bologna Convention, or 5-year master’s studies, which are gradually being discontinued). State schools prevail at all levels of the Polish education system, the largest number of private schools being in the sector of higher education.

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6 Percentage of children aged 3—5 in pre-schools is ca. 30%, while in EU countries it is 70—100%.
8 Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej o edukacji na wsi „Biblioteczka Reformy” (Reorganisation Book Series, MEN concerning education in villages), Warsaw, 1999/10, pp. 18—19.
The reform implemented in 1999, aimed at equalising educational opportunities for children and youth, and the main tool for executing this objective is a new type of school: the lower secondary school. The point is to enhance the level of education in country children and increase their chances of completing their education at a higher level.

Before the implementation of the reform in 1999, the number of city schools increased 9.6% with a simultaneous decrease in the number of pupils by 13.2%. In the countryside, the situation was practically reversed: the number of schools dropped 11.1% with a slight reduction in pupil population (by 4.1%). From 1999 6-form primary schools and lower secondary schools came into existence, which, apart from the already present population decline (the most numerous classes having already left primary school), significantly changed the distribution of pupils and there was a decrease in number of primary schools. The number of country schools dropped by 14.9%, while the reduction in city schools reached 6.7% (with a 28% decrease in the number of pupils in the countryside and 34% in the cities). As regards lower secondary schools, their number in the years 1999-2000 increased by 2.4%, as did the number of classrooms, both in the countryside (74.9%) and in the cities (96.2%)\(^9\). This was the result of using rooms in existing primary school buildings, as well as the trend to get rid of primary schools in favour of lower secondary schools.

Disproportions in access to education at post-lower secondary school level are even clearer. In 2005, only 251 out of a total number of general secondary schools (2,517) were located in rural areas. Considering vocational and general vocational schools, their distribution network is similar, with 1,038 countryside schools from among 7,456 schools located in the territory of Poland\(^10\).

As regards access to Polish higher education schools, 12.8% of the youth aged 19-24 studied in them in the early 1990s, with 24-34% in European countries\(^11\). According to the data in the Report on Social Development, only 2% of students come from the countryside\(^12\). The scholarisation index, or percentage of the total number of studying youth aged 19-24 increased to

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\(^{10}\) Oświata i wychowanie w roku szkolnym 2004/2005 (Education and Upbringing in the 2004/2005 School Year), Warsaw, GUS 2005.


43.7% in 2001/2002, which according to forecasts is expected to reach 65% in 2010\textsuperscript{13}.

**Dimensions of the Process of Commodification of Education**

Since the 1990s, the position of education in the hierarchy of values in Polish society and particularly among the youth, has continued to grow. Before the transformation, it was perceived by the youth in terms of instrumental values, used for getting a desired job and providing financial security, as well as in terms of autotelic value (in intelligentsia families, education was an element of inherited ethos or a factor of gaining and enhancing the family status). At present, irrespective of the social or territorial origin of young people, their attitudes show pragmatism. More and more often, education is regarded as capital, and the very process of education has become a sort of adjustment method for the youth to the observed changes on the labour market and the expected demand for employees. Young people often perceive education as a pass to living at a higher level. Thus we have an ever-increasing process of commodification of education, which consists of "regarding education as an investment in the future, a diploma as a market commodity, and the sector of higher education investment as a field of industry and market economy"\textsuperscript{14}.

Attention must be paid to several significant consequences of the commodification process. Firstly, there has been a continuous increase in educational aspirations in Polish society, particularly among the youth. According to CBOS within eight years (from 1990 to 1998) the percentage of people wishing to obtain university-level education increased from 25% to 57%. That was accompanied by a distinct decrease in the number of people planning to end their education at vocational basic school level (from 30% in 1990 to 5% in 1998)\textsuperscript{15}. In 1992, 30% of young people aged between 18 and 24 took education

\textsuperscript{13} www.sourcecied.org; E. Chmielecka, A. Kraśniewski, J. Woźnicki, Korzyści i koszty związanego z przystąpieniem Polski do Unii Europejskiej w sferze szkolnictwa wyższego (Benefits and Costs related to Poland joining the European Union in the Field of Higher Education), Urząd Komitetu Integracji Europejskiej, Warsaw 2003.


Table 1. Level of education in the population aged 15+ in the years 1988 and 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>1988</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>men</th>
<th>women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in thou.</td>
<td>in %</td>
<td>in thou.</td>
<td>in %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In total</td>
<td>28 269.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>31 288.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>1 838.3</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>3 203.6</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-secondary and secondary</td>
<td>6 979.6</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>10 208.4</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic vocational</td>
<td>6 655.8</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>7 539.8</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary completed</td>
<td>10 961.4</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>8 808.5</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary incomplete and without school education</td>
<td>1 823.7</td>
<td>6.5&lt;sup&gt;1)&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>877.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undetermined level of education</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>650.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>1)</sup> Along with the undetermined level of education

Source: www.stat.gov.pl

In different types of schools, ten years later there were twice as many (60%). In the 1990/1991 academic year, there were 404,000 university or higher education students (including 312,000 full-time students) and a further 2,700 were doing doctoral studies, these numbers in 2001/2002 being, respectively, 1.7 million students (including 765,000 full-time students) and 28,300 doctoral students<sup>16</sup>.

Secondly, the commodification process contributes to the universality of education and expanding the educational offer. The increase in educational possibilities in Poland came in the 1990s. This is largely due to the popularisation of non-state education and an increase in the number of higher education schools. As a result, the increase in percentage of people with higher education is clear. The data of the National Report show (see table 1) that in 1988 it was 6.5%, increasing to 10.2% in 2002.

Participation in the social structure of people with primary education is dropping constantly. In 2002, this percentage decreased 10.8% compared with

Table 2. The structure of the level of education of the population in Poland according to place of residence in 2002 (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Countryside</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-secondary and secondary</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic vocational</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary completed</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary incomplete and without education</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: www.stat.gov.pl

1988. Reduction in the dependency between the level of education and social origin is also characteristic. In the 1990s, origin had a decreasing impact on having primary education. The percentage of people with a rural background dropped from 52.9% in 1987 to 40.6% in 1998 – 1999, and from 37.8% to 27.4% among people coming from rural areas. Obviously enough, the intelligentsia definitely constituted the smallest percentage (5.1% in 1987 and only 1.4% in 1998 – 1999)\(^\text{17}\).

At present in Poland there are high enrolment rates in secondary and higher education, particularly among women. In the years 1988 – 2002, the percentage of women with higher education increased from 5.9% to 11.9%, i.e. twice in comparison with men (from 7.2% to 10.7%)\(^\text{18}\). In 2003, the early school leavers constituted 6.3% of young people aged 18 – 24, which is less than half of that in all EU Member States (Poland: 6.3%, EU15: 18%).

Finally, the process of the commodification of education also has negative consequences, namely it strengthens social diversification, culture and status quo in access to it. These are especially visible in rural communities. Considering the structure of the level of education of the country population, a significant dissonance between the city and the country is still clear. The National Report\(^\text{19}\) data show that in the cities those with higher education constitute 10.3% of the


\(^\text{19}\) www.stat.gov.pl.
population, this percentage being only 3.9% in the country (see table 2). Even larger disproportions are to be found at the level of post-secondary school education and secondary education: 36.2% of city residents and 22.2% of country population hold this level of education.

The polarisation of the education level of the rural population is also clearly visible in regional distribution (including breakdown into provinces). According to the data of the 2002 National Report (see table 3), the highest level is represented by the population in the largest cities and metropolitan areas. There, the percentage of people with higher education sometimes reaches 20%. Peripheral regions are at the other pole, the percentage of the population with higher education not usually exceeding 5%.

An especially high concentration of better educated people is a feature of suburban zones. The greater the distance from the largest agglomerations (especially Warsaw), the greater the decrease in education level. Areas located 100-150 km away from Warsaw and within a radius of 30-70 km from, say, Szczecin, Poznań, Olsztyn, Białystok, Łódź and Opole, feature the lowest indexes of share of population with higher education (below 3-6%) in the country.

Provinces peripheral to the Warsaw agglomerations, i.e. Warmińsko-Mazurskie (3.6%), Kujawsko-Pomorskie and Podlaskie (3.7% each) rank lowest in terms of the index of share of people with higher education. According to the data, these provinces also have the highest percentage of population with primary, primary incomplete or no education whatsoever. In some rural communes, the share of this population in the total structure of education exceeds 50%. These regions have poor economic development. As regards the Warmińsko-Mazurskie province, this situation is largely due to the location of the former state-owned farms, which occupied ca. 33% of the province. After the liquidation of state-owned farms, ca. 20,000 employees were deprived of their earning potential, and these were mostly the least educated people. The 2000 research shows that almost every third inhabitant of a former state farm settlement was unemployed.20

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Table 3. Population aged 15 + in rural areas by level of education in 2002 (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provinces</th>
<th>In total</th>
<th>Level of education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLAND</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolnośląskie</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kujawsko-pomorskie</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lubelskie</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lubuskie</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Łódzkie</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Małopolskie</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazowieckie</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opolskie</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podkarpackie</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podlaskie</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pomorskie</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Śląskie</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Świętokrzyskie</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warmińsko-mazurskie</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wielkopolskie</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zachodniopomorskie</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: www.stat.gov.pl

Specific Nature of Rural Education

The effects of educational inequalities in Poland are noticeable in the first stages of education, i.e. pre-schools. The low index of pre-school education in the countryside stems from the uneven development of pre-school education
facilities. On the other hand, the tendency to liquidate pre-schools restricts with each coming year the access of Polish children aged under 6 to pre-school education. Along with the decreasing number of children in successive classes, the number of pre-school facilities is also continually diminishing.

According to GUS data in 2002, there were 7,789 (state) pre-schools in Poland, 4,022 of which were in cities, 1,706 in urban and rural communes (mostly within the urban parts of these communes) and 2,061 in the countryside. From among 76 operating special pre-schools, only 10 were located in rural and urban or countryside communes (there are almost 2,200 such communes in Poland). Pre-schools operate in 1,932 out of 2,487 communes. This means that there are no pre-schools in 555 communes. Considering that 95% of them are rural communes, there is not a single pre-school in a third of them\(^{21}\).

Analysing the educational situation of pupils of rural background at consecutive levels of education (primary schools, lower secondary schools and post-secondary schools), there are clear disproportions in comparison with city youth. The problem of country schools is their lower quality of education. This is reflected in worse results in competence examinations, which apply to pupils in the 6\(^{th}\) form of primary school and the 3\(^{rd}\) form of lower secondary school. Tests after primary school and lower secondary school are common and mandatory. Taking them is the prerequisite for completing school. Comments by the Central Examination Commission after examinations conducted in May 2004 confirm a high correspondence between results and the location of schools. Good results are most frequent in large population centres. Former State Farm areas have the poorest results. Undoubtedly, this is related to the specific nature of that environment, where prolonged “family” or “hereditary” unemployment is a common feature\(^{22}\), the adults have a low level of education, poverty is progressive and there are limited possibilities of supporting the educational aspirations of the children and youth.


The very diverse quality of education in Poland is also indicated by the PISA research (Programme for International Student Assessment) executed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The research is conducted among 15-year-olds attending the first classes of post-primary school (basic, secondary and secondary vocational). This research is cyclical (3 yearly) and includes successive rounds of tests. Each round is dedicated to three areas: comprehension, mathematics and scientific thinking. Two thirds of the test time is allocated to in-depth assessment in one area. The PISA research, unlike the lower secondary school examination, does not refer to the curriculum (a young person does not only learn at school), but to tasks and roles s/he most often comes across in life (at least theoretically). Testing pupils' competence in comprehension takes into account three areas: finding information in texts of varied form, interpreting text, reflection and assessment. The results obtained by pupils are ranked on a 5-step scale. Achieving the fifth level means that a pupil can solve complex tasks which require finding hidden information in difficult texts, precisely understands such texts, and has the skill of critical assessment and formulation of conclusions which require breaking through stereotypes. Level I and II mean that a pupil can only find single pieces of information and relate them in an elementary scope, with common knowledge.

In a 2000 research on reading with understanding, Polish pupils achieved an average of 479 points (level 3) from the total scale of competence in understanding text. As the average for all OECD countries is 500 points, Polish pupils were clearly below the average. The obtained results leave Poland far behind the leaders: Finland (the average 546 points), Canada (534 points), New Zealand (529 points). The results of the Polish pupils are clearly lower than those achieved by pupils from most European countries and the US. Apart from the level of the results, distribution of the results in the group of pupils is also an alarming phenomenon. Poland is among the countries with a high diversification of results. The percentage of pupils with the lowest level of skills, below 400 points with an average of 500 points, is higher than in other countries. Diversification applies to territory (countryside vs. city). The research results in reading with understanding show that as many as 80% of pupils from the countryside and small places achieved a level of functional illiteracy. On the other hand, pupils from elite secondary schools from large cities ranked among the leaders in Europe with the highest level of skills.

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The 2003 PISA research emphasised mostly mathematics. The research also covered skills in pupils in the scope of solving problems, scientific thinking and understanding text, as well as attitude to learning and school. The ranks of most of the countries were not basically changed against the 2000 PISA edition, although significant differences occurred in several cases. Poland recorded a general increase in the achievement of pupils. Differences in levels between countryside and city schools were slightly reduced in comparison with PISA 2000. These changes may result from introducing a more integrated education system in 1999.

Standards of equipment in countryside schools also deviate significantly from those offered by city schools. The “Right to Education” report from monitoring prepared in 2002 on the basis of research in 521 primary schools, 253 lower secondary and 541 secondary schools from all over Poland by the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights indicates that for some local governments in poorer regions, the tasks related to managing schools often take more than half of annual expenses, in extreme cases reaching as much as 2/3 of the commune budget. There are still schools in the countryside without running water or toilets. 15% of all examined schools do not have a sports room. In 64% of country schools (in comparison with 45% of city schools), sports classes take place in the so-called “replacement rooms” which do not meet any requirements necessary for doing quality sports classes. In half of the examined country schools, there is no reading room (this problem occurs in the city in half that number). Bad conditions are also apparent in school libraries without the possibility of supplementing book collections, purchasing required set books, dictionaries or new literature. Newspapers and magazines are not subscribed due to a shortage of money. 27% of primary schools in the countryside do not have computer rooms, as compared with 12% in city schools. Access to the Internet is almost three times worse in country schools as compared with city schools.

Non-budgetary funds obtained by schools are also an important source of financing education. Here too there is a significant difference between city and country schools, the latter having problems in obtaining such funds due to their poverty. Additional funds mean that teaching which extends beyond the minimum programme is possible, including foreign languages or classes developing pupils’ interests. Poor rural communities have no chance in this

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regard. Sponsored participation in fee-paid classes in country schools applies to few pupils.

Another problem, significantly more important for pupils in the country than in the city, is commuting to school. Pupils in primary and lower secondary schools, who live elsewhere are entitled to free transport. According to the Helsinki Foundation of Human Rights, this right is generally observed. However, time is wasted daily on commuting and waiting for the bus. Where many children are transported, some of them have to come to school long before their classes begin, and some have to wait long to be taken home after school. Weather conditions and defective buses also extend their waiting time. In as many as 82% of primary and 76% lower secondary schools in the countryside and small locations, children wait 3 hours for the bus, in some cases even 4.5 hours. The time which the pupils spend going from home to the bus stop, travelling to school, waiting for classes and then returning home, is from 1.5 to 3.5 hours per day. Less affluent communes save money by minimising the number of trips, extending the routes, which leads to overcrowded buses on the one hand, and extends travelling time, on the other.

If conditions allow, day-care classes are organised at school for commuting pupils. In country primary schools, there are four times fewer day-care rooms compared with city schools. The degree of satisfying the needs regarding grant aids is far lower among pupils from the countryside and small locations in comparison with large cities. According to the above-mentioned data, in case of secondary schools, the lack of any grant aid refers to 28% of pupils from the countryside, while in the city the percentage of pupils with justified yet not met need of grant support, is as low as 7%. Insufficient funds for grants occur four times more often in country schools. In addition, support for pupils with limited means in the form of free books, is far more insufficient in country schools than in the city. Extra meals at school are a similar problem: this form of help is executed in one sixth of the cases in country primary schools in comparison with city schools. The scale of support by foundations, non-governmental organisations, institutional and private sponsors is far smaller in the country than in the city.

Lower quality education in the country also results from less qualified teachers employed in schools at different levels. The lower number of pupils in schools often makes one teacher teach different subjects, including those for which s/he does not have the required qualifications.

Because of large distances between schools, the possibility of specialists employed part-time coming there is very limited. In city environments, where parents are better educated and pose higher requirements for teachers,
maintaining the required level of completing the syllabus is easier compared with the country milieu. In the countryside substituting a teacher with specific qualifications is difficult while competition in the profession is lower.

Despite the regional differences in the functioning of the education system, from the 1990s there has been a slow but gradual educational promotion among the youth from rural communities. The TNS OBOP research ordered by the Ministry of Education at the end of 2003 in a representative sample of pupils completing lower secondary school and their parents showed that 80% of the countryside youth continued their education after lower secondary school in schools, enabling them to get A-level certificates. The largest percentage (37%) chose secondary schools, 28% technical colleges, and 15% profiled secondary schools (with preparation for a vocation). After the completion of all three types of schools, studying is possible. Basic vocational schools were selected by 14% of the tested group. However, many experts indicate that this clear increase in educational aspirations may not be translated into an increase in competitiveness in rural communities. The reason is that motivation for starting education at higher levels often comes as an escape. As many as 44% of pupils reaching schools with A-level certificates do not want to go back to their villages. Among those who continue education in secondary schools, more than half intend to "get out" of their place of residence. The choice of a post-primary school is largely dependent on the network of schools in the vicinity and is related to the relevant possibilities and costs of commuting. Other factors considered while choosing directions of education are duration of tuition and the possibility of continuing education with current friends. Living in a boarding house far away from home is a psychologically more difficult and costlier decision, opted for by definitely fewer young people from small locations.\textsuperscript{26}

In comparison with the results of the research, which show the structure of education of the country youth in post-lower secondary schools, the data on undertaking studies by them are not optimistic. In the early 1980s every 14th primary school leaver with a country background became a student in a higher education institution — at present this applies to every 140th person. Ten times fewer of these young people undertake education at university level.\textsuperscript{27}

The youth from the countryside and cities with a population of under 20,000 constitute 50% of the population aged 19–24. Only 2% of them study in free


study institutions. Important state-owned colleges mostly accept the children of educated parents, from families with a high social and financial status. The increase in number of students from the countryside is mostly noted in fee-paying studies. The transfer of money from the state budget does not reach those who had lower chances at the start and need support, but is provided for students from well-to-do families, who do not need such support. Pupils from the countryside and from small locations choose private colleges, as they cannot meet the examination requirements in the renowned state-owned educational institutions. Those who pass the examination round and are accepted on popular courses are better prepared for their studies, they have more knowledge and have an additional incentive in that they study what they are interested in. During their studies, they have contact with better tutors and enjoy book collections which have been gathered for dozens of years. Thus, social and financial status decide about chances for a good diploma and the appreciation of education by parents, as well as having enough resources to provide education for their children.

Summary

According to article 70 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, each citizen is entitled to education, which is compulsory until the age of 18 and the state authorities ensure common and equal access to education for their citizens. For this purpose, they create and support systems of individual financial and organisational help for pupils and students. Reducing differences in conditions of education, upbringing and care between particular regions of the country, especially large cities and rural areas, is one of the statutory tasks of the educational system, set forth in article 1 of the act on the system of education. For this purpose, the National Programme for the Development of the Polish Countryside Education was developed, which assumed, first of all, enhancing the level of education in countryside areas through the popularisation of secondary school education and higher studies and equalising educational opportunities for communities residing in rural areas. The planned period of project execution were the years 1999—2007. The first stage (1999—2001) included creating and developing a network of primary and lower secondary schools, the second stage (2002—2005) concerned the reform of secondary school education, development of post-secondary schools and continued education for adults. The third stage (after 2005) planned for the evaluation of
the education system in the countryside and promoting secondary school education among the country youth.\footnote{Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej o edukacji na wsi „Biblioteczka Reformy” nr 10/1999 (Reorganisation Book Series, MEN concerning Education in Villages), Warsaw 1999, p. 65.}

Unfortunately, the general assessment of education and its reform is quite sceptical. The 2001 CBOS research shows that the Polish educational system is viewed as significantly worse than three years ago (before the introduction of the educational reform). 43% of respondents considered the Polish system of education to be good, almost the same number (42%) assessed it negatively. In comparison with the poll in April 1998 (before the reform of the education system), at present positive opinions are fewer (by 15%), and negative ones are more numerous (by 11%).

The changes are also critically viewed, which occurred in the educational system after the reform had been introduced in schools. According to the largest group of respondents (38%), the educational system is functioning worse than before the reform, and a quarter of them expressed the opinion that nothing has changed in this area (“neither better nor worse”). Only about a fifth of the respondents (18%) saw an improvement. Every fifth respondent did not have an opinion on this. Most reservations come for ensuring the youth from different social environments equal opportunities for a start in their adult living: two thirds of the respondents believed that Polish schools do not execute this task (“the school does not ensure...” in 61% responses).\footnote{Komunikat z badań CBOS: „Czy polskie szkoły wywiązuja się ze swoich zadań? Szkolnictwo i reforma edukacji po czterech semestrach doświadczeń” (Information of the Public Opinion Research Centre: Do Polish Schools meet their Duties? The Education System and Reform after Four Terms of Experience), Warsaw 2001.}

Even worse was the assessment of the results of the reform of education by respondents from former state farm areas, both adults and youth (see table 4). To the question whether children and youth have more difficult access to different types of schools, the largest number of interviewed women said that the problem refers mostly to higher education. Almost 70% of mothers from the

\footnote{The research on educational opportunities for children and youth from former State Farm settlements in the opinion of their mothers, a comparative study was conducted in 2002 in two provinces: Lubuskie and Warmińsko-Mazurskie. It covered 352 women, 96 from the Lubuskie province and 256 from the Warmińsko-Mazurskie province. E. Sikora, Szanse edukacyjne dzieci i młodzieży z osiedli byłych pegeerów (Educational opportunities for children and youth from settlements in former State farms), [in] Z. Kawczyńska-Butrym (ed.), Kobiety i ich rodziny w osiedlach byłych pegeerów (Women and their families in settlements of former State farms), Olsztyn 2004.}
Warminsko-Mazurskie province fear difficulties in their children having access to higher education.

Table 4. Opinions of women from the Warminsko-Mazurskie province on access of children and youth to different types of schools (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you believe that children and youth have problems in being accepted at:</th>
<th>definitely yes</th>
<th>rather yes</th>
<th>rather no</th>
<th>definitely no</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lower secondary schools</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vocational schools</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technical schools</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>secondary schools</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>higher studies facilities</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As regards assessment of educational possibilities for youth from areas of former state farms in secondary schools, more than 1/3 of the respondents stated that access to both secondary and technical schools is difficult. As expected, the lowest number of respondents believed that lower secondary schools in the compulsory level of education, may be difficult for pupils to have access to. The most often quoted factors hindering access to education for children and youth are: economic, demographic, spatial and regional, psychological, ideological, cultural, educational and sex-related.\(^{31}\)

Despite changes in the reform of the Polish education system introduced in 1999, it still is far from perfect. The premises for improving quality and effectiveness of the system, in particular elimination of regional (city-countryside) inequalities in access to education, are not reflected in the actual situation. Owing to the major delay of Poland against other European Union countries in expenditure for the educational system, the level of education, modernisation of the system is necessary, increasing participation of educational and research investments and improving quality and effectiveness of education.

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