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The World of Values of Polish and Hungarian Students: A Comparative Study

Świat wartości studentów polskich i węgierskich.
Studium porównawcze

Abstract

This article presents the results of a comparative study on the world of values of Polish and Hungarian university students. During the research queries, a tool allowed both the respondents' axiological self-identification and the expression of opinions on socially emotive issues. The research project made it possible to identify both similarities and interesting differences in the value systems of the students of the two countries analysed. Hungarian students were less likely to declare themselves as believers and to give less importance to religion, while at the same time being much more likely than Polish students to consider that the Christian value system should be the basic foundation for Europe. Another interesting point may be the identified difference between the different dimensions of the world of values of men and women. In both Poland and Hungary, female students are more worldly liberal, while male students are conservative and refer more often to tradition.

Keywords: values, axiological orientations, academic youth

Abstrakt

W artykule zaprezentowane zostały wyniki badań porównawczych dotyczących świata wartości studentów polskich i węgierskich uczelni wyższych. Podczas kwerendy badawczej wykorzystano narzędzie pozwalające zarówno na aksjologiczne autoidentyfikacje badanych, jak i wyrażenie opinii na temat budzących społeczne emocje zagadnień. Projekt badawczy pozwolił zidentyfikować zarówno podobieństwa, jak i interesujące różnice w systemie wartości studentów dwóch analizowanych państw. Studenci węgierscy rzadziej deklarowali się jako wierzący i mniejszą wagę przydawali religii, równocześnie znacznie częściej niż polscy uznając, że chrześcijański system wartości powinien być

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podstawowym fundamentem dla Europy. Inną interesującą kwestią może być zidentyfikowana różnica pomiędzy różnymi wymiarami świata wartości kobiet i mężczyzn. Zarówno w Polsce, jak i na Węgrzech, to studentki są bardziej światopoglądowo liberalne – natomiast studenci konserwatywni i odwołujący się częściej do tradycji.

Słowa kluczowe: wartości, orientacje aksjologiczne, młodzież akademicka

The social world and its practices are based on values, though this obvious fact is frequently forgotten in the practice of constructing social analyses. In trying to report on various areas of social life, one cannot ignore their axiological dimension and the meanings assigned to them by social actors. “Values belong to the order of culture and constitute the foundations of social life. By being internalised into attitudes and behaviour, and into the practices of people’s social life, they shape the cultural profiles of entire communities and of the social personalities of individuals.”¹

The problem of values not only seems to be virtually inexhaustible from the cognitive point of view but has also been subject to intense debate in recent decades. “A lot has been said in everyday life about the twilight of family-oriented values, religious and moral values, and all sorts of traditional values”²; sometimes, axiological heterogeneity is identified as one of the characteristic features of the modern era. The belief that we are living in a time of intense axiological transformation that has far-reaching consequences is becoming widespread. The pace of change is certainly conducive to a sense of uncertainty and even, at times, to apocalyptic sentiment. These changes are related to a sense of temporality, a category that is becoming one of the constitutive features defining the socio-cultural context of modernity.³ In some people, this provokes what U. Beck described as the “frenzy of change”, which, paradoxically, may lead to the abandonment of individual resources for the sake of an unspecified ideal. The above-mentioned German sociologist describes this phenomenon using a powerful metaphor: “Possessed by the goal of self-fulfillment, they pull themselves out of the ground in order to check if their roots are healthy.”⁴

An inspiring metaphor of the cultural condition of modern societies was proposed by W. Świątkiewicz, who used the term “axiological turbulence”. In this perspective, which is the starting point for the research reported in this paper, the ongoing changes entail risk, but their character is not entirely negative, as

¹ W. Świątkiewicz, *Światy wartości mieszkańców miasta. Na przykładzie badań socjologicznych w Zabrze*, “Zeszyty Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego Jana Pawła II” 2020, no. 1 (63), p. 2.

² J. Mariański, *Sens życia, wartości, religia. Studium socjologiczne*, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2013, p. 122.

³ R. Cekiera, *O pułapkach emigracyjnej lekkości*, Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS, Kraków 2014, p. 22.

⁴ U. Beck, *Spółczesność ryzyka. W drodze do innej nowoczesności*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2004, p. 148.

they become an opportunity to refresh a certain set of values and to adopt it more consciously.

Turbulence is born of the wind and storm, which are synonymous with fast and violent cultural change; the wind blows in various, sometimes opposite, directions, bringing new values and patterns of behaviour, fertilising and renewing life, but also destroying and blowing away traditional values and principles, if they are poorly rooted in the soil of the native culture. Turbulence symbolises change, instability, varying speeds, dynamics, dispersion, displacement, banishment, which may sometimes be brutal, unapologetic, ruthless, and irreversible.⁵

This dynamic picture seems to be particularly relevant to members of the young generation who, as if “by definition” are usually engaged in actively seeking their own paths in life, identity affiliations, and the transition from deriving values from the process of socialisation to their reflexive, conscious adoption. In the circumstances of social transformations described above, it is an extremely intriguing process, often based on a logic of suspicion towards universal axio-normative systems which are suspected of “merely masking the lust for power.”⁶

The research project that was undertaken, an excerpt of which will be outlined in this article, was aimed at identifying the world of values of Polish and Hungarian students, as well as recognising and interpreting similarities and differences between these two groups. Its starting point was curiosity, for which the peculiarity of the socio-cultural situation of Poland and Hungary provided an important context. The main research question concerned the similarities and differences between the world of values of students from these two countries. The aim was to verify the hypothesis that Polish and Hungarian students have a similar view of the world and represent fairly similar axiological orientations, based to a large extent on the Christian value system. Studies conducted among young people also have the value of being, on the one hand, an indication of the effectiveness of the processes of socialisation (also in the area of values promoted at a given time), while, on the other hand, they may serve as a predictor of socio-cultural changes in the coming years. The young generation is usually a very sensitive barometer of such changes.

⁵ W. Świątkiewicz, *Między sekularyzacją i deprywatyzacją. Socjologiczne refleksje wokół polskiej religijności w kontekście europejskim*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2010, p. 55.

⁶ C. Delsol, *Koniec świata chrześcijańskiego*, Wydawnictwo WAM, Kraków 2023, p. 86.

Values – Lasting Orientations and Core Beliefs

The problem of values is of absolutely crucial significance to human life. Values belong to the narrow set of concepts of which it can be stated with full confidence that they constitute the very core of social life. From the supra-individual perspective, they play “an important role of stabilisers of social life, providing support to individuals and communities. They enable an unambiguous orientation in reality, the selection and assessment of actions, as well as mutual interpersonal communication. Moreover, they force people to make decisions and specific choices.”⁷

There is no way to avoid making choices in the axiological sphere. Man is a being whose functioning is directed to values; “Values organise the world around us. They are often the driving force behind our activity. While they are not always visible or verbalised, they are the basis of human activity.”⁸ According to M. Bogunia-Borowska, “values give meaning and significance to human actions, behaviours, and choices. Values are the foundations of social life. Values are the pillars of human life, both individual and collective.”⁹ The choice of values that are important to a given individual is also an important information about what is regarded as significant in a given society and what the goals motivating individuals in that society are.¹⁰

Choices made in the sphere of values sometimes take the form of confronting various dilemmas or conscious decisions that are of great importance. Yet, their main realm is the everyday that we mark with successive, sometimes seemingly banal and ordinary, decisions, which reflect the world of values we espouse. Daily activities, the commonplace everyday, nearly every human activity is an emanation of the axiological background. Individual choices are the results of a selection in the axiological area, made previously, in a more or less conscious manner, and of one’s individual preferences in that area. L. Dyczewski pointed to the significance of this mechanism when he wrote that “man responds to the call of values and thus shapes oneself and transforms the world. The values to which one directs one’s cognition and desires are therefore not without significance.”¹¹ At the same time, he pointed to the multiplicity of functions associated with

⁷ W. Drzeżdżon, *Wychowanie do wartości: aksjologiczne inspiracje dla edukacji*, “Język-Szkoła-Religia” 2009, no. 4, p. 116.

⁸ U. Swadźba, *Wartości – pracy, rodziny, religii – ciągłość i zmiana*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2012, p. 9.

⁹ M. Bogunia-Borowska, *Życie w dobrym społeczeństwie. Wartości jako fundament dobrego życia*, in: *Fundamenty dobrego społeczeństwa. Wartości*, ed. M. Bogunia-Borowska, Znak, Kraków 2015, p. 23.

¹⁰ M. Lewicka, *Świat wartości młodzieży akademickiej*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, Bydgoszcz 2015, p. 19.

¹¹ L. Dyczewski, *Miejsce i funkcje wartości w kulturze*, in: *Kultura w kręgu wartości*, ed. L. Dyczewski, TN KUL, Lublin 2001, p. 38.

values; “they serve important functions in the lives of individuals and society; they intrigue, move, and shape our consciousness; evoke experiences and inspire action; set the goals of actions, integrate actions and their products; unite people and societies; stimulate, direct, and stabilise development.”¹²

Values shape our attitudes to individual objects of social life; “they are the criterion according to which a specific way of thinking and behaving is adopted.”¹³ In his succinct definition, P. Pharo called them “expressions of attractiveness of a good”.¹⁴ J. Mariański emphasised that values can be construed as:

spiritual and moral core beliefs that determine attitudes and behavioural patterns of individuals. If values change, so do the attitudes and behavioural patterns that depend on them. Values are more general and permanent orientations, defining the perspectives of everyday life and its meaning and significance, and indirectly setting the norms that determine specific actions.¹⁵

This perception of the category of values and their contexts has been adopted as the theoretical framework for the research reported in this article.

The extremely broad spectrum outlined above, as well as the great usefulness of the concept of values for social analysis, makes it easy to understand the popularity of the ongoing research on values. Its intensification in the recent years alone can be regarded as an indirect evidence of the fact that this is an area that is subject to change and that inspires scientific curiosity. If we look at it from the Polish perspective, one of the issues that arguably contributes to the interest in the world of values (and even more in its transformations) is the growing secularisation of the young generation. After all, religious systems have traditionally had a significant and fundamental influence on the values recognised in a given society.

According to the classic approach, religions were the expressions of meaning and values, as they provided answers to important metaphysical questions such as “Where do we come from?”, “Why do we live?”, “What happens after death?”, and from them drew some practical conclusions related to people’s conduct in life.¹⁶

¹² Ibidem, p. 39.

¹³ D.A. Michałowska, *Wartości w świecie edukacji na początku XXI wieku*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wydziału Nauk Społecznych Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, Poznań 2013, p. 7–8.

¹⁴ P. Pharo, *Moralność a socjologia*, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 2008, p. 75.

¹⁵ J. Mariański, *Wartości życia codziennego a sens życia – zmienne relacje*, “Zeszyty Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego Jana Pawła II” 2021, no. 1–2 (64), p. 164.

¹⁶ P. Pharo, *Moralność a socjologia...*, p. 28.

The erosion of the religious horizon raises questions on the legitimisation of individual values and their status in society, which are significant and interesting to a sociologist. J. Mariański writes that we can currently observe phenomena referred to as “processes of decanonisation”,¹⁷ which are leading to the pluralisation and individualisation of preferred values. The forms of transmission and adoption of specific axiological positions are changing too; “even the most important values of the past cannot be inherited in an automatic and straightforward way. They must be absorbed and renewed through personal choice, which is often not easy.”¹⁸ The place of the “significant others” in the process of value transmission is more and more often occupied by the media and messages received in the virtual space.

However, this is not an area that relates solely to the level of religiosity, which can be measured in various ways, and it is not confined to our local context. In the broader, temporal, as well as geographical, perspective, attention has been drawn to the diminishing significance of the axio-normative system based on the legacy of Christianity, which was once culturally dominant. According to one researcher:

Currently, in much of Europe, the system of values that grew out of Christianity is in crisis, and is being replaced by European values which nominally refer to truth, good, and beauty, however, obligations that are alien to the previous culture of societies and previous understanding of the surrounding reality are being derived from them.¹⁹

C. Delsol writes in this context about a “normative inversion”²⁰ that is overturning the order which has been hitherto considered “obvious and natural”.

All this provokes and prompts social researchers to conduct studies in the area of values, especially among young people.

¹⁷ J. Mariański, *Religia w społeczeństwie ponowoczesnym. Studium socjologiczne*, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 2010, p. 42.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

¹⁹ T. Przesławski, *Normy społeczne a współczesny świat wartości*, in: *W poszukiwaniu dobra w perspektywie jednostkowej i społecznej. Księga jubileuszowa z okazji 80-lecia urodzin dr hab. Krystyny Ostrowskiej*, ed. T. Przesławski, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Wymiaru Sprawiedliwości, Warszawa 2020, p. 243.

²⁰ C. Delsol, *Koniec świata chrześcijańskiego...*, p. 70.

Methodological Contexts of the Ongoing Research

The sociological perspective on values accentuates the fact that they are not suspended in a vacuum; one should not disregard all their social determinants, including socialisation and intergenerational transmission, which have fundamental significance. Studying this area can also be treated as a future-oriented indirect forecasting of future social transformation:

The phenomenon of values is always (and above all) related to the future that is being created. That future defines it, sets the perspective, and directs it. The future is condensed on and through the things that can occur, or in fact must occur, if anything at all has occurred in the life of a self-conscious person.²¹

These aspects of the exploration in the axio-normative area of the young generation contribute to the multiplicity of various research studies exploring this issue in the lives of students. Contrary to what some people may ironically point out, this is not merely the result of the researchers' easy access to respondents (although this is likely to encourage such research in many cases). Among the many analyses published in recent years, we can distinguish, for example, the research into the world of values of students representing specific faculties, such as management,²² education,²³ physical education,²⁴ pre-school/early education²⁵ and among music academy students.²⁶ On some occasions, the research involved students of various types of universities (public and private) and of various faculties, whose common characteristic was the city where they studied (for example, Bydgoszcz²⁷). Research has also been conducted on the world of values of foreign students in Poland.²⁸ Among the studies conducted

²¹ K. Popielski, *Psychologia egzystencji: wartości w życiu*, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2008, p. 63–64.

²² R. Borowik, S. Laird, B. Borowik, *Etyka i świat wartości studentów kierunku Zarządzanie*, "Annales. Etyka w życiu gospodarczym" 2005, no. 2 (8), p. 87–96.

²³ A. Molesztak, *Wartości preferowane przez studentów pedagogiki*, in: *Komunikacja społeczna a wartości w edukacji: nowe znaczenie i sytuacje*, vol. 1: *Humanistyczne i (inne) konteksty komunikowania „się” i „ja” w obszarze wartości wewnątrz edukacji*, ed. W.J. Maliszewski, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2007.

²⁴ A. Brojek, M.A. Turosz, A. Bochenek, *Wartości życiowe studentów wychowania fizycznego jako element ich kompetencji wychowawczych*, "Lubelski Rocznik Pedagogiczny" 2016, no. 1 (35).

²⁵ C. Langier, M. Siembida, *Wartości preferowane przez studentów edukacji wczesnoszkolnej i wychowania przedszkolnego*, "Edukacja-Technika-Informatyka" 2018, no. 4 (26), p. 403–409.

²⁶ E. Kumik, *Wartości uznawane i realizowane przez studentów Akademii Muzycznej w Łodzi*, in: *Sztuka i jej wartości*, eds. J. Uchyła-Zroski, Z. Mojżysz, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2017.

²⁷ M. Lewicka, *Świat wartości...*

²⁸ P. Długosz, *Ku Europie – wartości życiowe i ideologiczne ukraińskich studentów studiujących w Polsce*, "Edukacja Międzykulturowa" 2016, no. 5, p. 100–124.

in Hungary, we can distinguish, for example, research on students' attitudes to democratic values²⁹ and on the political orientations adopted by them.³⁰

In the multiplicity of research studies on the world of values of university students, we can also distinguish comparative studies, covering different dimensions. Among them, we can include comparisons of values that matter to students of social sciences and technical faculties,³¹ or to students and academics.³² Explorations in the form of recurrent studies conducted over the years³³ are also of interest. From the point of view of the subject matter of this article, comparative studies involving students from different countries, for example, Poland and Ukraine,³⁴ Poland and Belarus,³⁵ and students from selected countries in Central and Eastern Europe³⁶ are especially interesting. The cross-sectional study of the young generation (persons aged between 14 and 29 years) conducted simultaneously in the seven Visegrad Group countries and the Baltic States; Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, also deserves a mention. The outcome of these research explorations, conducted in countries with a shared post-Soviet heritage, were two comprehensive research reports.³⁷

Similar research studies, conducted i.a. by the author of this text a few years ago, compared the world of values of university students in Visegrad Group countries. As far as declarations on the significance of specific categories of values are concerned, the greatest disparities between Polish and Hungarian students were observed in their declarations on the significance of friends and

²⁹ D. Oross, T. Kovacs, A. Szabo, *University Students' Democratic Values and Attitudes toward Democracy in Hungary*, "European Quarterly of Political Attitudes and Mentalities" 2018, no. 1 (7), p. 15–31.

³⁰ *Exit, Voice, Loyalty and Neglect: Political Attitudes of Hungarian University and College Students*, ed. A. Szabó, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Prague 2015; *Political Orientations, Values, and Activities of Hungarian University and College Students*, ed. A. Szabó, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Prague 2013.

³¹ B.M. Mróz, J. Kurzyca, *Poczucie jakości życia i hierarchia wartości – różnice między studentami kierunków społecznych i technicznych*, "Czasopismo Psychologiczne" 2018, no. 3 (24), p. 509–518.

³² A. Jurczak, *Wartości wyznawane przez pracowników naukowych vs wartości studentów*, "Pedagogika Przeszkolna i Wczesnoszkolna" 2015, no. 2 (6), p. 81–88.

³³ M. Czerniawska, *O wartościach i ich zmianie – raport z badań porównawczych nad systemami wartości studentów*, "Kultura i Edukacja" 2016, no. 3 (113), p. 135–153.

³⁴ Z. Sprynska, A. Tychmanowicz, S. Filipiak, *Dyspozycje osobiste a poczucie jakości życia u studentów w Polsce i na Ukrainie. Kto jest szczęśliwszy? Optymizm, wartości i satysfakcja z życia studentów polskich i ukraińskich*, "Czasopismo Psychologiczne" 2019, no. 1 (25), p. 69–77.

³⁵ D. Czakon-Tralski, W. Borecka, *To co w życiu ważne czyli hierarchia wartości polskich i białoruskich studentów*, "Zeszyty Naukowe. Organizacja i Zarządzanie Politechniki Śląskiej" 2018, no. 123, p. 131–142.

³⁶ A. Borowski, *Hierarchy of Values of Students in Selected Countries of Middle-Eastern Europe in the Context of the Public Trust*, "International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences" 2014, vol. 38, p. 100–110.

³⁷ A. Bíró-Nagy, A. Szabó, *Youth Study Hungary 2021: Discontent, Polarisation, Pro-Europeanism*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bonn 2022; M. Harring, D. Lamby, J. Peitz, A. Bíró-Nagy, A. Szabó, *Youth Study Personal Optimism, National Pessimism, Trust in Europe*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bonn 2023.

colleagues (they had greater significance for Hungarian students, scoring 3.95 and 4.34 points in a 1–5 point scale, respectively), and religion (which had greater significance to Polish students, with the score of 2.80 vs. 2.38 among Hungarian students). The most significant values to Polish students were family (4.78), health (4.69), work (4.13), and education (3.97). The hierarchy was slightly different among Hungarian students, who prioritised family (4.85), health (4.61), friends and colleagues (4.34), and work (4.24).³⁸

In the light of the various research queries cited above, comparing students in Poland and Hungary, the two countries whose policies, also in the dimension of identity, in recent years were often different from those considered mainstream in EU member states, appeared to be an interesting undertaking. In both these countries, the political forces that took over the government strongly emphasised their attachment to Christian roots and declared their willingness to defend these roots in the Old Continent.³⁹ Analysing the dominant political narrative in Hungary, D. Hejj points to the popularity of the belief that Hungarians get no support for these measures in Europe and that Poland is the only country they can count on. At the same time, however, both Hungary and Poland have observed a significant degree of secularisation in the recent time. The number of Hungarians declaring themselves to be Christians fell by 2 million over 10 years (2001–2011); this translates into a 22.6 percentage point drop across the Hungarian society at large.⁴⁰ In Poland, these phenomena are, above all, affecting the young generation, in which there has been a significant drop in the number of people declaring to be religious and in the level of religious observance.⁴¹

This text will discuss an excerpt from the results of the research project concerning the identification of the world of values of Polish and Hungarian students. The most important of the research questions asked can be formulated as follows: What are the axiological orientations of Polish and Hungarian students? What are the similarities and differences between them? The objective of this part of research exploration was to verify the hypothesis that Polish and Hungarian students adopt similar axiological orientations, stemming from the

³⁸ U. Swadźba, R. Cekiera, M. Żak, *Wiedza ekonomiczna, praca, przedsiębiorczość, konsumpcja. Świadomość ekonomiczna polskich studentów*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2019, p. 57.

³⁹ See e.g.: J. Balicki, *Obrona „chrześcijańskiej Europy” przed „inwazją islamu”? Populistyczny dyskurs polityczno-religijny w Polsce w kontekście kryzysu migracyjnego w UE*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UKSW, Warszawa 2021; D. Hejj, *Węgierska tożsamość*, „Teologia Polityczna”, 9 September 2017, <https://teologiapolityczna.pl/wegierska-tozsamosc> (accessed: 7.05.2024).

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ R. Cekiera, *Cyfrowi apateiści? Szkic do socjologicznego portretu religijności młodych Polaków*, in: *Młodzież wobec wiary i powołania*, ed. A. Draguła, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, Szczecin 2020.

Christian value system. A survey questionnaire (in Polish and Hungarian) was used to verify the hypothesis.

At the beginning of the classic text “System wartości społeczeństwa polskiego” [“Value system in the Polish society”] Stefan Nowak wrote that the system appears to comprise two dimensions. The first dimension is what “*people consider more or less important* – which objects, spheres of life, and areas of reality around them attract their attention, provoke emotions and judgements, inspire a sense of identification or engagement”; with regard to the second, “we ask which states and situations they consider appropriate or desirable for the objects that they regard as less or more important, i.e. we try to determine *the evaluation criteria and standards of assessment* that people apply to the reality around them.”⁴² The authors of the research reported in this text attempted to touch on these two dimensions simultaneously, which was reflected in the research tool. The identification of the world of values of Polish and Hungarian students was conducted in two ways. The first part involved an ordinary request for respondents to relate to selected categories and to assign an appropriate level of significance to them (which corresponded to the first area suggested by S. Nowak). In the second part of the study, respondents were asked to relate to statements concerning various aspects of social life; above all, ones that concerned sensitive issues which were subjects of heated debates in recent time (which corresponded to the second of the cited areas).

The research study in question was conducted as part of a research internship at Szent István University in Gödöllő, financed by the Intra-Visegrad Scholarship. The surveys were initially intended to be conducted using a traditional questionnaire, however, due to restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, they had to be conducted online. The questionnaire made available on the survio.pl portal between 11 March 2021 and 13 June 2021 was filled by 903 respondents, including 558 Polish university students and 345 Hungarian university students. The link to the survey was distributed by lecturers teaching at four universities: University of Silesia in Katowice, University of Life Sciences in Poznań, University of Szeged, and Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences w Gödöllő (formerly Szent István University).

The over-representation of women in the group of respondents (who made up 66.1% of the total number of respondents, including 69.4% of Polish respondents, and 60.9% of Hungarian respondents), can be considered a limitation of the study. Hungarian students also tended to be slightly older than their Polish counterparts (with students aged 24 years and over making up 31.0% of Hungarian and 16.3% of Polish students). As far as subject profiles are concerned, efforts were made to diversify the study sample as widely as possible. Students

⁴² S. Nowak, *System wartości społeczeństwa polskiego*, “Studia Socjologiczne” 2011, no. 1 (200), p. 261.

of science and life sciences filled the largest number of questionnaires (27.7%), followed by students of social sciences (26.6%), and students of engineering and technical sciences (20.7%).

Values and Their Dimensions – Results of the Study

Usually, the simplest and most obvious way to measure the world of values is to ask for axiological self-declarations. To Polish students, the most important values were the following (the figures in brackets reflect the percentage scores for “high value” and “very high value” responses): health (93.2%), family (90.3%), reciprocated love (86.2%), respect from other people (83.5%), freedom to express one’s views (83.1%), friends and colleagues (82.8%). The responses of Hungarian students were as follows: respect from other people (91.6%), health (90.8%), family (87.9%), friends and colleagues (85.5%), and reciprocated love (81.2%). The declared worlds of values of Polish and Hungarian students can be regarded as very similar. However, statistically significant differences were observed with regard to a few categories, which deserve attention and which will be characterised below.

The significance attributed to the home country is certainly one of these categories (the association coefficient is statistically significant, with the Cramer’s V coefficient being 0.168). It was assigned high and very high value by 34.3% of Polish students (of whom 11.5% assigned very high value to it) and by 50.5% of Hungarian students (with 17.7% assigning very high value to it). Likewise, 12.2% of Polish students and 6.7% of Hungarian students assigned very low value to their home country.

An interesting and statistically significant difference, with a strong association (Cramer’s V of 0.398) was observed with regard to declarations concerning the significance of the freedom to express one’s views. It was assigned high or very high value by 84.1% of Polish students (43.2% and 40.9%, respectively) and by no more than 50.7% of Hungarian students (13.9% and 36.8%, respectively). Similarly, 0.4% of Polish students and 3.5% of Hungarian students assigned very low significance to this value, while 3.2% of Polish students and 10.4% of Hungarian students assigned low significance to it. An inverse association (Cramer’s V of 0.124) was observed with regard to declarations concerning respect from other people; Hungarian students were more likely to assign very high (47.5%) and high (44.1%) value to it. In the case of Polish students, the percentages were 45.7% and 37.8%, respectively. If the two responses are summed up, the difference between Hungarian students (91.6%) and Polish students (83.5%) amounts to 8.1 percentage points.

Statistically significant differences, though with insignificant strength of association, have also been observed with regard to the value students assigned to family and reciprocated love. Family has a slightly higher value to students from Poland than to Hungarian students (Cramer's V of 0.124); it was assigned "very high" value by 69.0% of the surveyed Polish students and by 60.9% of the Hungarian students; meanwhile, "very low" value was assigned to family by 0.2% and 1.7% of students, respectively. Likewise, in the case of reciprocated love; Polish students were much more likely to assign "very high" value to it than Hungarian students (63.1% vs. 49.9%). Meanwhile, "very low" and "low" value to reciprocated love was assigned by 4.8% of respondents at Polish universities and by 7.6% of respondents at Hungarian universities. The association between these variables was statistically significant and the strength of the association was small (Cramer's V of 0.133).

Statistically significant differences were also observed for two categories of values; namely, education and religion. In these cases, Polish students were again more likely to select answers indicating that they assigned a high value to these categories. For education (association between variables was statistically significant with a small strength of association; Cramer's V of 0.162); it was assigned "very high" value by 22.6% of Polish students and 14.5% of Hungarian students, and "high" value by 50.9% of Polish students and 48.7% of Hungarian students. Hungarian students chose the intermediate value much more frequently than Polish students did; "medium" value was assigned to education by 34.8% of Hungarian and 22.2% of Polish students.

As far as religion is concerned, a very interesting phenomenon can be observed. Nearly one third of the surveyed population (32.9%) assigned "very low" value to religion (this included 31.7% of Polish students and 34.8% of Hungarian students). According to respondents' declarations, religion has less value to Hungarian students than to Polish students (the association between variables is statistically significant and has a small strength of association, with Cramer's V of 0.105). This becomes clear when we sum up the responses assigning "very high" and "high" value to religion (28.1% for Polish students and 19.5% for Hungarian students, respectively). A detailed breakdown of responses is provided in Table 1. In the second part of the study, when respondents were asked to relate to various statements, one of these statements was "The Christian value system should be Europe's core foundation." Approval of this supposition was expressed more frequently by Hungarian students, with 34.5% of them saying that they agreed with it (vs. 13.3% of Polish students saying the same). Disagreement with this statement was expressed by 42.3% of Hungarian students and 59.0% of Polish students. Interestingly, Hungarian students were less likely to declare themselves to be religious than Polish students; yet, at the same time, they advocated the recognition of the Christian value system as fundamental for Europe more often

than Polish students did. It is symptomatic that among the Hungarian respondents who declared themselves to be non-religious, 15.2% of them agreed with this view (while 65.8% disagreed with it). For Polish students, the percentages were 0.9% and 90.7%, respectively. Detailed results are presented in Table 2. It is also worth mentioning that there were significant differences in the levels of approval for this statement between women and men. In both countries, men were more likely to support it than women; in Poland, the figures were 17.5% and 11.4%, while in Hungary 48.1% and 25.7%.

Table 1. Significance of religion in the lives of Polish and Hungarian students (n=903)

How high is the value of the following categories in your life:			Country		Total
			Poland	Hungary	
Religion	1 Very low	N	177	120	297
		%	31.7%	34.8%	32.9%
	2 Low	N	101	74	175
		%	18.1%	21.4%	19.4%
	3 Medium	N	123	84	207
		%	22.0%	24.3%	22.9%
	4 High	N	91	44	135
		%	16.3%	12.8%	15.0%
	5 Very high	N	66	23	89
		%	11.8%	6.7%	9.9%
Total		N	558	345	903
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Cramer's V	0.105	9.899 ^a	4	0.042	0.041 ^b
coefficient	value	Chi-square	df	p	p Monte Carlo

Source: Authors' own research.

A higher percentage of Polish students than of Hungarian students supported the statement that same-sex couples should have the right to get married (74.0% vs. 62.6%). However, young people in both countries are predominantly in favour of such legal measures. Even among persons who declared themselves to be "religious" in Poland, 61.4% supported the measure (with 36.0% support among Polish students declaring to be "deeply religious"). In Hungary, the percentages were 42.6% and 30.8%, respectively. In both countries, the measure is supported by more women than men, which is especially strongly pronounced in Hungary, where the measure was approved of by 73.8% of female students and 45.2% of male students (among Polish students, the percentages were 78.0% and 64.9%, respectively).

Table 2. Respondents' attitude to religion vs. their approval of the statement on recognising the Christian value system as Europe's core foundation (n=903)

Country		7. How would you describe your attitude to religion in general terms?					Total		
		1 deeply religious	2 religious	3 undecided, searching	4 indifferent, I do not reflect on it	5 non-religious			
Poland	The Christian value system should be Europe's core foundation.	1. I agree	N 14	46	10	3	1	74	
			% 56.0%	19.5%	8.1%	4.6%	0.9%	13.3%	
		2. It is hard to say	N 7	98	30	11	9	155	
	Total		% 28.0%	41.5%	24.2%	16.9%	8.3%	27.8%	
		3. I disagree	N 4	92	84	51	98	329	
			% 16.0%	39.0%	67.7%	78.5%	90.7%	59.0%	
Hungary	The Christian value system should be Europe's core foundation.	Total	N 25	236	124	65	108	558	
			% 100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
		1. I agree	N 9	55	24	19	12	119	
	Total		% 69.2%	54.5%	35.3%	22.6%	15.2%	34.5%	
		2. It is hard to say	N 1	30	15	19	15	80	
			% 7.7%	29.7%	22.1%	22.6%	19.0%	23.2%	
Total	The Christian value system should be Europe's core foundation.	3. I disagree	N 3	16	29	46	52	146	
			% 23.1%	15.8%	42.6%	54.8%	65.8%	42.3%	
		Total	N 13	101	68	84	79	345	
	Total	The Christian value system should be Europe's core foundation.		% 100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
			1. I agree	N 23	101	34	22	13	193
				% 60.5%	30.0%	17.7%	14.8%	7.0%	21.4%
Total		2. It is hard to say	N 8	128	45	30	24	235	
			% 21.1%	38.0%	23.4%	20.1%	12.8%	26.0%	
		3. I disagree	N 7	108	113	97	150	475	
Total		% 18.4%	32.0%	58.9%	65.1%	80.2%	52.6%		
	Total	N 38	337	192	149	187	903		
		% 100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

Source: Authors' own research.

Differences between the respondents were also observed with respect to the statement that “having children is essential for achieving happiness in life.” In both countries, the majority of respondents rejected this belief; however, this trend was significantly more pronounced in Poland than in Hungary (81.5% vs. 68.4%). The statement was supported by 4.5% of respondents at Polish universities and 16.5% of respondents at Hungarian universities. Responses to this question differed significantly depending on the respondents’ attitude to religion; the more religious the students were (in both countries), the more they tended to support this statement (for example, in Poland, support for it was expressed by 16.0% of respondents declaring themselves to be deeply religious and by 1.9% of respondents declaring themselves to be non-religious). Interestingly, men were more likely to regard having children as essential for happiness in life (5.8% in Poland and 21.5% in Hungary) than women (3.9% in Poland and 13.3% in Hungary, respectively).

Respondents in the two countries had similar attitudes to abortion. The majority of respondents in Poland and in Hungary believe that the right to legal abortion until the 12th week of pregnancy should be recognised without any restrictions (the view was supported by 62.4% and 61.4% of respondents, respectively). Support for this statement is naturally dependent on the respondents’ attitude to religion; even though, among Polish students, support for this statement was expressed by 24.0% of persons declaring themselves to be “deeply religious” and by 49.2% of persons declaring themselves to be “religious”. For persons identifying as non-religious, the percentage is 90.7%. Moreover, in both countries, it women were more likely to support it than men; in Poland, the figures are 64.6% and 57.3%, respectively, while in Hungary, they are 64.8% and 56.3%, respectively.

Statistically significant differences between students representing the two surveyed nations, with a fairly strongly pronounced association (Cramer’s V of 0.29) were observed with respect to their responses to the statement suggesting that one should help refugees. Respondents at Polish universities were significantly more likely to agree with this statement than students at Hungarian universities (59.9% vs. 37.7%). As was pointed out on more than one occasion, in this case gender played a significant role too; male students were much more likely to disagree with this statement than female students. In Poland, the figures were 7.0% and 2.6%, respectively, while in Hungary the difference was even more pronounced (12.4% and 31.1%).

Similarities and Differences – Discussion of Results

Despite many similarities, the survey revealed quite significant and consistent differences between Polish and Hungarian students. Gender was the second dimension of discernible differences; here too we can observe some intriguing disparities.

Polish students tend to present a much more individualistic outlook on life. They approach “big concepts” related to communal social life, such as the home country or the Christian value system, with a considerable degree of reserve. They are less community-oriented than their Hungarian counterparts, which can be demonstrated by the fact that they assign less value to being respected by others. Meanwhile, they assign a much higher value to the freedom of speech and freedom to express their views. Polish students assign a high value, higher than their Hungarian counterparts, to family, yet, in this case also they show a reserve towards beliefs that have the character of cultural models, such as the belief that having children is essential for happiness. They also give more significance to reciprocated love than Hungarians do. In other words, this belief could be succinctly expressed as: “I affirm family, as long as it is on my own terms.” Polish students also tend to attach greater significance to education, which is consistent with their individualistic profile.

The attitude towards religious issues may be the most interesting difference between Polish and Hungarian students revealed in the study. While this category was not at the top of their list of most important values, young Poles tended to attach greater significance to religion and were more likely to admit their religious affiliations. At the same time, however, which can be seen as another expression of the insistence on doing things “on their own terms”, Polish students were more likely than their Hungarian counterparts to reject the idea of adopting the Christian value system as the basis for social life in Europe. If we were to find a succinct way to describe this attitude, we could express it as “if we are to accept religion, let it be individualised and make no claims to form the rules of social life through the ethical system.”

It was the opposite for Hungarian students, who were less likely to admit their religious affiliations, assigned lower value to this category, yet, at the same time, were more likely than Polish students to advocate the recognition of the Christian value system as fundamental for Europe. This can be better understood if we view this paradox in the context of other elements of the world of values identified in the course of the conducted research. Hungarian students are, at least at the level of declarations, more conservative. They assign high significance to their attachment to the home country, honour, and respect from other people. They value the freedom to express their views and education less than Polish students do. They identify more with the model based on respect

for traditional values than with constructing one's own world of values on an individual basis. This may also explain, despite their declared support for the Christian value system, why they are less willing to help refugees than Polish students are. The latter are more willing to engage in this activity, which is crucial in the Christian doctrine, and which is regarded as one of the conditions for salvation. In this case, we can speculate that Hungarian students care more about political and identity-centred narratives than about religious justifications.

The other interesting issue is the observed difference between particular dimensions of the world of values of women and men. Both in Poland and in Hungary, female students tend to be more progressive and liberal, while male students tend to be conservative and more likely to refer to tradition. In the Polish context, this outcome is not surprising; this division has been observed in various other research studies and surveys.⁴³

We could also try to interpret the obtained research results using the construct of axiological turbulence referred to above. If we accept that it stands for “a relativisation of judgements and the mutability of values available to be experienced by broad social circles with free access to information and events, which are often presented in the convention of fake news and post-truths, subordinated to mercantile, ideological, and political interests,”⁴⁴ we could then propose the thesis that it has two dimensions. In the case of Polish students, this would be, above all, turbulence leading to situational axiological choices, based on the primacy of individuality, sceptical about drawing on value systems sanctioned by tradition, but also susceptible to manipulation resulting from contemporary rules of information and knowledge circulation. Meanwhile, for Hungarian students, axiological turbulence would rather be related to the transformation of the understanding of individual concepts or, sticking to the metaphor proposed by W. Świątkiewicz, “blowing away their contents”. The declared attachment to tradition can in this case merely serve as a ritual. Religious self-declarations then become a tool for the construction of national, cultural, or political identification rather than a reference to the content of the religious doctrine.

Conclusions

The research study demonstrated that there are similarities, as well as significant differences in the declarations concerning the world of values made by Polish

⁴³ See e.g.: P. Pacewicz, *Młodzi Polacy niewrażliwi, lekkomyślni, konserwatywni. A Polki? Panorama płci w sondażach OKO.press*, 29 January 2022, <https://oko.press/mlodzi-polacy-niewrazliwi-lekkomy-slni-konserwatywni-a-polki-panorama-plci-w-sondazach-oko-press> (accessed: 13.02.2024).

⁴⁴ W. Świątkiewicz, *Światy wartości mieszkańców miasta...*, p. 57–58.

and Hungarian students. Moreover, they have different preferences with respect to some questions, which have been attracting a lot of interest and provoking heated debates in recent times. Differences in the choices related to the world of values can be interpreted from the point of view of the very understanding of specific categories, which are, notably, undergoing significant transformation at the present time. This can be seen as a promising and scientifically interesting area for further comparative research, related not so much (or not only) to the identification of specific elements of the world of values, as to the very understanding of their specific dimensions. It would be difficult to support the claim that the representatives of young Poles and Hungarians who took part in the study are selfish in their outlook or show low sensitivity to the needs of others. Perhaps the differences observed between them have their roots in their ultimately different understanding of specific values. As one researcher wrote, it is a fundamental problem in the contemporary discussion of the axiology of modern societies: “For example, respect for the human person who is old or ill may be manifested in assisting that person in suicidal death, while respect for human rights may mean acceptance for bringing death onto an unborn child.”⁴⁵ In the world of “axiological turbulence” and of social media, which are shaping our perceptions, an attempt to identify the procedures for defining specific concepts in the world of values, especially by the young generation, seems to be not only greatly needed but also immensely interesting.

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⁴⁵ T. Przesławski, *Normy społeczne a współczesny świat wartości...*, p. 243.

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