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Young Poles About Young Germans – Similarities and Differences

Evolution of the „stereotype" based on a young generation sample from a cross-cultural borderland area in Głogówek in the Opole region

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Abstract

In this article the author will attempt to demonstrate what the "stereotype" of young generation Germans is in the eyes of young generation Poles inhabiting a cross-cultural borderland area. It draws on empirical research conducted on the youth in Głogówek in the Opole region in three different time periods (1988, 1995 and 2005). However, the conclusions are extended to the entire socio-cultural borderland area of Opole and Upper Silesia. Section 1 presents the historical conditioning of the formation of the Germans' image in Poland; Section 2 includes the opinions about the young generation of Germans. Section 3 consists of methodological underpinnings of the research. The theoretical concept of "stereotype" discussed in Section 4 will serve as a basis to present empirical research. Combined quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data shows that over the examined time span the "stereotype" of Germans has evolved and become more positive. During the real-socialism, the "stereotype" referred to material values, in the early 1990s to lifestyle issues and at the beginning of the 21st century is focused on consumerist values.

Keywords: Stereotype, young generation, identity, cross-cultural borderland area

Junge Polen über junge Deutsche
Evolution des Stereotyps am Beispiel der jungen Generation im kulturellen Grenzland in Oberglogau in Oberschlesien im Oppelner Land

Zusammenfassung

Dafür wurden zu drei Zeitpunkten Jugendliche in Oberglogau im Oppelner Land empirisch untersucht (1988, 1995 und 2005). Im Rahmen der Ausführungen werden – nach einer kurzen Einführung – in Kapitel 2 die historischen Bedingungen der Gestaltung des Stereotyps der Deutschen in Polen geschildert. Abschnitt 3 enthält die Meinungen über die junge deutsche Generation. Kapitel 4 stellt die methodologische Vorgehensweise vor. Die dort erläuterte theoretische Konzeption des Stereotyps dient der Vorstellung der empirischen Ergebnisse (Kapitel 5). Die quantitative und qualitative Untersuchung zeigt, dass sich in den drei Zeitabschnitten das Stereotyp der Deutschen in eine zunehmend positive Richtung entwickelte. In der Zeit des realen Sozialismus konzentrierte es sich auf die materiellen Werte, Anfang der Neunzigerjahre trat der Lebensstil in den Vordergrund, Anfang des 21. Jahrhunderts die Konsumption.

Schlagworte: Jugend in Polen und Deutschland, Identität, Stereotypen

1   Introduction

The young generation most often perceive and evaluate their peers in other counties in terms of their lifestyle, system of values, conditions of studying, free time activities, their status in the family and the issues of their social networks and relationships. The aim of this article is to find answers to the question of what social perceptions young people from a cross-cultural borderland area hold. This article is based on empirical research conducted in Głogówek in the Opole region in southwest Poland, which has a large German minority. The research was carried out at three different time points over the period of seventeen years – in 1988, 1995 and 2005. Therefore, it is possible to depict the evolution of the opinions of young generations and inter-generational change. Firstly, it provides the "stereotype" of the German young people as presented in all available publications. Secondly, it touches upon the theoretical and methodological underpinnings and concludes with the empirical analysis. Finally, it attempts to form a generalization and indicate a direction of change in the way young Poles perceive the young generation of their neighbours. Furthermore, the conclusions refer to the entire socio-cultural borderland area of Opole and Upper Silesia. It is essential to point out that the Opole region and a part of Upper Silesia were under Germany rule before 1945.

2   The creation of the "Stereotype" – history and the present time

It has been evidenced in relation to stereotypes that historical events can influence stereotypes creation. This is an inevitable process which occurs across many nations and most often regards relationships between proximate neighbours. This might be due to conflicts over borderlands or other properties and goods between neighbouring countries (cf. *Kircher/Suchoples/Hahn* 2008; *Pichler* 2008; *Brown/Thodossopoulos* 2004; *Kubis* 2003; *Jasińska-Kania* 2001; *Błuszkowski* 2005). The second important source of stereotypes formation are contemporary political events or actions pursued by members of a particular nation presented by media. Other significant sources of stereotypes creation are personal experiences of individuals derived from cross-national encounters. The German population forms a large group and together with inclination and opportunities to travel frequently it is common to meet German people in other counties of Europe and beyond. Existing stereotypes of Germans are mostly based on the two latter sources (cf. *Kent* 2004; *Capozza/Manganelli* 1999; *Kolarska-Bobińska* 2003).

The process described above can be applied to analyze Poles and their stereotypization of Germans. The creation of the German "stereotype'' has been determined by the historical knowledge obtained from home and school environment as well as personal experience. Poland and Germany are neighbouring countries sharing a history of more than a thousand years with each side holding distinct perceptions regarding their common history. However, this is neither the time nor the place for a detailed analysis of Polish-German relations as this topic is still under scrutiny of many historians (cf. *Davies* 2001; *Mączak* 1997; *Czapiński* u. a. 2002; *Urban* 2000; *Conrads* 1994). Memories of historical events are passed down by older generations to younger ones and this determines the "stereotype" of the neighbours. Certainly, this plays an important role in creating the

"stereotype" of Germans in Poland. In the first survey research concerning the attitudes of Poles towards other nations Germans were ranked first (66.8% indications) among most disliked nations. In 1975 this figure decreased to 60 percent, and in 1993 it decreased further to 25 percent (cf. *Szacki* 1969; *Jasińska-Kania* 1975; *Kawalec/Strzezewski* 1993; *Derczyński/Traczyk* 1996; *Błuszkowski* 2003; *Strzeszewski* 2005). The research conducted in 2000 on the "stereotype" of Germans indicated that Poles still remember the period of German occupation, but they do not express hostile feelings towards contemporary Germans and they do not attribute to them the attitudes of nationalism and xenophobia. Almost half of Poles under the age of 40 declare positive feelings towards Germans. Hence, a picture that emerges is that a positive evolution of the German "stereotype" has taken place. Germans are seen as typical representatives of the Western culture, as proven by subsequent sociological studies (cf. *Dolińska/Fałkowski* 2003). The economic development and other achievements of the Federal Republic of Germany and the ability to build a country of wealth has had a definite influence on the German stereotype. The positive changes in perceptions took place especially during the 1990s and have been accredited to political events as well as direct relations between members of both nations (cf. *Binge/Malinowski* 2000; *Wolff-Powęska/Bingen* 2005).

The "stereotype" of Germans is dependent on the region of residence. In central, western and eastern Poland it consists of more negative elements due to more severe consequences of the war and occupation (cf. *Szarota* 1996; *Nasalska* 2001), whereas it has always been more positive in the territory we refer to as the cross-cultural borderland area – the region of Opole and Upper Silesia. Parts of this reagion were under Germany rule until 1918 and some until 1945. For the Silesians living in that area the time of war and occupation was not a burdensome experience. During this time Germans and Poles lived side by side treating each other as equals. It was possible to meet Germans personally and mixed marriages were a common incidence. Moreover, Silesians shared a Western identity mediated by a common level of civilization and a work ethos. Despite existing conflicts, Germans were and still are perceived more positively in this area. These trends have been pointed out by sociologists for a long time (cf. *Chałasiński* 1935; *Ossowski* 1967; *Swadźba* 2001). As a result of existing migration to Germany during the real-socialism these communities experienced more personal relations with Germans that other Poles. Therefore, the current "stereotype" of Germans consists of more positive elements than in the other parts of Poland (cf. *Berlińska* 2000; *Błuszkowski* 2005).

While presenting the "stereotype" of Germans in Poland the opposite stereotype of Poles in Germany needs to be mentioned as they are not symmetrical. Subsequent research conducted by the Allensbach Institute in 1959, 1963 and 1972 (cf. *Dolińska/Fałkowski* 2003) allowed the observation not of an increase in positive attitudes of Germans (western) towards Poles as such but more evidently a decrease in negative attitudes and increase in indifference. Currently, it can be said that the "stereotype" of Poland or Poles is no longer a "stereotype" of the enemy. The contemporary attitudes of Germans towards Poles range from feelings of distance and aversion to openness and kindness of relationships. Looking back over the decades it seems that Germans have reevaluated their opinions of Poland and Poles (cf. *Dolińska/Fałkowski* 2003).

3   The young generation of Germans – reality vs. opinions

The "stereotype" of German youths in the opinion of Polish youths has also changed. In particular, it concerns those communities who have more direct encounters with their neighbours (cf. *Siellawa-Kolbowska* 2005). Youth researchers in both countries have discovered differences in lifestyles of Polish and German young people. In Poland the social environment of young people is primarily formed by the family members and not by peers. In Germany, family and peers are given the same status, but given the choice most young Germans would choose to spend their free time with peers (cf. *Koseła/Jonda* 2005). German youths tend to be strongly involved in consumption and perform their identity in leisure time "searching for examples, approval, sensations and diverse experiences youths created a separate consumer group which is targeted by the entertainment market" (*Mayer* 1997). Social liberalization of sexual behaviours of youth in the '60s and '70s led to the sexual revolution and has had a radical impact on youth behaviour. The age of the first sexual intercourse has decreased over the decades. Sexuality is not longer merely limited to marriage relationships and youths often have a few sexual partners while teenagers (cf. *Siering* 1995). Comparing young Germans and Poles one could state that it is a generation that clearly prefers a "pick and mix approach to values". Values of acceptance, obligation and materialistic objectives as well as self-development and post-materialistic priorities are synthetized together by youths. Despite the fact that German youths would rather choose "post-modern" values and Polish youths "traditional" ones, the differences are not significant (cf. *Adamczyk* 2003). German youths are very optimistic about life as well as being socially orientated. More than half of German youths are members of at least one grass-roots organization (cf. *Szawiel* 2005).

Do the differences in lifestyle and value systems of young Poles and Germans determine stereotypes? Research shows that young Poles often describe young Germans in positive terms (cf. *Dolińska/Fałkowski* 2003). It is further facilitated by international exchange programs. The majority of young people who visited western neighbours generally express positive opinions about them, regardless of the amount of positive characteristics they are assigned with (cf. *Siellawa-Kolbowska* 2005). Student exchange programs combined with close relationships promise a chance for changing the "stereotype" (cf. *Berlińska* 2005).

4   The notion of "Stereotype" – a theoretical construction

In search of theoretical or thematic frameworks in the research on the perception of foreign nations, the notion of "stereotype" will be referred to. The term "stereotype" has changed a lot since *Walter Lippman* first coined the phrase in 1922 as a description of "images that we carry in our heads" (cf. *Lippmann* 1965). Current studies on stereotypes embrace their essence, origins and functions. In existing Anglo-Saxon theories stereotypes are presented from a dual perspective (cf. *Devine/Hamilton* 1994; *Forgas* 1981).

The first one is the psychological perspective (cf. *Fyock/Strangor* 1994). Within this concept "stereotypes" are the elements of an individual perception of the world. "Stereotypes" originate and function in the mind of an individual and therefore they influence the

individual's emotional life and the motivation to act. They are formed as an effect of configurations of one's beliefs, demeanour and needs. Individuals form stereotypes as a result of personal contacts and group membership. The process of learning behaviours and reactions of others makes it possible to initiate contact and be involved in interactions with people. Through learning "stereotypes", individuals "economise" their own behaviours (cf. *Devine* 1999; *Chaiken/Trope* 1999). This perspective highlights the cognitive function of "stereotypes" in forming an individual or group identity (cf. *Tajfel* 1981; *Abrams/Hogg* 1999).

The second approach, cultural, implies that society creates a base for the stored knowledge. It sees stereotypes as sets of information about other groups spread within members of a given group (cf. *Dueveen/Lloyd* 1990; *Farr/Moscovici* 1984). "Stereotypes" are an integral part of social structure common for people of the same cultural origin. Similarly to other cultural patterns "stereotypes" are integrated through the socialization process. Information is obtained from schools and the media. This approach is wider and considers inter-generational transfer as well as contribution of social norms and rules (cf. *Oakes/Haslam/Turner* 1994). The task of a researcher is to record and define their substance. Some studies that take this approach indicate the factor of time changes which the stereotype is subject to (cf. *Park/Hastie* 1987; *Johnson/Macrae* 1994). This is called the evolutional approach.

Within the scope of Polish sociology, many authors have dealt with these issues (*cf. Kapiszewski* 1978; *Kłoskowska* 1996; *Ossowski* 1967; *Schaff* 1981; *Wilska-Duszyńska* 1971; *Bokszański* 1997; *Jasińska-Kania* 1992; *Nowicka* 1990; Nowak 1973; *Chlewiński/Kurcz* 1992; *Kurcz* 1994; *Szarota* 1988; *Wrzesiński* 1991). The approaches should be divided into at least two schools of thought: psychological and socio-cultural. The first school refers to the "stereotype" as a cognitive structure encrypted into the mind (cf. *Chlewiński/Kurcz* 1992; *Kurcz* 1994; *Jarymowicz* 1992), where it has a simplifying function.

The other school of thought appears to be more valuable for sociological studies. This perspective concentrates on phenomena that can be external for the psyche and can embrace integrated objectified cultural products such as historical memory, customs and traditions, position in social structure or ethnic (national) identity. This school of thought uses the terms "image" and "stereotype" interchangeably (cf. *Ossowski* 1967; *Nowicka* 1990; *Bokszański* 1997). The Polish sociologist *Ossowski* (1967) defined stereotypes as: "The pictures typical of the whole social group. They usually refer to not the individuals as such but as members of a particular group […] hence this sort of image has social character in two ways: because it was formed and accepted by a group and it considers the entire community" (p. 39). This is the definition that fits the author's research. It was constructed to facilitate research on stereotypes, both ethnic and national, and it also embraces the specific Polish character.

The above definition is also complemented by the research approach proposed by *Bokszański* (1993) "It appears that both for theoretical and pragmatic reasons […] it is best to connect the phenomenon of the so called perception of nationality or images of their typical representatives with the direction of studies on stereotypes" (p. 11). Stereotypes are further understood and conceptualized according to Bokszański in a cultural sense and linked to the group identity (*Bokszański* 1995). Foreign authors came to the same conclusion in relation to forming images about one's own group (*cf. Tajfel* 1982; *Levine/Campbell* 1972). It is a very broad approach and takes into account the cultural

entity. It covers the historical memory of a group and individuals, ethnic (national) identity, tradition, conventionally accepted behaviour, norms and values, experience and generalizations. This approach consists of factors taking into the account a cultural background of people constructing images of others and is appropriate for sociological discussion.

Bokszański's concept of "stereotype" also indicates the method of research on stereotype. It embodies the consideration that "stereotypes" are elements of knowledge about other nations commonly shared by members of a certain group or community, in this case the young generation. This broad perspective allows for the analysis of the following factors contributing to the formation of a stereotype.

Firstly, historical knowledge is passed to the young generation through various institutions such as school, media as well as intergenerational messages in the family. This message will be different in an autochthonic family or a family of allochthonous origin (e.g. from pre-war eastern parts of Poland).

Secondly, national identification on the researched cross-cultural territory is framed along the continuum Germans – Silesians – Poles. Germans treat the "stereotype'' of Germans as an auto-stereotype.

Personal experience regarding relationships with young Germans is another factor included in the analysis. "Stereotypes" can vary depending on the intensity of contacts with representatives of different nations. Positive experience influences forming of "stereotypes" with positive elements.

Situational circumstances embrace current socio-political events that influence functioning of "stereotypes" (e.g. The visit of Pope *Benedict* XVI to Poland in 2006 and Stefan Muller's participation on the Polish Television Show "Europa da się lubić").

Research on "stereotype" using the above mentioned factors requires a qualitative method of inquiry as the only useful in the socio-cultural approach. Therefore the research conducted by the author focused on the collective dimension of "stereotype" rather than on the personal one. Taking into consideration both the social context structural and cultural determinants allowed a detailed analysis of the evolution of the German stereotype. This emphasizes the dynamic approach to the researched topic. "Stereotypes" do not always stay the same over time. The useful conceptual category that comes hand in hand with this approach is the hypothesis of contact (cf. *Tajfel* 1978; *Rothbart* 1981). It is based on the idea that members of various groups should engage in ever ongoing interactions in order to change the "stereotype". Contacts between the young generations of Poles and Germans occur during visits to Germany and Poland (with the former being more common) which result in various experiences by both sides. The process of shaping the "stereotype" of Germans among young Poles is influenced by the information acquired from both formal and informal sources. It derives from the media and public institutions as well as families, friends and neighbours. The research entailed the identification of the types of information that were particularly influential when shaping the "stereotype" of Germans currently and in the past.

The important matter is to demonstrate the evolution of the German-stereotype which exists within the young generation of Poles. Therefore the following questions were fundamental to the research: What "stereotype" of Germans used to exist within the young generation of Poles in the years the research was conducted? Have any changes occurred? If yes, in which direction? According to previously mentioned research data a positive change in the "stereotype" of Germans has occurred. The sociological observation of the

researched community indicated a positive direction of changes amongst the local people despite their regional origin.

5   Methodological background of the research

The "stereotype" of Germans has been investigated by the author since 1987. The first study was conducted among high school students in three areas of South-West Poland – Zabrze, Głogówek, and Dobrodzień. After the initial analysis, Głogówek proved to be the most fruitful place to further explore in terms of findings. Why Głogówek? Undoubtedly, due to the large German minority living in that area which has influenced the demographic composition and the character of the town. What is more, it had an impact on the possibilities of contacts with Germans and the Federal Republic of Germany which at the time of real socialism were not that frequent.

In 1988 a field research was carried out which included 302 informants – both from the young and older generation. The main group of participants consisted of the young generation (226 people) whereas the older generation was a control group (76 people). The interviews were conducted by sociology students as a part of their educational training in the form of annual practice. The interview questionnaire comprised the following issues – sources of information on Germans, knowledge on family, friends and neighbour networks, opinions on the young generation of Germans and the index of features that the "stereotypes" of Germans and Poles comprised. The final personal details section one question asked for the regional origin of the participants. The study revealed a vast amount of information and the findings were published (cf. *Swadźba* 1991; *Swadźba* 1993; *Swadźba* 1995).

In 1990s a significant system transformation was initiated in Poland. One of the processes was to increase the freedom of citizens, including the possibility of national minorities to act without constraints from the state. According to sociological studies from that period it was the time of their increased activity. The same referred to the territory under investigation. One of the most significant changes was the opportunity for the German minority in that area to set up organizations. The Socio-Cultural Association of Germans in Opole Silesia with the Voivodship Administration situated in Gogolin emerged in Głogówek. Local school students were given the opportunity to learn German. A week long student exchange program for teenagers from a local school and a school in Prieetz near Cologne was organized.

In September 1995, another study examining the ''stereotype'' of Germans was conducted. The study was carried out in schools. School students were selected as participants in order to enable the author to conduct the research by her own means. The participants in question were 3rd and 4th year general high school and 4th year technical high school students respectively, i.e. 18-20 year old teenagers constituting a sample of 82 participants in total, 47 males (53.3%) and 35 females (42.7%). Male students constituted the majority in technical high schools whereas the opposite applied to general high schools. The participants were given a questionnaire to fill in during classes. The questionnaire contained questions that covered issues similar to the ones in the previous research, but they were modified to take into account the respondents' age. Interviews with social experts were also conducted, i.e. school principals, teachers and district authorities.

The findings of this study were also published and presented as conference papers (cf. *Swadźba* 1997a; *Swadźba* 1997b; *Swadźba* 1997c; *Swadźba* 1999; *Swadźba* 2000). Nevertheless, the research published hitherto was selective in nature, and the ongoing observation of changes in the region through personal contacts and theoretical investigations has led to further research in order to reveal the dynamic of the stereotype evolution.

In order to present current elements present in the substance and functioning of the "stereotype" of Germans, research was conducted recently among young students. Students of 5 different grades from the same schools were selected: 2nd and 3rd year general high school students, 3rd year profile high school students as well as 3rd and 4th year technical high school students. 108 respondents were examined altogether, i.e. 43 males (39.8%), 60 females (55.6%) and 5 students who did not indicate gender in the questionnaires. Questionnaires were handed out during classes. The issues presented in the questionnaire were similar to those of the previous one but the questions were adapted to include issues relevant to the time and social context of the research. Apart from questions concerning sources of information about other nations, the scope of information, knowledge about work, family, social and neighbourhood life of Germans, their attitude towards Poles and Poles' attitude towards Germans, it also included questions about the most popular German, as well as actual acquaintance with a German person embodying positive or negative features. The question with an index of features was included to investigate "stereotypes" of Germans and auto-stereotypes of Poles. The personal details section, apart from questions about the regional origin, command of the German language, visits to Germany and national identity, covered issues relating to German citizenship and passport as well as intentions to work in Germany. Additionally, expert interviews were conducted with the school head teacher of Zespół Szkół in Głogówek, the vice principal, as well as the mayor of the town and district of Głogówek, a former Polish teacher and the President of the Local Socio-Cultural Association of Germans in Głogówek (Opole Silesia).

Both the similarity of questions and the way the research material was analyzed justify comparisons. Data collected from the respondents during the interviews of 1998 and the auditorial questionnaires conducted in 1995 and 2005 were substantial enough and had the same value in merits. In the author's opinion, the studies conducted in the same social setting on three different occasions enabled the distinguishing evolution of viewpoints concerning the "stereotype" of young generation Germans. The collection of research data on a similar subject over a period of 17 years in one social environment is uncommon.

The analysis below, due to the word limitations, will concern only the issues related to how young Poles percieve young Germans.[1] The questions presented in all studies were the same and were open. After the analysis the answers were categorized and aggregated. The percentages were calculated and qualitative analysis conducted. The respondents' actual quotations are used to present typical answers. Factors that influence the notion of "stereotype" are taken into consideration.

6 The "stereotype" of young Germans in the eyes of young Poles in the empirical studies

What are the views of youths from the cross-cultural borderland area on German young people? Could the participants of research point out differences between themselves and German youths? The most important question, though, is whether evolution in the perception of young generation Germans has occurred. By evaluating their peers, teenagers show their own systems of values, priorities and groups of reference.

Thus, the discussion provided below attempts to answer the questions raised. The participants were asked the following questions: What can you say about the young German generation? Does it differ from the Polish one? The results are compiled in the table below.

Table 1:   The differences between the German and Polish youths (%)

Do the German youth differ from the Polish one?			1988 N = 226	1995 N = 82	2005 N = 108
A	They do not differ		16.6	15.8	18.5
B	They differ				
	1	They differ (no reasons given)	10.8	7.3	13.5
	2	They differ – have better material conditions and easier life	28.6	15.9	18.6
	3	They differ – are more modern	8.5	13.4	10.2
	4	They differ – are more spoilt	15.6	35.2	25.9
C	They do not know		16.5	7.3	5.6
D	No answer given		2.4	4.9	7.4
Total			100	100	100

Source: Own research

The questions asked in each study were interesting for young respondents, as indicated during the interviews. The answers can be divided into the following types. They can be found in all three studies, but differ in frequency (without answers: "No answer given"; "I do not know"; "Incomplete answers").

– The first type (A), where the respondents think that young Germans do not differ from the young Polish generation.
– The second (B1), where the respondents think that young Germans differ from the young Polish generation, but they did not give the explanations of the characteristics of that difference.
– The third type (B2), where the respondents claimed that young Germans differ from young Poles. The differences in question concerned the material level of life and transition into the adulthood phase.
– The fourth type (B3), in which the respondents claimed that young Germans differ from young Poles. The very differences were related to the lifestyle, patterns of behaviour and social networks. The way of life of German youth was the object of desire for young Poles and was positively evaluated.
– The fifth type (B4), in which the participants considered themselves as different from young Germans. Germans are perceived in a negative way and their lifestyle is not regarded as worthwhile.

The analysis of the answer types in the course of the three studies shows that the number of people falling into the first category remained at almost the same level. The differences in figures are insignificant. The third, fourth and fifth types point to the differences between the young Polish and German generations, and give the reasons for them. The third and fourth categories show such differences which are related to positively evaluated characteristics of the German youth's life (better material conditions and easier life, as well as a more modern and laid back attitude towards life), and the fifth type included the differences showing Germans in a negative light (more deviance cases, more spoilt). In subsequent years, respondents put an emphasis on a range of differences between generations. In 1988 the majority of respondents fell into the third category, i.e. the answers showed differences between the material conditions. The youth did not pay as much attention to the discrepancies derived from their lifestyle. In 1995 the biggest discrepancies were observed in terms of lifestyle, which was perceived in a negative way by the majority of participants. Furthermore, in 2005 the respondents mentioned these differences, but not as often as in 1995. In 2005 the approval of the German lifestyle decreased and the informants indicated more frequently differences between material conditions and life paths.

The categories of answers show that there is a diversity in opinions and explanations presented by Polish respondents. The questions triggered an emotional reaction from the respondents due to the fact that they share similar life problems as their German counterparts. Therefore, the opinions which show a specific way of thinking of youth are presented next.

The first category – *type (A) – young Germans do not differ from young Poles. This was the answer in all studies commonly chosen by male respondents who have come to the Silesia region from other parts of Poland and declared Polish national identity*[2]. This can be attributed to the fact that they knew more peers in Germany after the border opening and the Polish accession to the European Union. On the other hand, such answers were also given by young respondents of the autochthonous origin and declaring German national identity. Both groups of respondents referred to the universal youth culture typical for young people all over the world, to values such as tolerance, and the right to live in a society without divisions. The opinions given by the youth are as follows: *"Practically, there are no divisions between young Polish and German people. They listen to similar music, wear similar clothes, do not like to recall historical events and conflicts between Poland and Germany"* – one student wrote. *"I have young German friends. They enjoy life in the same way and have the same problems"* – another wrote. Sometimes students highlighted that if differences exist they result from psychological reasons. *"These two nations and generations are alike but different features of a national character exist in each country"*. Students who belong to this category also emphasized that one should not look for differences between nations but rather for common characteristics. Their definitions oscillate around such notions as tolerance, similarities and lack of prejudices. In the last study, young respondents pointed to the fact that globalization is omnipresent, both countries are members of the EU and there are more similarities than differences between the two. The examples of such points of view are as follows: *"Since we are in the EU we no longer differ from one another. We are the same as Germans"*; *"In my opinion there are no differences, all youths in Europe are the same. I have friends in France, Italy and Germany."* In their responses, the youth highlight the ease of communication in the contemporary world and the similarity of cultures.

Some respondents said that Polish and German youths differ, but they did not indicate what exactly the differences are (second type – B1). These were usually one or two sentence-long statements. Such responses were given by both the youth of autochthonous and inflow origin as well as those declaring Polish, Silesian or German identity. Examples of their opinions were: *"I think there are differences, but I don't know how to name them"*. This group was represented by those students who had problems elaborating on their opinions, but also those ones who had too little knowledge to do so. The numbers of such students were twice as high in 2005 than in 1995.

In the third category – *type B2 – the informants* indicated *positive differences on the part of the young Germans ascribed to them due to better material conditions and easier life*. The factors as such were given more attention in 1988 when the period of real socialism of the 1980s in Poland was associated with a lack of goods and constant deficiencies. The prosperity of Germans, shelves filled with products, and packages of attractive commodities sent by families were the desired objects. Therefore, this generation paid attention to material conditions dividing young Poles from young Germans. This aspect was not that popular in 1995, but it regained significance in the latest study. *"German youth have better conditions and possibilities. The can afford the things we usually cannot. They experience more entertainment and diversity in life. They visit the countries we can only dream of"* – one of the respondents of the autochthonous origin wrote, *"Young people aged 18 have their own flats"* – another added. The students also paid attention to the school equipment and ideal circumstances connected with the ways of spending free time. They wrote: *"Schools in Germany are well-equipped, with computers, language labs and sport halls. They have an easier syllabus and more free time"*. The youth highlighted a higher standard of living and easier transition into adult live in the case of young Germans. The respondents from 2005 pointed out yet another factor, namely work, which one can easier find over the German border: *"Here it's unemployment. There it's too but if you want, you can find a well-paid job. That is why the youth there have much better conditions for their life start"*, *"There is the difference. They have a job there, whereas we have to look for a job abroad"*. The comparisons of living conditions of Poles to that of Germans are depressing and trigger bitterness on the part of those who cannot afford such living standards. Materialistic values are of a primary significance to these respondents and they infiltrate into their opinions. The youth who falls into this category also belongs to the category of respondents associating Germany with a nation of high standards of living, rich people, well stocked shops and more interesting lifestyles.

The fourth answer – *type B3 –* represents the students *approving of behaviours, attitudes, and lifestyles of young Germans defined as modern*. These differences were already indicated by the respondents in the period of real socialism, but then the majority of respondents concentrated on material differences. The most important and leading element of that lifestyle which was approved was the notion of "being at ease" characterized by one of the students as: "They *are more easy going, they are not as stressed in school as we, they don't have to learn that much*". Sociologists and journalists dealing with the youth problem pointed to the liberal up-bringing and laid back nature of the young German generation (cf. *Mayer* 1997; *Puttmann* 1996; *Tyszecka* 2004). The rebellion of the young generation of the 1960s and 1970s against their parents was directed against Zucht und Ordnung, drill and order – traditional values of the German up-bringing. Their children were raised without the discipline influence of parents, religious norms and prohibitions (cf. *Tyszecka* 2004). This liberalism was a feature appreciated by the respondents. It

refers mainly to leisure time. According to some students, the factor of the laid back nature as an integral factor of good fun was characteristic for the behaviour patterns of young Germans: "They can enjoy life. They are totally easy going and thanks to it they have fun." *Jonda* (2005), writing about young Germans' free time, indicates the importance that German youth attribute to the way of spending leisure time, the importance of the company they spend it with, as well as the fact that free time is also connected with taking up odd jobs. Our young respondents, evaluating the young German generation, concentrated mainly on free time. They described this lifestyle as "something more developed". They underline here the element of modernity, assessing it in a positive way: "*It seems to me that the German youth seems always to be one step ahead", "I don't know how to say it but they are always one step ahead of us*". Early self-sufficiency of the German youth is the last factor approved by this category of informants. Young Germans become independent earlier by having their own flats: "*They have their own flats at the age of 16-18. They become self-reliant earlier. They don't have to respect their parents' decisions.*" *Mayer* (1996) wrote that in their opinion youth nowadays do not have to refrain any longer from acquiring goods nor from the pleasures of everyday life in order to secure their future lives. Their behaviour is strongly driven by 'the present', and they are characterized by hedonism and the tendency to avoid difficulties by all means. The needs of young people are met by parents who give their children large amounts of pocket money. The researchers, however, indicate that the youth take on jobs in their free time and are independent from their parents.

Those students who were fascinated with the lifestyle perceived as typically German do not accept that of Polish youths claiming that it is far from being modern. They define modernity as "being easy going", i.e. less discipline at school, at home and in institutions. At the same time they prefer self-reliance and spend much of their free time with their peers. It is the group of respondents close to the previous one in terms of the values approving and accepting material goods. Here the lifestyle connected with consumption, fun, and less demanding educational system and work is an accepted and desired commodity.

Some youth can see the differences between Polish and German youths connected to a *negative evaluation of the young German generation (B4)*. Such views not only enable us to see the way they perceive their neighbour, but also show the system of values of the so called cross-cultural borderland area youths. The negative opinions were less evident in 1988. Their number increased in 1995 and again decreased in the sample in 2005. These relatively large differences in the views can be accounted for by the fact that at the time of real socialism youth concentrated much more on the tangible material differences rather than the lifestyle as such. The people visiting Germany experienced such differences. In the early 1990s when contacts with the Federal Republic of Germany intensified young people going to Germany recognized not only the differences in terms of finances. They saw that the lifestyle of German youths did not match the traditional one in which they themselves were raised. Presently, the number of such people is lower due to lifestyles which have become similar and do not shock any more.

The students disapproving of different spheres of life of German youths thought that they do not have their place in the socially accepted patterns of behaviour. Such disapproval concerned three dimensions of the lives of German youths:

- School life and school relations
- Parent-child relations

– Ways of behaviour and moral evaluation of behaviour

The first aspect that did not get the approval of our respondents was school life. This issue was not referred to so frequently in the first study and was mentioned more in the course of the further two. Females, irrespective of their regional origin, and declaring Polish or Silesian-Polish identity mostly referred to this aspect. They wrote that: "The young generation of Germans differs from the young generation of Poles. Mostly visible in schools. The youth are more relaxed during lessons, e.g., they eat breakfast during classes, put their legs on the tables. The Polish youth are more disciplined, well mannered and behave better towards the teacher". Such opinions were more common in 1995. Student exchange programs influenced knowledge about the reality of the educational system. This type of school life description derived from students' own experiences and student exchange programs or from their relatives' knowledge contains two elements.

The next aspect the youth paid attention to constitutes relationships with parents and attitudes toward the elderly. This issue was raised mainly by young girls mostly of autochthonous origin and Silesian or German national identity knowing the German reality. In the 1995 and 2005 studies they constituted the group of people who often visited Germany and had family there. The possibility of confronting German patterns of behaviour with those that girls were raised in resulted in appreciation of their own upbringing. One of the girls wrote: "*We are brought up in a traditional way, we respect our parents. They do not know it. Children show a bad attitude towards their parents. They do not respect them. I think they have too much freedom.*" Such opinions, as well as others, reflect their attachment to traditional values in which the young Silesian generation is raised. However, there were fewer responses of that kind during the latest studies.

The last quote brings to the light an issue frequently subject to moral judgement, namely attitudes towards the sexual life of young Germans: "*There is a big sexual freedom among the youth, they start their adult life much quicker, they are never the youth as such, they go from childhood into adulthood – it's too big a gap*". In 2005 there were fewer opinions reflecting the ascription of such negative behaviours, whereas the judgements concerning the lifestyle of young Germans were no longer so emotional.

7 Conclusion

The question of the young generation of Germans as well as the differences between the young Polish and German generations resulted in vast sets of empirical data and incited reflection in each study. The positive symptom is evident in the increase in student opinions pointing to the uniformity of the lifestyle and similarities of the young generations. At the same time one feature of the "stereotype" of young Germans and the evaluation (positive or negative) connected with it needs to be emphasized. The "stereotype" oscillates around the factors that students can observe, whereas almost no one describes young Germans on the basis of political views or cultural interests. It derives from a language barrier and the opportunities of exchanging viewpoints.

Yet the respondents' opinions represent not only young Germans and their lifestyle, but also reflect young Poles and their systems of values. The comparison of the cross-cultural borderland area youths with Germans provides a great opportunity for both these groups to understand the differences between each other. Based on the differences in the

circumstances of young Poles and young Germans three types of "stereotypes" of young Germans can be distinguished.

– In the period of real socialism, when the number of contacts were limited, young Poles from the cross-cultural borderland perceived, above all, the material differences between the young Polish and German generations and their living standards. The "stereotype" was concentrated on materialistic values.
– In the early 1990s the contact between young Germans and Poles intensified, which allowed Poles to become acquainted with the lifestyles of Germans. The "stereotype" of youths focussed on lifestyle.
– The consumer attitude has spread across the cross-cultural borderland young generation of the early century. This has been caused by direct contacts between nationals of both countries, but also the media had a big impact. The "stereotype" of Germans is mainly focused on consumer values (material values and lifestyle).

Thus, the recent studies point to the process of convergence in the evaluation of lifestyle and ways of spending free time. This convergence is the result of changes after 1989, where a Western lifestyle was prevalent and advertised in the media. It was especially the young generation that was susceptible to these novelties and values as they have long aspired to achieve the lifestyles of young Germans.

Notes

1 The whole research is presented in: *Swadźba*: Obraz Niemców w oczach młodzieży pogranicza kulturowego. Studium dynamiki zmian na przykładzie Głogówka. Wyd. Śląskiego Instytutu Naukowego. Katowice – Opole 2007.
2 In general, the region of Opole can be divided into two categories of inhabitants: the autochthonous (local) and the inflowing ones (who came here after 1945 from the eastern territories Poland lost after 1945, from central Poland and abroad). Now, the two categories are mixed, and, as it follows from sociological studies, a variety of ethnic and national identities can be found in the Opole region, mainly the Polish, German, Silesian and mixed: Polish-Silesian, Polish-German, Silesian-German, Silesian-Polish-German, of the German origin ones, etc.

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