

Original Papers

Polish Psychological Bulletin
2008, vol. 39 (3), 138-148
DOI - 10.2478/v10059-008-0018-3

Hanna Liberska*

Changes in the adolescents' orientations towards the future and factors threatening them against systemic transformation

The purpose of the present study was to investigate adolescents' orientation towards the future (e.g. expectations and fears, their content and timing) and its relationship with the life conditions perceived. The developmental conditions set in the socio-economic context perceived by an adolescent are evaluated from the point of view of their significance for realization of the conception of individual's future. The study was carried out in three stages in the period of systemic transformation –between 1991 and 2005. The total number of 180 adolescents, aged 16 to 18 participated in the study. The main techniques were an essay on the subject “Me and my future” and the psychological conversation on threats perceived by young people in the surrounding reality. The results contributed to the psychological knowledge on significance of the process of transformation of socio-economic system in Poland for the formation of adolescents' orientation to the future and indicated the tendencies of changes in the cultural prototype of development in the life cycle.

Keywords: adolescence, expectations, threats, developmental tasks, transformation of ecological context

Introduction

The adolescents' orientation towards the future is a theoretical construct including three elements: 1) motivation determining the aims of activity, 2) planning ways and means of realisation of goals, and their cause-effect, hierarchic and temporal relations and 3) evaluation of achievability of goals and plans (Nurmi, 2002). All three components are functions of subjective anticipation of the subject's own development, recognition of the socio-economic context and ability of acting in this context, conception of the subject's personality together with the specific subjective style of evaluation of events (Niemczyński, 1988, Markus, 1986, Bandura, 1989, Little, 1983, Emmons, 1991, Cantor, 1990).

These subjective structures being schemes of the mind are shaped by the developmental context (comparable with the “total situation” (Lewin, 1946)), describing the normative events in life, possibilities of acting perceived by the subject and standard evaluations of completion of normative developmental tasks (Trempała, 2000, 2002, Tyszkowa, 1993) along with non-normative or beyond-normative events such as winning the lottery, revolution, cataclysm, terror acts and alike, e.g. (Zaleski, 2002).

In this paper it is assumed that the orientation towards the future being one of the forms of temporal orientations is the structure of the mind responsible for cognitive, affective and evaluative processing of experiences, representing the expected future events and their time sequence (Liberska, 2004). Formation of the orientation towards the future, in consistence with the structuring and restructuring concept of M.Tyszkowa (Tyszkowa, Przetacznik-Gierowska, 1996) and the temporal model of developmental changes of Trempała (2000), is always set in a certain specific developmental context, in certain sociological and cultural conditions and certain historical background.

As follows from the literature in the field, although interest in adolescents' orientation towards the future has increased for a few years, much more attention should be paid to the active approach of the young people to the socio-economic context (Nurmi, 1988, Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 2001, 2003, Liberska, 2004, Silbereisen, 2005, Giddens, 2006). Not much attention has been devoted to the influence of historical events in shaping the orientation towards the future in adolescents (Nurmi, 2002).

The process of shaping the orientation towards future is of vital importance from the point of view of developmental perspectives of young people. The images, visions or conceptions regarding one's future life formed in the period

* Instytut Psychologii, Uniwersytet Kazimierza Wielkiego w Bydgoszczy, ul. Staffa 1, email: hanna.liberska@op.pl

of adolescence function as structures directing the activity of adolescents, their preparation for assuming the roles and realisation of tasks assigned in a given culture to adulthood (Tyszkowa, 1990, Pervin, 2002, Doliński, Łukaszewski, 2000).

In psychological theories effective transition from the period of adolescence to that of adulthood is related to the orientation towards the future (Erikson, 1982, 2004, Havighurst, 1953). The orientation of a young person towards the future is a manifestation of his/her striving to get into the adult world, while the contents and the temporal dimension of this orientation indicate the level of preparation towards taking up the adult life tasks. On the one hand, the orientation towards the future reflects the cultural prototype of life, while on the other – the present life context perceived and evaluated by the young person and the life context anticipated in the future perspective.

Integration of visions and projections of a person's life with objective socio-economic conditions is a substantial condition affecting the autonomy of an individual (Obuchowski, 1985). It requires maintenance of relative balance between aims, means and possibility of the aims realisation in a given life context (Merton, 1982, Oleszkowicz, 2006). Developmental conditions fixed in the socio-economical context perceived by an individual are evaluated from the point of view of their significance for realisation of the conception of individual's future (Tyszkowa, 1993, Liberska, 2002).

Hypotheses of the study

For over 15 years Poland has been the area of deep transformations in political, economic and social systems, which have recently gained the status of historical changes (Tyszka, 2002, Biela, 2002). The radical transformations in all spheres of life (political, economic, sociological) were initiated by the so-called round table negotiations in 1991.

In regard to the range and great dynamics of the transformations of conditions of life, the beginning of the 1990s is generally assumed as very difficult, termed by some authors as "the shock period" for individuals, families and social groups (Tyszka, 2002, p.98). A fast increase in unemployment related to economic changes brought a decrease in the sense of security (Bańka, 1992) felt not only by adults but also by children and adolescents (Tyszka, 2002). As it has been established, in adverse conditions stemming from the difficult situation on the job market and high unemployment, convictions about the self, including the sense of self-effectiveness, can suffer from undesirable initiative hampering transitions thus making it even more difficult to adapt to transformed reality (Jerusalem, Schwarzer, 1992, Bańka 2005). As a consequence the group of people with the acquired helplessness syndrome increased (Kofta, Sędek, 1999). Many parents and their adolescent children experienced

increased level of doubts about a successful start of the adolescents into the adult life, which influenced the content of life goals set by young people (Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 2001, Tyszka 2002). It has been indicated that inefficiency of medical and social institutions contributed to an increase of the number of chronically ill or disabled people (Tyszka 1996). In the same period the number of incomplete families increased, among others because of high death rate of men in the period of intermediate adulthood, which significantly affected transformations of family systems, development and upbringing of children (Tyszka 1999). Reorganisation of the economic structure initiated not only a number of changes in the social life but also changes in culture by introducing new trends and styles, thus contributing to life style transformations (Wrzesień, 2003).

The radical deconstruction of the life style dominant in the 1970s and 1980s together with a rapid deconstruction of the axiological contexts, revealed qualitatively new standards of evaluation and changed perception of the world (Świda-Ziemba, 1999, pp 4-5).

The turn of the 20th and 21st centuries became the phase of adaptation to the modified ecological context, including appearance of opportunities of finding one's place in this context and chances for realisation of individual life goals. These conditions stabilise transformation tendencies in the society. Parallel changes in the education system opened possibilities of getting university level education to a much greater number of young people (Bańka, Orłowski, 2006). This opportunity of gaining greater knowledge and professional competence (Strykowska, 2002) contributed to developing an active and effective approach to at least some transformations in the life context.

The first years of the new millennium also witness substantial changes in the conditions of living following from progressing globalisation, enhanced relation of Poland with other democratic states and Poland's participation in the processes stabilising the world peace in the view of increasing threat of terrorism.

With regard to the above, the question has been formulated if the transformations in conditions of living related to the above mentioned three stages of the systemic changes have exerted significant effect on young people's expectation of the future?

With reference to the ideas of an outstanding Polish psychologist Stefan Szuman (1985) on the effect of the social order on the perspectives, visions and plans for the future formulated by young people, it is expected that the systemic transformation taking place in Poland is manifested in the contents and temporal characteristics of the orientation towards the future of the generation of present adolescents. The relations between the real world and the values and outlook on life of young people has been characterised by the study of Gurycka (1998) and Świda-Ziemba (1999, 2005) covering a period of over 40

years. Searching for the reasons leading to the empirically established changes in the hierarchy of values and outlook on life in young people and their consequences in the sphere of life goals, these authors point to the socio-economic transformations initiated in 1991.

Therefore, there are theoretical and empirical grounds for formulation of the two hypotheses:

- The adolescents' orientation towards the future at particular stages of the systemic transformation in Poland changes both in the content and temporal dimension,
- The adolescents' orientation towards the future changes in response to the contents and frequency of threats perceived in the external context at subsequent stages of the systemic transformation.

Method

The course of investigation and the group studied

The investigation was performed in the period covering three stages of systemic transformation: the initial phase (1991), the phase of progressing adaptation to the relatively stabilised transformed context of living (till 1999) and the period of experiencing the first consequences of obligations following from membership in European structures and new military systems (2005).

At each stage the study was performed on subgroups of 60 young people aged from 16.9 to 18.1. Thus, the total sample for the present study consisted of 180 adolescents (age $M = 17.3$ years; $SD = .46$) chosen from urban schools. The subgroups were homogeneous in gender and the level of education.

The sample was selected in layers: at first, two high schools (liceum) were randomly selected from the list of urban schools in Poznań; next, the groups of 60 students (30 girls and 30 boys) were randomly selected in each school from the list of students. The sampling procedure was the same at each stage of the study.

The tools

The tools used in the study were the essay and psychological conversation.

The material for the study of the orientation towards the future was obtained from the essay. The subjects were asked to write an essay on the conception of their future, entitled "Me and my future". The instruction given to the subjects was as follows.

"Write about your plans concerning your future personal life. Write about your aims you wish to achieve and the expectations for the future. What sequence of events do you expect in your future life and at which age do you expect to be able to realise your particular goals?"

The material collected was categorised by three competent judges. At the first stage of data analysis the subjects' expressions concerning the contents of their goals were assigned to earlier distinguished general categories: education and profession, family of origin and procreation family (marriage, children), health, material status, entertainment and leisure, socio-political activity, development of personality (cognitive competence, spiritual development, religion) or the category called "other". The categories correspond to the main areas of the adolescents' interest established by the judges on the basis of a pilot study. The judges had been trained during the pilot study and the coefficient of consistence of the judges' opinions (Kendall W coefficient) was .93.

The psychological conversation was used to collect the data on perception and evaluation of socio-economic conditions (positive or negative) in the aspect of their role in realisation of the subjects' expectations regarding personal future. The subjects were asked the following questions: *Which phenomena in the world have attracted your attention? Do you perceive any changes in the situation of Poland or in the world? If yes, please tell me about these events, phenomena or processes. Do they arouse your apprehension or perhaps your approval when you think about your future?* In order to get more exact evaluation of the phenomena perceived, the subjects were asked to assess them from the point of view of the influence on their personal development and classify them into three categories: positive, negative or unimportant.

The threats mentioned by the subjects studied were categorised by three competent judges into the following categories (already distinguished in the pilot study): threats to the security of the country and citizens related to an external conflict, a threat to democracy related to an internal conflict, accidents and illnesses threatening the subjects' health, health of relatives or health of large groups (e.g. AIDS, neoplastic disease), death of the subjects or their relatives, depreciation of the basic norms and values, crime, unemployment, homelessness, overwork and a threat to the natural environment.

The coefficient of consistence of the judges' opinions (Kendall W coefficient) in classification of the subjects' statements was .95.

In the research plan the main dependent variable was the adolescents' orientation towards the future (the contents of the expectations and their temporal localisation) and transformations in the ecological context recognised by the subjects as significant for their future life path (the phenomena classified as threatening were of the main interest in the study). The main independent variable was the temporal setting of the investigation in the historical time covering the distinguished stages of the systemic transformation.

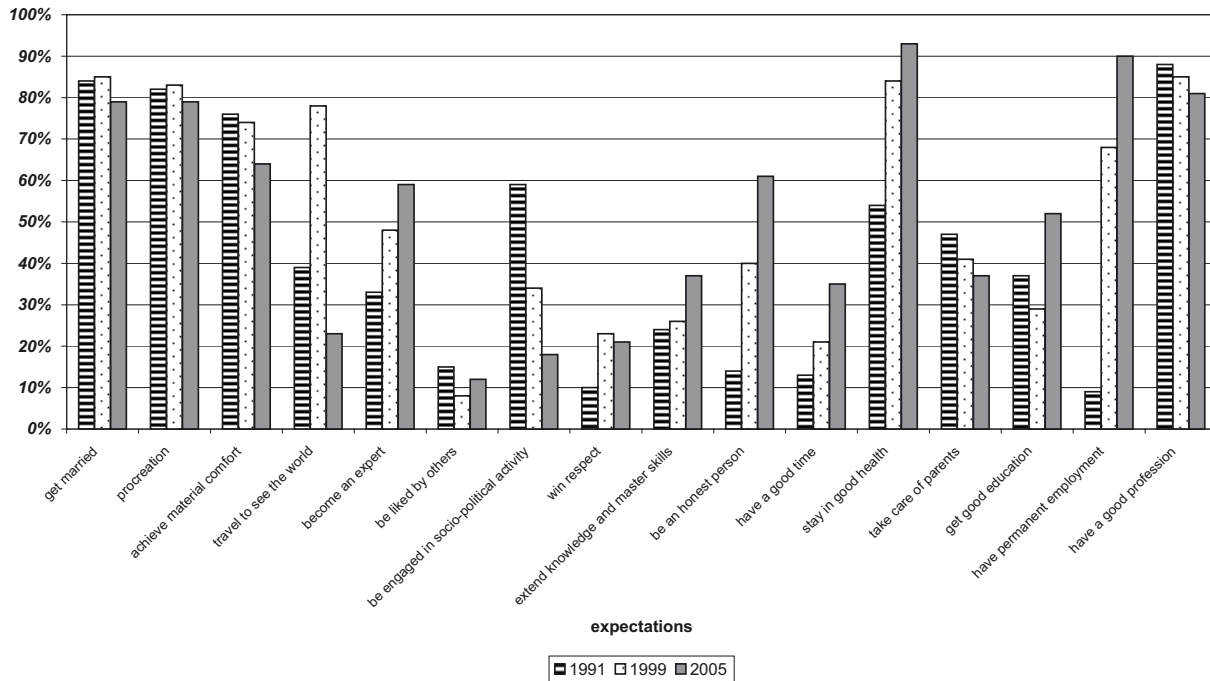


Figure 1. Frequency of adolescents' expectations in three stages of study.

Results

The contents of the orientation towards the future

According to the results presented in Table 1, the expectations of the adolescents regarding the future personal life are similar at the three stages of the study and include the main tasks of adolescence, early and middle adulthood such as: working out the own system of moral standards, finding a group of friends, having fun, getting to know the world, education and preparation to professional life, gaining a certain social position in the world of adults, taking up social responsibilities, starting a family and taking care of its material needs (Havighurst, 1981).

Although at the three distinguished stages of the study the contents of the orientation towards the future of the adolescent cohorts studied was not much different (Kruskal-Wallis $H=2.97, p<.05$) frequencies of expectations regarding the future are not so similar (Figure 1).

A moderate degree of similarity was noted for the hierarchies of frequency of expectations revealed in the years 1991 and 1999 ($r_{Du\ Masa} = .46(6)$) and the hierarchies recognised in years 1999 and 2005 ($r_{Du\ Masa} = .32$), (Brzeziński, 1978), while the hierarchies of frequencies of expectations formulated by the subjects studied in 1991 and 2005 show a low degree of similarity ($r_{Du\ Masa} = 0$). The above results indicate that over the period of the last 15 years the hierarchy of the frequency of expectations of adolescents has undergone gradual changes. A detail analysis of the data permits recognition of their directions and dynamics (Table1).

Table 1
Hierarchy of frequency of expectations regarding the future at the three stages of the study 1991, 1999, 2005.

Contents	Stage of the study:		
	I (1991)	II (1999)	III (2005)
Get married	2	2	4
Procreation and upbringing of children	3	3	4
Get a good profession	1	1	3
Achieve material comfort	4	5	5
Travel to see the world	8	4	11
Become an expert	10	7	7
Be liked by others	12	15	14
Be engaged in socio-political activity	5	10	13
Win respect	15	13	12
Extend knowledge and master skills	11	12	9
Be an honest person (observe social rules and law)	13	9	6
Have a good time	14	14	10
Stay in good health	6	2	1
Take care of parents	7	8	9
Get good education	9	11	8
Have permanent employment	16	6	2

($H = 2.97 < \chi_{\alpha}^2 = 5.99, df = 2, p < .05$)

Radical transitions in the hierarchy of frequencies concern the expectations related to finding permanent jobs (rise from the 16th position in 1991 to the 2nd position in

Table 2
Temporal localisation of the adolescents' expectations established at the three stages of the study.

Content	Stage of the study		
	1991	1999	2005
Socio-political activity	24.1	34.7	33.3
Satisfying work	21.8	24	27.2
Getting married	25.1	26.2	27.7
Child birth	26.9	26.7	28.9
Satisfying income	26.7	25	29.6

($H = 6.41 > \chi^2_{\alpha}$, $k=2$, $p < .05$).

2005), observance of social standards, law and order (rise from the 13th position in 1991 to the 6th position in 2005) and engagement in socio-political activity (drop from the 5th position in 1991 to the 13th position in 2005).

In general, over the period of the study (1991-2005) eight of the distinguished 16 categories of expectations moved up in the hierarchy, six moved down and positions of only two remained relatively unchanged.

On the basis of analysis of the results in the aspect of dynamics of changes in the hierarchy of frequency of expectations regarding the future, the following four categories have been distinguished:

I. The expectations of the strongest dynamics of changes:

1. Expectations related to securing the material basis of existence (permanent employment),
2. Expectations related to the sphere of morality, law and order (social standards),
3. Expectations related to social responsibilities (socio-political activity).

II. The expectations of moderate dynamics of changes:

1. Expectations on the health status, physical and psychological regeneration (leisure and recreation),
2. Expectations related to learning about the world and travelling,
3. Expectations related to social contacts (gaining respect),
4. Expectations related to professional success (gaining a

position of an expert)

III. The expectations of weak dynamics of changes:

4. Expectations related to preparation for professional career (good education, satisfying professional life),
5. Expectations related to material status,
6. Expectations related to human relations and responsibility for close persons (finding a partner, marrying, taking care of parents, having a group of friends),
7. Expectations related to personal development (gaining knowledge and new competences),

IV. Stable expectations:

- a. Expectations related to having and bringing up a child / children,
- b. Expectation of gaining material comfort.

In general the results indicate the stability in the contents of the orientation towards the future and changes in the frequency of expressing particular content categories, manifested in the shifts in the hierarchy of expectations established by the subjects. However, the changes are statistically insignificant.

Temporal structure of the orientation towards the future

According to the results of statistical analysis, the temporal localisation of the main expectations of the adolescents representing the three cohorts studied is significantly different (Kruskal-Wallis $H = 6.41$, $p < .05$).

Over the 15 years of the study the time of realisation of the majority of goals and tasks in the personal future was systematically shifted towards later and later years of life (Table 2). Great diversity of changes was observed for the temporal localisation of the engagement in the socio-political activity: at the second stage of the study it was delayed by over 10 years relative to the results from the first stage of the study, whereas according to the results collected at the last stage (2005) it was planned a few years earlier. Relatively the weakest temporal translocation was noted in the sphere related to starting a family. As a consequence,

Table 3
Temporal localisation of the fundamental expectations in early adulthood at the three stages of the study.

Stage	Years of Age		
	20.1 – 25.0	25.1 – 30.0	30.1 - 35.0
	Realization of expectations		
1991	1. Find a good job 2. Take socio-political activity	1. Find a spouse and get married 2. Reach material success 3. Have children	-
1999	1. Find a good job	1. Reach material success 2. Find a spouse and get married 3. Have children	1. Take socio-political activity
2005	-	1. Find a good job 2. Find a spouse and get married 3. Have children 4. Reach material success	1. Take socio-political activity

Table 4

Hierarchy of frequency of threats perceived at the three stages of the systemic transformation.

Type of threat	Stage of transformation		
	1991	1996	2005
External conflict	6	7	4
Internal conflict	1	4	5
Accidents and illnesses	4	3	5
Depreciation of values and standards	2	2	2
Crime	7	2	3
Death of the subject or close persons	8	6	7
Overwork, strain	5	5	6
Threats to the natural environment	5	5	8
Homelessness and unemployment	3	1	1

($H = 8,82 > \chi_a^2$, $k=2$, $p < .02$).

the temporal distribution of particular developmental tasks assigned to adulthood was considerably changed (Table 3).

The changes noted between the first and the third stage of the study, involve the shift of the life tasks from the phase of early adulthood to later phases. Consequently, the initial phase of adulthood had relatively few tasks, the majority of them were shifted to the intermediate phase of early adulthood – between 25 and 30 year of age – and partly to the last phase. No statistically significant differences in the content and temporal localisation of expectations, in the three cohorts of young people compared were found to be sex dependent. The only prominent tendency observed was a stronger temporal translocation of the expectations on the future family among boys and a stronger temporal translocation of the socio-political activity among girls. The results have confirmed the suppositions expressed by the hypothesis on the temporal changes in the adolescents' orientation towards the future at the three subsequent stages of the systemic transformations in Poland.

Threats to the orientation towards the future

The results of the study indicate that young people perceive many phenomena and processes taking place in the external context that may negatively affect their future. Detail information was obtained on the main categories of threats to personal future affecting the orientation towards the future of the three cohorts of young people (Table 4).

According to the results of the quantitative analysis, the hierarchy of frequencies of the recognised categories of threats indicated by the young people was significantly different at the three stages of the study (Kruskal-Wallis $H = 8.82$, $p < .02$). According to the qualitative analysis, the adolescents' perception of the phenomena and processes related to the systemic transformation in regard to their significance for the personal future was different at the

three stages of the study, i.e. in the years 1991, 1999 and 2005.

The frequencies of threats perceived by the young people at the three stages of the study are characterised by different degrees of similarity. High degree of similarity was found between the threats perceived in the years 1991 and 1999 ($r_{ps} = .5$), moderate – between those perceived in the years 1991 and 2005 ($r_{ps} = .25$), whereas low – between those perceived in 1999 and 2005 ($r_{ps} = 0$), (Brzeziński, 1978). The above results testify significant changes in the way of thinking about the transformations in the ecological context in the aspect of their effect on the personal future of young people, observed to have taken place between the first and the last stage of the study. Evaluation of different phenomena and events perceived in the socio-economic context by contemporary adolescents (at the third stage of the study) is considerably different from that established in 1999 but close to that obtained at the first stage of the study in 1991.

Analysis of the results in the aspect of dynamics in changes in hierarchy of frequency of the threats indicated by the adolescents permitted the distinction of four categories:

- I. Threats of the strongest dynamics of changes (shifts by at least 5 positions in the hierarchy), including all kinds of crime,
- II. Threats of moderate dynamics of changes (shifts by 3-4 positions) including:
 1. Internal conflicts,
 2. External conflicts, terrorism,
- III. Threats of weak dynamics of changes (shifts by 2 positions), including:
 1. Homelessness and unemployment,
 2. Accidents and illnesses
 3. Threats to the natural environment,
 4. Anxiety about the death of relatives and own death,
- IV. Stable threats (at most shifts by 1 position), including:
 1. Depreciation of values and standards,
 2. Overwork and strain.

The results collected at the first stage of the study prove that at that time internal conflicts were the most frequent source of apprehension related to the future. The adolescents in the study described them as discords between the leading political groups and inside their structures as well as negative social consequences of some economical solutions. These events were perceived as a threat to the then young democracy and the related socio-economical changes. The results obtained at the second stage of the study (1999) show a drastic increase in the apprehension of threats to the personal future related to unemployment and breaking of moral and law standards (all kinds of crime). At the third stage the category of the most frequently mentioned threats also included external conflicts and terrorism.

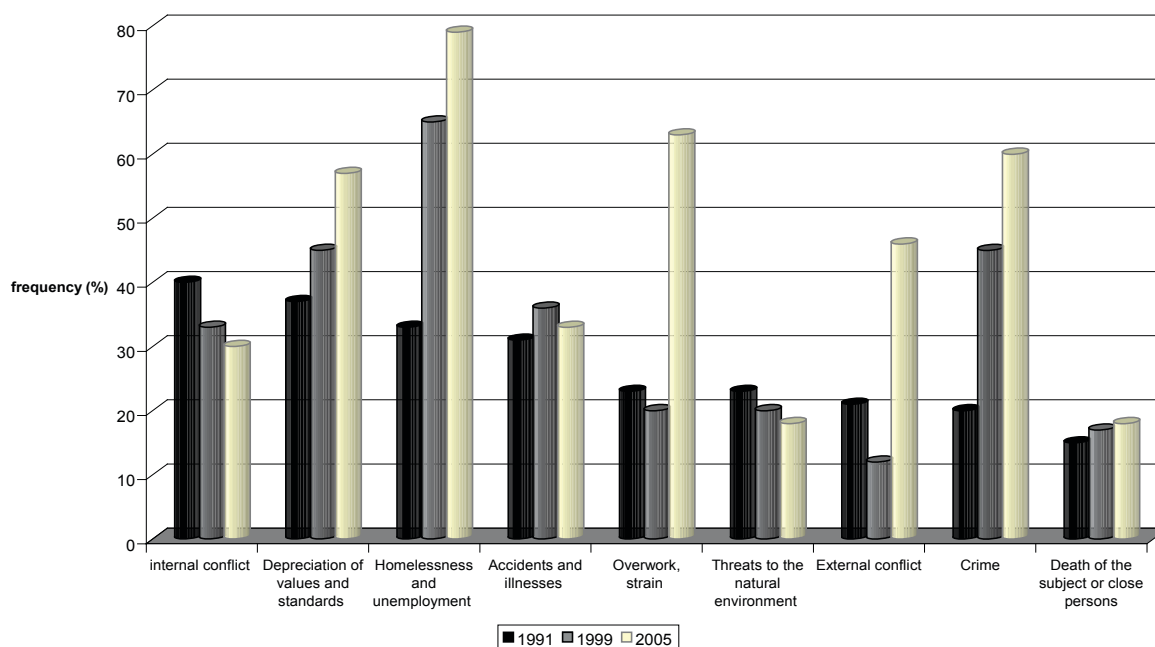


Figure 2. Frequency of threats perceived at three stages of study.

A comparison of the frequencies of the threats perceived by the young people at the three stages of the study (1991, 1999, 2005) corresponding to the stages of the systemic transformation, has shown that young people more often classify the phenomena and processes in the external context as threats to their future (Fig. 2). In 1999 the young people perceived about one third (37.5%) threats more than in 1991, while in 2005 – almost twice as many (189%). The cohort studied in 2005 three times more often than that in 1991 indicated all kinds of crime as a threat to their future and almost three times more often indicated the effects of overwork and tiredness (270%) experienced by people in their families. The same group – studied in 2005 – pointed to the threat of homelessness and unemployment and engagement in an external conflict over two times more often (239% and 219%, respectively). The frequency of mentioning the threat of an external conflict drastically increased (383%) between 1999 and 2005. The only categories whose perception as threats decreased were those related to internal conflicts and degradation of the natural environment.

According to the statistical analysis no statistically significant differences in the structure of the hierarchy of threats related to the sex of the respondents were noted.

In general the results have revealed a great sensitivity of young people to different pathological phenomena they perceive in the surrounding reality. The main sources of apprehension identified by the young people are the negative processes in the sphere of morality and social order, social security (homelessness), the situation on the job market and recently the international situation and terrorism.

Discussion and conclusions

The results obtained have brought a substantial contribution to recognition of the orientation towards the future of contemporary adolescents, the areas and directions of its changes related to the transformations of the ecological context.

The data collected have revealed a systematic increase in the adolescents' interest in the activity aimed at preservation of good physical and mental condition, intellectual and moral development as well as securing material basis of existence. On the other hand, a relatively stable decrease in the adolescents' interests has been noted in the area of social and political activity. Another area in which the adolescents interests has been slowly but systematically decreasing is getting satisfying profession and reaching high economical status as well as cultivation of close interpersonal ties (care of elderly parents, finding a partner). The data also reveal that the decrease in the adolescents' interest in good education and finding a reference group noted in 1999 (second stage of the study) was only temporary, similarly as an enhanced concentration on travelling and learning about the world.

It has been found that in the orientation towards future the young people have been increasingly concentrating on personal development. The results have confirmed the expectations expressed in the hypothesis on the progressing differentiation of the orientation towards the future in the contents and temporal localisation over the last 15 years. The differences were manifested by the changes in the frequency of mentioning the basic expectations of the young people indicated by the shifts in the hierarchic structure

and significant temporal translocations. Consequently, the study has revealed a considerable restructuring of the plans for early adulthood. A similar tendency towards putting off some expectations on marriage and procreation was reported to have been noted in Italian young people (Lanz, Rosnati, 2002, Scabini, Cigoli, 1997). However, at the present stage of studies it cannot be concluded that the tendency is permanent (Liberska, 2005, 2007), it cannot be rejected that it is a manifestation of temporary deregulation of the life cycle (Liberska, 2004) and also a thesis put forward by some authors that "the shift in time of taking up important life decisions has become a value in itself" (Wrzesień, 2003, p 59) cannot be accepted.

As follows from the collected material, the contemporary youth perceives different threats to realisation of their future tasks and expectations inherent in the life context and classifies them as important (Nurmi, 1988, Yowell, 2000). These results confirmed the adolescents' sensitivity to the pathological phenomena in the environment and the developmental processes (Szuman, 1985, Tyszkowa, 1993).

The results have also revealed changes in the structure of the threats mentioned by the young people as affecting their conception of future life at particular stages of the systemic transformation. The changes have confirmed hypothesis II on the relations between the adolescents' orientation towards the future and the ecological context of its formulation.

Results of earlier studies on the effect of environment on the orientation towards the future in the period of adolescence have revealed intercultural differences (Nurmi, Liceanu, Liberska, 1999, Malmberg, 1998). They confirmed significance of taking into regard the ecological context (Bronfenbrenner, 1981, Bruner, 1996, Tyszkowa, 1993a) in exploration and explanation of shaping of temporal orientation. However, the interpretation based on the transversal model did not permit grasping of the intergeneration differences (between the results for different cohorts) related to events of non-normative character woven into the historical development in particular societies (Wygotski, 1971, Gurycka, 1998). The more informative interpretation was obtained as a result of assuming the strategy of time-lag design (Brzezińska, 2000).

Comparative analysis of the results collected at the three stages of the study has shown a systematic increase in the frequency of perceived threats, related by the young people with the situation on the job market, public safety, depreciation of the system of norms and universal values. The frequency of perception of the state of the natural environment and the internal situation on the country (internal conflicts) as threats has decreased. This change may suggest stabilisation of the political situation in perception of the young people or their indifference to political activities stemming from the conviction that they

have no influence on the political sphere. This interpretation is confirmed by the decrease in the young people's interest in the socio-political activity and temporal delay of the decision about possible political engagement. At the last stage of the study in 2005, there was a tendency to shift this decision back to the earlier temporal scale, which may suggest a new trend of changes.

A consequence of the above are changes in the orientation towards the future manifested as postponement of realisation of the developmental tasks of early adulthood in the area of family life, professional career material status and social responsibilities as well as changes in the sequence of taking up these tasks in life. Relatively great number of tasks is planned for the intermediate phase of early adulthood, while the initial phase of early adulthood contains fewer and fewer tasks and this phase becomes a kind of buffer between adolescence and adulthood. This buffer offers a possibility of effective adaptation of some young people to increasing – in their perception – demands of external reality and increasing difficulty in fulfilling many tasks of adulthood (Gidens, 2006). A similar tendency of changes has been noted for German young people (Hurrelmann, Rosewitz, Wolf, 1985), also in the study performed after the destruction of the Berlin Wall (Silbereisen, 2005). In the light of the studies on shaping of the identity of adolescents (Liberska, 2005) the results of this study make grounds for a supposition of gradual absorption of the initial phase of early adulthood by the period of adolescence and shortening of the period of early adulthood.

Starting from 1991, an increasing number of young people have indicated that the situation on the job market, present and anticipated, has a negative effect on their life. This realisation was manifested in the contents of the orientation towards the future as increasing concentration on the professional activity aimed at finding permanent employment, improvement of competence and abilities, leading to achievement of the status of an expert and winning social respect. Temporal localisation of the moment of finding a satisfying job, also in material aspect, has gradually shifted towards later years of life (Liberska, 2004, Wrzesień, 2003). The increase in the time needed to get desired professional qualifications and finding a satisfactory job is another factor responsible for postponement of the decision of starting a family (Hurrelmann, 1985, 1993). The noted decrease in the interest in close interpersonal ties, both on friendship and romantic level, or even a family level, occurs together with the postponement of the time young people plan getting married, starting a family or taking care of elderly family members. This direction of changes in the orientation towards the future may be a portent of potential difficulties of adolescents when faced with basic dilemmas of adulthood concerning the family sphere such as intimacy versus isolation and generativity versus stagnation.

Another notable tendency is a significant increase in the number of statements indicating the stronger apprehension of all kinds of crime either experienced or heard of from others. Increasing perception of the possible threats by the young people is manifested by enhancement of the expectations of their own moral development and law and order around them, and partly disclosed reluctance (or aversion) towards taking up social responsibility, expressed among others by postponement of possible engagement in social and political activities. A natural consequence of the threats related to overwork and strain that the young people observe in their parents and other representatives of older generations, the accidents and illnesses sometimes leading to the death of close family members, is a significant increase in the interest in their own health and leisure activities. This tendency is consistent with the growing tendencies towards reaching a professional success whose achievement requires good physical and psychological condition.

A comparative analysis of structures of the threats established at particular stages of the study (1991, 1999, 2005) indicates a systematic decrease in the similarity of their frequencies (from high, through moderate to low). A similar tendency of decreasing similarity of the frequency of formulation but much less intense is noted on the basis of the comparative analysis of the contents of expectation in future life established at the three stages of the study (from moderate to low similarity). The growing pace of changes observed at the third stage of the study, corresponding to the recent 6 years of the transformation, signals a possibility of the onset of processes leading to more radical changes in the contents of the orientation towards the future of the adolescents in response to perception of an increasing number of threats in the present and anticipated context. In regard to the above there is a possibility of restoration of the interest in socio-political activity in young people, viewed as a chance of securing stability and protection of fundamental values and aims in a given culture (Inhelder, Piaget, 1970).

This result can also be interpreted as a manifestation of decreasing resistance or weakened adaptation ability of young people to the perceived and prognosticated range and direction of changes in the external context.

The hitherto established pathway of changes in the adolescents' orientation towards the future can lead to at least relative stabilisation (perhaps only temporary) of the already transformed structure of early adulthood and hence force changes in the full life cycle. Formulation of a more precise conclusion on the stability of the tendencies observed in the orientation towards the future in the ecological context and on the effect of these tendencies on the structure of early adulthood and other developmental periods requires further studies that however, they should be performed on a representative group of young adults.

References

- Bandura, A. (1989). Self-regulation of motivation and action through internal standards and goal systems. In L.A.Pervin (Ed.), *Goal concepts in personality and social psychology* (pp. 33-68). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Bańka, A. (1992). *Bezrobocie. Podręcznik pomocy psychologicznej*. [Unemployment. Handbook of psychological assistance]. Poznań: Print-B.
- Bańka, A. (2005). *Poczucie samoskuteczności*. [The sense of self-effectiveness]. Poznań – Warsaw: Print – B, Instytut Rozwoju Kariery.
- Bańka, A., Orłowski, K. (2006). Makiawelizm jako czynnik wpływający na poczucie skuteczności nauczycieli w warunkach zmiany organizacyjnej w systemie edukacyjnym. [Machiavellism as a factor affecting the sense of effectiveness of teachers in the conditions of organisational changes in the education system]. W B.Rożnowski, A.Biała, A.Bańka (Eds.), *Praca i organizacja w procesie zmian* [Work and organisation in the process of changes] (pp. 77 – 97). Poznań: SPA.
- Biała, A. (2002). Psychologia transformacji gospodarczej w Polsce. [Psychology and the economic transformation in Poland.] W J.Brzeziński, H., Sęk, J.Reykowski (Ed.), *Kolokwia Psychologiczne, 10*, (pp.141-165). Warsaw: Instytut Psychologii PAN.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1981). *The ecology of human development. Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J.S. (1996). *The culture of education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Brzezińska, A. (2000). Modele i strategie badania zmiany rozwojowej [Models and strategies of investigation of developmental change]. In J.Strelau (Ed.), *Psychologia. Podręcznik akademicki* [Psychology. Academic handbook] (pp.238-256). vol.1. Gdansk: GWP.
- Brzeziński, J. (1978). *Elementy metodologii badań psychologicznych* [Elements of methodology of psychological research]. Warsaw: PWN.
- Cantor, N. (1990). From thought to behaviour: "having" and "doing" in the study of personality and cognition. *American Psychologist, 17*, 735-750.
- Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, M. (2001). The life goals of adolescents in the changing social situation in Poland. *Studia Jagiellonica Humani Cultus Progressus, 5, 1 (15)*, 53-69.
- Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, M. (2003). Nadzieje i obawy młodzieży dotyczące własnej przyszłości w zmieniającej się sytuacji społecznej w Polsce a jej cele życiowe [Hopes and fears of adolescents concerning one's future in the context of changing social situation in Poland and the life goals]. In L.Wojciechowska (Ed.), *Spostrzeżenie zjawisk świata społecznego przez dzieci, młodzież i młodych dorosłych* [Perception of social phenomena by children, adolescents and young adults] (pp. 149-162). Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.
- Doliński, D., Łukaszewski, W. (2000). Typy motywacji [Types of motivation]. In J.Strelau (Ed.), *Psychologia. Podręcznik akademicki* [Psychology. Academic handbook], vol.2, (pp.469-491). Gdansk: GWP.
- Emmons, R.A. (1991). Personal strivings, daily life events, and psychological and physical well-being. *Journal of Personality, 59*, 453-472.
- Erikson, E.H. (1982). *The life cycle completed*. New York – London: W.W.Norton.
- Erikson, E.H. (2004). *Identity and the life cycle* [Tożsamość a cykl życia] (translated by M.Żywicki). Poznań: Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka.
- Giddens, A. (2006). *Modernity and identity* [Tożsamość i nowoczesność]. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Gurycka, A. (1998). The map of my world. *Polish Psychological Bulletin, vol. 29, 2*, 81-103.

- Havighurst, R.J. (1953). *Human development and education*. New York: Longmans.
- Hurrelmann, K. (1993). Introduction: Interdisciplinary and international approaches to research on adolescence. In K.Hurrelmann (Ed.), *International handbook of adolescence* (pp. 1-15). Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press.
- Hurrelmann, K., Rosewitz, B., Wolf H.K. (1985). *Lebensphase Jugend*. Munch: Juventa.
- Inhelder, B, Piaget, J. (1970). From the logic of a child to the logic of an adolescent. [*Od logiki dziecka do logiki młodzieży*]. Warsaw: PWN.
- Jerusalem, M., Schwarzer, R. (1992). Self-efficacy as a resource factor in stress appraisal processes. In R. Schwarzer (Ed.), *Self-efficacy: Thought control of action* (pp. 195-213). Washington: Hemisphere Publishing Corp.
- Kofta M., Sędek, G. (1999). Uncontrollability as irreducible uncertainty. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 29, 577-590.
- Lanz, M., Rosnati, R. (2002). Adolescents' and young adults' construction of the future: Effects of family relations, self-esteem, and sense of coherence. In J.Trempała, L.E.Malmberg (Eds.), *Adolescents' future orientation. Theory and research* (pp.17-35). Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang.
- Lewin, K. (1946). Behaviour and development as a function of total situation. In L.Carmichael (Ed.), *Manual of child psychology* (p. 791-844). New York: Wiley.
- Liberska, H. (2002). Life perspectives of adolescents in the context of social and economic changes in Poland. In J.Trempała, L.E.Malmberg (Eds.), *Adolescents' future orientation. Theory and research* (pp.51-65). Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang.
- Liberska, H. (2004). *Perspektywy temporalne młodzieży. Wybrane uwarunkowania* [Temporal perspectives of adolescents. Selected determinants]. Poznan: Adam Mickiewicz University Press.
- Liberska, H. (2005). *Tożsamość młodzieży a jej orientacja temporalna* [The identity of adolescents and their temporal orientation]. Paper presented at the 14th Conference of Polish Developmental Psychologists. Warsaw, Poland.
- Liberska, H. (2007). Współczesny obraz moratorium [Contemporary image of moratorium]. In B.Harwas-Napierała, H.Liberska (Eds.), *Tożsamość a współczesność. Nowe tendencje i zagrożenia* [Identity and modern times. New tendencies and threats] (pp. 25-53). Poznan: Adam Mickiewicz University Press.
- Little, D. (1983). Personal projects: A rationale and method for investigation. *Environment and Behaviour*, 15, 273-309.
- Malmberg, L-E. (1998). *Education and Students' Future-Oriented. Adolescents' Future Preparation, Future Goals and Self-Evaluation in Educational Context in Finland and Poland*. Vasa: Department of Teacher Education Abo Akademi University.
- Markus, H.M., Nurius, P.(1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist*, 41, 954-969.
- Merton, R.K. (1982). *Sociological theory and social structure* [Teoria socjologiczna i struktura społeczna] (przekł. E.Morawska, J.Wertenstein-Żuławski). Warsaw: PWN.
- Niemczyński, A. (1988). Procesy rozwojowe człowieka w pełnym cyklu życia indywidualnego [Human developmental processes in the full cycle of an individual life]. In M.Tyszkowa (Ed.), *Rozwój psychiczny człowieka w ciągu życia*, [Psychological development of man in life] (pp. 222-232). Warsaw: PWN.
- Nurmi, J.E. (1988). Experience of the threat of war among Finnish adolescents: Effects on thinking about the future, and comparison of methods. *Medicine and War*, 4, 199-210.
- Nurmi, J.E. (2002). An introduction: Thinking about, preparing for and negotiating the future. In J.Trempała, L.E.Malmberg (Eds.), *Adolescents' future orientation. Theory and research* (pp. 9-14). Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang.
- Nurmi, J.E., Liiceanu, A., Liberska, H. (1999). Future-oriented interests. In F.A.Alsaker, A.Flammer (Eds.), *The Adolescent Experience. European and American Adolescents in the 1990s* (pp. 85-98). Mahwah – New Jersey – London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Obuchowski, K. (1985). *Adaptacja twórcza* [Creative adaptation]. Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza.
- Oleszkowicz, A. (2006). *Bunt młodzieńczy. Uwarunkowania. Formy. Skutki*. [Rebellion of the youth. Determinants, Forms, Consequences]. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.
- Pervin, L.A. (2002). *Psychology of Personality* [Psychologia osobowości] (translated by M.Orski). Gdansk: GWP.
- Scabini, E., Cigoli, V. (1997). Young adult families. An evolutionary slowdown or abreakdown in the generational transition? *Journal of Family Issues*, vol. 18, 6, 608-626.
- Silbereisen, R.K. (2005, September). *Social change and adolescent transition to adulthood*. Paper presented at the XXXII Meeting of the Polish Psychological Association (PTP). Cracow, Poland.
- Strykowska, M. (Ed.) (2002). *Współczesne organizacje. Wyzwania i zagrożenia. Perspektywa psychologiczna*. [Contemporary organisations. Challenges and threats. Psychological perspective]. Poznan: Wydawnictwo Fundacji HUMANIORA.
- Szuman, S. (1985). Perspektywy, ideały i plany życiowe wychowanków [Perspectives, ideals and life plans of young people]. In S.Szuman: *Podstawy rozwoju i wychowania w ontogenezie. Dzieła wybrane* [Fundamentals of development and upbringing in ontogenesis. Selected Works], vol. 2, (pp 83-98). Warsaw: WSiP.
- Świda-Ziemba, H. (1999). *Wartości egzystencjalne młodzieży lat dziewięćdziesiątych* [Existential values of the adolescents of the 1990s]. Warsaw: ISNS UW.
- Świda-Ziemba, H. (2005). *Młodzi w nowym świecie*. [The young in a new world]. Krakow: WL.
- Trempała, J. (2000). *Modele rozwoju psychicznego. Czas i zmiana* [Models of psychological development. Time and change]. Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uczelniane Akademii Bydgoskiej im Kazimierza Wielkiego.
- Trempała, J. (2002). Models of psychological time in the research on time Perspectives. In J.Trempała, L.E.Malmberg (Eds.), *Adolescents' future orientation . Theory and research* (pp.111-122). Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang.
- Tyszka, Z. (1996). Polityka społeczna w okresie transformacji w kontekście uwarunkowań rodzinnych. [Social policy in the transformation period in the context of family conditions]. *Roczniki Socjologii Rodziny*, vol. VIII, 243-254.
- Tyszka, Z. (1999). Ku społeczeństwu postindustrialnemu. Kondycja rodziny polskiej w dobie przyspieszonych przemian [To postindustrial society. Polish families during accelerated transformations]. *Roczniki Socjologii Rodziny*, vol. XI, 7 – 16.
- Tyszka, Z. (2002). *Rodzina we współczesnym świecie* [Family in modern reality]. Poznan: Adam Mickiewicz University Press.
- Tyszkowa, M. (1990). *Aktywność i działalność dzieci i młodzieży* [Activity of children and adolescents]. Warsaw: WSiP.
- Tyszkowa, M. (1993). Wyobrażenia młodzieży na temat własnych perspektyw życiowych a zmiany społeczno-gospodarcze w Polsce (porównanie danych z lat siedemdziesiątych i dziewięćdziesiątych) [Expectations of the youth on their life perspectives against the socio-economic changes in Poland (comparison of the data of 1970s and 1990s)]. *Kolokwia Psychologiczne*, 2, 76 – 88.
- Tyszkowa, M. (1993a). Ekologiczne uwarunkowania rozwoju psychicznego jednostki: propozycja interpretacji poznawczej [Ecological determinants of the psychological development of the individual; proposition of cognitive interpretation]. *Kwartalnik Polskiej Psychologii Rozwojowej*, 2, 3-18.

- Tyszkowa, M., Przetacznik-Gierowska, M. (1996). Wybrane koncepcje i teorie rozwoju psychicznego człowieka [Selected conceptions and theories of psychological development of a man]. In M.Przetacznik-Gierowska, M. Tyszkowa (Eds.), *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka* [Psychology of human development] (pp.189-221). Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Wrzesień, W. (2003). *Jednostka – rodzina – pokolenie Studium relacji międzypokoleniowych w rodzinie* [Individual, family, generation. The intergenerational relations study in the family]. Poznan: Adam Mickiewicz University Press.
- Wygotski, L.S. (1971). *Wybrane prace psychologiczne* [Selected psychological works] (translated by E. and J.Fleszner). Warsaw: PWN.
- Yowell, C.M. (2000). Possible selves and future orientation. Exploring hopes and fears of latino boys and girls. *Journal of Early Adolescence. Vol. 20, 3*, 245 – 280.
- Zaleski, Z. (2002). Future horizon: A challenging concept for psychology. In J.Trempała, L.E.Malmberg (Eds.), *Adolescents' future orientation. Theory and research* (pp.123-130). Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang.