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Geography in the reformed educational system in Poland – return to the past or a brand new quality?

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Abstract

In 2017 the reform of the educational system in Poland was introduced. The current system of education is being changed drastically owing to both the removal of the three-year junior secondary school (*gimnasium*[1]) and the extension of primary school education. These systemic changes are likewise responsible for a change in the curricula of all school subjects at different levels of education, including Geography. Will these changes be beneficial for teaching this subject and the status of Geography at school? We are not certain at this time. Despite the fact that the proposed changes and the constructed core curriculum were likewise consulted among a wider group of teachers, it has not been possible yet to assess these changes unequivocally. Therefore, the subject of the present analysis and evaluation is the core curriculum for teaching Geography and the status of Geography in the Polish educational system. It is, however, impossible not to refer to other determinants of changes introduced into education, including geographic education.
A profound reform of the educational system rapidly introduced by the present government is giving rise to intense emotions. The reform proposes to return to the system and solutions that were valid many years ago such as the removal of the "gimnasium or lower secondary school", compulsory education starting from the age of 7, as well as enormous and unforeseen consequences of those changes for students, parents and teachers who are uncertain their future teaching career.

Keywords: Geography Curriculum, the Reform of the Educational System in Poland

1. Introduction

The notion of changes in educational systems in many countries is the subject of lively discussions and even disputes among a wide range of societies, especially among politicians, teachers, parents and even students. It is indeed a lively discussion because it points to an extremely important process of preparing children and adolescents for adult life and a proper planning of their career and educational career.

The introduction of new system solutions

[1] Gimnasium – a three-year lower secondary school, obligatory for 13 to 16-year-old students.

requires a detailed preparation, a number of analyses, social simulations and consultations, as well as a large amount of money. The proposed changes often apply to all subjects taught at multiple levels of education and should be properly embedded and incorporated into the overall educational process.

Therefore, the subject of the changes in geographic education at school is likewise discussed not only by Geography teachers, educators, administrators of education, but also among teachers at different levels of education. Such discussions do aim at solutions that are to be effective, innovative and conducive to a student's comprehensive development, geographical passion development and social needs. At the same time, the proposed solutions should not cause unnecessary doubts as to purpose, appointed tasks, and even strengthening the rank of Geography as a subject in the educational system.

2. Educational system after 1999 – are changes desirable?

The former (implemented as a result of the reform of the educational system by previous the government in 1999) system of education defines three stages of education: full-time compulsory education lasts for 10 years and comprises the last year of pre-school education, 6 years of primary school education and 3 years of gymnasium (lower secondary school) education while part-time compulsory education (obligation to be in education) can be continued in e.g. three-year upper secondary school (*liceum)*[2].

In 1999, the most bitter criticism of the reforms centred on shortening a primary school education from 8 to 6 years and introducing a new level of education – a lower secondary school as a three-year compulsory school. As a consequence, academic subjects – Geography, Biology, Physics and Chemistry – have been removed from the primary school. In place of those subjects taught in grades IV-VI at primary school the subject called "Nature" was introduced. The number of hours for Nature did not compensate for the losses for teachers of the four aforementioned subjects who were forced to either retrain by completing postgraduate studies in order to teach Nature or start teaching at a newly-formed "gymnasium". Unfortunately, it turned out that only 4 hours for a three-year cycle were devoted to teaching these subjects at lower secondary school. Consequently, teachers of Biology and Geography lost out the most owing to these changes. Students were deprived not only of the opportunity to develop their skills in Geography but also to broaden their horizons or geographic passion. It likewise encouraged a belief in the low value of Geography as the school subject.

Changes in the teaching of Geography in the Polish educational system over the past twenty years are presented in Table 1.

3. Geography at "gimnasium"

Since 2017 there have been four hours of Geography in a 3-year cycle at a mandatory gimnasium. The same number of hours were dedicated for other science subjects: Biology, Physics and Chemistry. Therefore, the rank of those science subjects at this stage of education was the same and regrettably low. Moreover, unfavourable demographic changes, resulting in a smaller number of grades at school, have a dominant influence upon the number of Geography hours, forcing Geography teachers to look for jobs in other educational institutions so as to have a full-time job. Geography teachers were forced to acquire additional qualifications so as to be able to teach a second subject, in order to stay in their teaching profession. According to Tracz and Świętek (2014), this phenomenon is visible especially in small towns where the educational offer is still very limited.

[2] Liceum – a non-mandatory three-year comprehensive school with specialized classes, for 16 to 19-year-old students. Upon graduating a student is awarded with the matriculation certificate after passing the external Matura examinations required to enter a university.

Education level	Teaching Geography in educational system after 1999 (in hours per week)		
primary school	The 4th, 5th and 6th grades	No geography as a subject, geographical contents only at natural science	
lower secondary school (gimnasium)	The 1st grade The 2nd grade The 3rd grade	1 hour 1 hour 2 hours	
upper secondary school (liceum)		Basic level	Extended level
	The 1st grade The 2nd grade The 3rd grade	1 hour ---------- ----------	1 hour 4 hours 4 hours

Education level	Teaching Geography in educational system after 2017 (in hours per week)		
primary school	The 5th grade The 6th grade The 7th grade The 8th grade	1 hour 1 hour 2 hours 1 hour	
liceum		Basic level	Extended level
	The 1st grade The 2nd grade The 3rd grade The 4th grade	1 hour 2 hours 1 hour --------	3 hours 4 hours. 4 hours 2 hours

Table 1. Teaching Geography in Polish educational system.
Source: elaborated by W. Osuch according to Project of core curriculum for Geography.

Tracz and Świętek (2014) asserted, basing their knowledge on research conducted at 50 schools, that gimnasium teachers pointed out an increase in behavioural problems in the gimnasium, reduction of the level of students' knowledge of the natural science subjects and an abridgement of teaching content from selected courses. There were likewise advantages: better learning outcomes demonstrated in PISA research, structural solutions similar to other European countries and better equipped schools with teaching aids (Tracz and Świętek, 2014, pp. 58-59).

An important conclusion for analysing and evaluating the educational content is that, in practice, in many cases the physical geography issues studied in the first grade are too difficult for students (Tracz and Świętek, 2012) and, very often, the given material has to be continued at

the beginning of the second grade. Moreover, the distribution of the hours of Geography is not compatible with the intentions of the authors of the core curriculum. This implies that the choice of some textbooks of the Geography of Poland in the third grade is motivated by marginalizing this content because approximately about half of the teachers in the survey devoted two hours of the subject in the second and not the third grade (Tracz and Świętek, 2014). This is likewise confirmed by previous studies conducted by Tracz (2008) pointing to the results of the competence test after gimnasium.

4. Geography at liceum

The reform of the educational system in Poland which started in 1999 has been valid at the liceums, starting from the 2011 / 2012 school year. Geography was taught at the basic level (30 hours in the first grade) and at the advanced level (240 hours in the second and the third grades). Only the basic level was mandatory for all students. It is estimated that Geography at the advanced level (in a variety of possible configurations and specialities) was studied only by 20-25% of all students (Osuch, 2017).

The lack of, or a very short time for, social consultations is a major problem as far as the educational changes are concerned. This makes an analysis and evaluation of the proposed changes superficial, limited to slogans formulated in the core curriculum; it does not enter at a deeper level into the "philosophy" of a new way of thinking. It is significant to remark that teachers themselves do not often feel comfortable in the throes of quick and thorough changes. They rather tend to keep their own jobs and think only about their own professional development and, therefore, are not willing to give specific feedback or suggestions on the core curriculum or specific geographic education topics. Consultations with teachers-practitioners, however, seem to be valuable and necessary. New trends, opportunities and changes in the Geography curriculum in New Zealand were reported by Fastier (2013), using teacher surveys and interviews with Geography Institute directors to evaluate proposed changes. It is worth noting that Geography as a subject is chosen as an optional subject among students aged 11-13 years old at the level of 6-8 (Fastier, 2013).

Demonstrating the concept of "geographic thinking" is of importance to go into detailed solutions. Maude (2013) presented a highly important concept of "geographic thinking" in the Geography curriculum in Australia. According to Maude, the full vision of "geographic thinking" and analysis requires the following elements: place, space, environment, interconnection, sustainability, scale and change (Maude, 2013).

It seems necessary to look more deeply into the past and into the history of the changes that have already been made, in order to have a broader view of the current ideas and solutions proposed. De Vecchis (2016) wrote in depth on the subject of the reform of secondary schools in Italy in the context of changes at secondary schools over a hundred years. It is intriguing to analyse the relation between Geography and History and to show some possibilities for integrating the content of education, although the assessment seems to be rather critical.

Although the general education curriculum reform is realized at two different schools – gimnasium and liceum – it does create a coherent whole as the foundation of education (Marciniak, 2011). The material in the first grade at liceum covers issues of socio-economic Geography, according to the assumption adopted earlier that at primary school a student should know about the socio-economic and environmental problems of the modern world (Czerny, 2011). According to Adamczewska (2014) Geography teachers generally positively assess the content selection carried out in the first grade at liceum, believing that it is absorbing and it may attract young people with content about political Geography, cultures, high-tech industries, demographics and tourism. In line with the author of this study, long-time Geography teachers were accustomed to implementing content from the physical Geography and the spiral arrangement of the contents. One downside of it is the lack of content of the Geography of Poland. Therefore, teachers cannot make references to specific examples. Furthermore, the limiting of hours to particular issues seriously hinders the development of critical thinking and analytical skills in the

geographical environment which may sadly lead to reproducing and reinforcing stereotypes (Adamczewska, 2014). One has to agree with this statement fully because the basic education level (30 compulsory hours) seriously hinders the acquisition of knowledge of the subject.

However, a detailed analysis of educational content for the extended level of Geography, conducted exclusively by eager students in the second and the third grades has a lot of flaws. Despite the number of 240 hours allocated for the extended level there are indeed problems with implementation of the material at this level because the new core curriculum differs only a little from the previous one, which in turn means that educational content must be implemented in a shorter (only a two-year cycle) time. Moreover, even a short weekly absence may cause a backlog of 4-5 topics in one subject, which can be extremely difficult for a student to catch up with. During the implementation of physical geography content in the second grade at lyceum, students should remember the issues discussed at gimnasium, which can be an obstacle for them and for teachers alike. Issues implemented in the second grade are markedly contrary to those of the first grade because they require specific knowledge, adequate use of maps, assimilation of geographical terminology, perceiving and explaining relations and dependencies between individual elements of the geographical environment. (Adamczewska, 2014).

According to Adamczewska (2014) a detailed summary of the geographical liceum education carried out according to the SWOT method of analysis is not quite positive. The weaknesses of the geographical liceum education include:

- the completion of mandatory geographical education after the first year at lyceum;
- very restricted role of the Geography of Poland at basic level;
- the insufficient number of hours and the absence of physical Geography.

A threat is a decrease in the level of geographical knowledge in society and knowledge about the country, the number of dismissed Geography teachers is increasing (the choice of a specific grade profile and thus the extended level is dependent on a number of eager students), and an increase in the anonymity of students even in the first grade.

The strengths and opportunities were likewise considered:

- a large number of hours for the extended level,
- dynamic and global approach in teaching Geography;
- the possibility of a thorough and conscious preparation for the Matura exam opportunity to learn and understand the surrounding world, different cultures, shaping the attitudes of openness (Adamczewska, 2014).

In short, according to Osuch (2017) it is impossible not to agree with the results of the research conducted by Adamczewska at schools and generally known experiences of Geography teachers in this field. The geographical education at liceum decreases the significance of Geography as the subject, but also the scientific discipline.

After completion of the geographic education at liceum, a student should acquire knowledge and skills (competences) allowing him or her to pass the Matura exam in Geography.

Since 2005 students at liceum, since 2005 have been able to choose Geography as one of the selected subjects in the written part of the Matura exam. So far, the Matura exam can be taken at the basic or advanced level. Since 2017 only at the advanced level.

As a consequence of the earlier choice of Geography at the advanced level, current (from 2015) liceum students can pass Geography only at the advanced level of the Matura exam. Polish language, one foreign language, and Mathematics are mandatory Matura exams and students must obtain at least 30% in order to pass. In addition, they are obliged to choose at least one additional subject at advanced level (max. five), but without the selected threshold of completion (Osuch, 2017).

According to Wójcik (2013), who made an analysis and evaluation of Geography Matura exam tasks, especially the scope of content, their construction, technical and educational correctness. The results of Wójcik's research in 2005-2011 point to an increase of tasks checking knowledge with a decrease of tasks checking

skills, which should be considered reproachful. So far, a large number of students were interested in Geography during school education and positively set to it. Moreover, average and poor students willingly chose Geography as their Matura exam because they were even weaker at other subjects and they thought that they could quickly catch up with Geography. At that time such thinking in fact proved to be wrong. Currently (since 2015), the main motive for choosing Geography is higher education where the Matura exam in Geography is required or additionally rewarded (Osuch, 2017).

Geography is currently very often chosen by graduates as an additional subject. In 2017 in Poland, 71601 students attempted to pass Geography at advanced level, which accounted for 27% of the students who chose this subject as an additional one. By comparison, Biology was chosen by 49928 students, Chemistry – 28880, Physics – 21801, History – 17924 and Civic Studies – 25479. An average result obtained at Geography exam at the advanced level is only 31%, 10% less than in 2015 (Central Examination Board 2017. www.cke.edu.pl).

5. Geography at "new primary school"

As far as the most recent concept of geographic education at primary school is taken into consideration, the content of education and detailed requirements are divided into 18 thematic sections and are to be taught in V-VIII grades in the following hourly arrangement: the 5th grade – 1 hour, the 6th grade – 1 hour, 7th grade – 2 hours, 8th grade – 1 hour per week.

the 5th grade: (total of 26 hours)

Map of Poland, Polish landscapes, lands and oceans of the Earth, landscapes of the world.

the 6th grade: (total of 26 hours)

Earth movements, geographic coordinates, Geography of Europe, neighbours of Poland.

the 7th grade: (total of 60 hours)

Poland's natural environment in Europe, society and economy of Poland in Europe, relations between elements of the geographical environment in the selected areas of Poland, my own region: "Little Homeland".

the 8th grade: (total of 26 hours)

Regional Geography of Asia, regional Geography of Africa, regional Geography of North and South America, regional Geography of Australia, regional Geography of the Antarctic.

For example, according to the core curriculum, the Neighbours of Poland section (6th grade) comprises the following issues: an industrial transformation in Germany; an economic development of the Czech Republic and Slovakia; a natural environment and an economic situation of Lithuania and Belarus; political, social and economic problems of Ukraine; Russia's natural and socio-economic diversification.

Such a form of formulation of particular topics does suggest the use of the dominant content layout and the specific problems of a lesson. The authors of the core curriculum strongly suggest a passage from passive teaching methods to a "searching" mode of education, and the most beneficial teaching-learning methods will surely be those that are able to activate learners, allowing them to monitor, analyse, compare, reason, evaluate, design, and take action so as to solve problems independently.

The authors of the core curriculum demonstrate the ability to use both modern (e.g. GPS) and traditional ways of field orientation (e.g. maps, compass, the Sun, polar star, etc.) as a practical dimension of geographic education, so as not to be surprised and lost in a variety of terrestrial or atmospheric conditions. The use of maps, geographic orientation, demonstration of spatial diversity of natural components and human activities in the geographical environment, and an interpretation of map content are thus the primary aims of education at this level. As for the selection of content itself, it is indeed the return to Geography from a primary school in the 1970s and 1980s, which was fairly simple and clear. In the 5th grade, a student (now 10/11 year-old, ultimately 11/12 year-old) will first get to know Geography as an object and will be able to learn about the diversity of Poland and the world, the distribution of continents and oceans on Earth, as well as maps as an important source of geographic knowledge. The key task of geo-

graphic education in the 6th and 7th grades, relating to the regional Geography of Europe and the world, is to get to know about the regional diversity of the world and the relation between nature and man. In the 7th grade a student studies the Geography of Poland. Particular issues in the field of physical Geography and socio-economic Geography are dealt with against the background of the Geography of Europe. The process of teaching and studying Geography also makes recourse to, among others, the application of the model of examples and case study as a detailed study of the unit (a region, an administrative unit, a city, a village, a farm, other geographical objects) which discloses exceptionally well typical features, phenomena, processes and relations of nature-man. This approach is not new and was being used successfully in the past at liceum but it was more about examples and case studies rather than the exemplary content, which is probably what the authors of the new core curriculum plan to achieve. Using the project method so as to create the conditions for students to undertake independent field research is a certain innovation introduced at this stage of education, and is all the more important because it concerns the knowledge of one's own region. This is an excellent opportunity to return to the regional Geography of our own country.

One of the innovations, apart from formulating the general aims of geographic education, is to identify important goals for shaping attitudes – upbringing. Here are some examples of geographic education objectives in education in the context of the policy pursued by right-conservative authorities:

- shaping the sense of identity, patriotism as well as community and civic attitudes;
- shaping the sense of pride in the beauty of the nature of our own country and the heritage of our people by means of studying a variety of natural and cultural heritage objects of our own region and Poland, Polish landscapes, natural, cultural and tourist beauty and the achievements of Poles in various spheres of life, successes of Polish companies in the international politics arena (The core curriculum for geography primary school, pp. 4-5);
- developing positive, emotional and spiritual bonds with the motherland, with the closest social and natural environment ("Little Homeland", our own region), and, to some extent, with the whole planet Earth (The core curriculum for geography primary school).

Despite the fact that those assumptions are right, so far they have not been sufficiently prominent in geographic education. Nevertheless, their significance has been indicated. "Geography fits in with the foundations of patriotic education which requires both historical and geographic knowledge" (The core curriculum for geography primary school).

It should also be noted that the number of hours of History at "new primary school" will amount to 9 hours throughout the cycle (Geography only 5 hours) which should be considered as a significant manifestation of government policy and a tremendous increase in the importance of the subject of History at school.

At this stage, it is extremely difficult to clearly define what the effect of the "novel" geographical education at primary school will be on account of the fact that in September 2017 only the 7th grade started education according to the assumptions of the reform. The textbook exclusively to this grade has just been published. On the other hand, this "transition" (removal of gimnasium, extension of primary school education, structural and program changes at liceum) can cause mounting anxiety. Primary school students, upon completion of the 6th grade of primary school (in the hitherto 6th grade of primary school there was no Geography, there was only Nature subject) passed into the 7th grade and started an entirely new program for the 7th grade. As a consequence of such a procedure, they did not acquire content and competence for the 5th and the 6th grades; they did not acquire the necessary information and did not develop competences in the implementation of many important issues (e.g. Map of Poland, Earth Movements, Geographic Coordinates). It is true, however, that some parts of the content should be fulfilled in a Nature subject in a hitherto primary school, but one does not have any certainty if it was done properly. It is only up to the teacher whether the students will catch up with the backlog or just move on to the next level of content without looking at the canons of Geography. It turned out, however, that the

publishing house has hopefully placed an extra insert for students in the 7th grade textbook to revise some important content taken from the 5th and 6th grades.

According to research conducted by Szczęsna (2011) on students' geographical achievements before the gimnasium, it was concluded that the integration of the science content at school contributed to lowering the level of Natural science competences among students, including Geography. In addition, Natural science classes poorly prepared students for further geographical education at gimnasium, due to insufficient training of cognitive and practical skills. The research confirmed teachers' general assumption that especially the geographic and biological content in Nature subject classes was insufficient for further geographic and biological education at gymnasium. It should be noted that a biologist who teaches Nature – obviously being less competent than a geographer and vice versa – may deal with the geographic content superficially. The truth is that the primary school teachers of a variety of subjects (especially biologists, geographers, chemists and physicists) who completed an additional 2 or 3 term postgraduate studies became teachers of Nature.

6. Geography in the "new liceum"

The content of education as well as specific requirements are divided into 16 core subjects and 21 extended ones. It is assumed that they are to be studied from the 1st to the 4th grades in the following matrix of weekly hours: the 1st grade – 1 hour of basic level + 1 hour of extended level, at the 2nd, the 3rd and 4th grades (for technical college classes the 4th and 5th) – 2 hours of extended level. Geography is also taught at the same level at technical college. Although the same core curriculum is valid for technical college as it is for liceum, the course is spread over five years, with slightly different versions of basic and extended education. This article focuses primarily on Geography at liceum, on account of the fact that after completing the current gymnasium and a "new primary school" in 2019, 80% of young people will probably attend liceum.

In the 1st grade (students are 15/16 years old), the basis of physical Geography is being studied (as it was done in the 1970s and 1980s). The basic level comprises sections that analyse geographic information sources, geoinformation technologies and spatial data presentation methods, the Earth in the universe as well as spheres: an atmosphere, the hydrosphere, the lithosphere, the pedosphere and the biosphere (Project of the core curriculum for geography in upper secondary school, p. 8). Only the great tragedy of the earthquake and tsunami in Japan in 2011 has led to changes in the Geography curriculum in Japanese schools and more attention has been focused on the causes, effects and prevention of such catastrophes, as was stated by Ohnishi and Mitsuhashi (2013). It can be astonishing that geographic education in Japan did not illustrate the notion of the consequences of such disasters early enough, and the possibility of anticipating and preventing them.

If it were not for the use of modern information technology, it could be considered as a traditional physical Geography that used to be so adored by an older generation of Geography teachers. And it is quite possible that such a trend will continue on account of the fact that the use of modern information technology by some geographers is still very poor, especially in small towns.

The content of education and requirements for the 2nd grade at basic level cover the basics of socio-economic Geography, within the limits of the classical division into issues related to political divisions and differences in an economic development, population and urban transformation, the determinants and development of three (traditional) sectors of the economy (agriculture with forestry and fishing, industry with construction and services). It is, however, interesting to note that the fourth sector of intangible services has not been included. This grade concludes with the chapter covering conflicts of interest in bilateral relations between human beings and the geographical environment. At the extended level the content of education and requirements refer to the issues of cooperation and conflicts in the world, changes in social structures and settlement networks, trends in an economic development and diversification of husbandry, as well as contemporary transfor-

mations of the industrial and service sectors (Project of core curriculum for geography upper secondary school, p. 8).

At the moment it is difficult to estimate how many students will choose the extended version of Geography; it will possibly motivate their decision to pass the Matura exam in Geography. Nevertheless, it will probably be 20-25% of the population at liceum (just as in the pre-reform years).

In the 3rd grade at basic level the issues relating to the regional diversity of the natural environment of Poland, its socio-economic diversification and maritime affairs are to be studied. At the extended level in this grade, apart from the requirements related to the natural environment of selected regions of Poland, there are a number of requirements that apply to completely new issues at this stage of geographic education: a landscape diversity in Poland, a socio-cultural diversity in Poland, and the section of content intended to be conducted in the field concerning relations between elements of the geographic environment in one's own region. The author of this publication analysing the level of acquisition of selected competences among active Geography teachers (Osuch, 2010, 2012) found that only half of them can competently conduct field research, 10% of secondary school teachers cannot do it, and about 40% do it weakly and insufficiently. Especially at liceum this type of classes was hardly ever carried out, as the teachers openly admitted. At gymnasium the results of these studies were much more satisfactory, as there were more field activities in the curriculum, and teachers more open to innovations. Most of the Geography teachers at gymnasium comprised former primary school teachers who were forced to follow the 1999 reform to pursue various postgraduate studies and courses.

The 4th grade, according to the authors of the core curriculum, "occupies a special place in geographical education due to a greater maturity of students in perception of the surrounding world and the need to prepare for the Matura examination in Geography" (Project of core curriculum for geography upper secondary school, p. 8).

The extended version (the fact is that only such a form is possible in the last grade) includes issues related to, among others, environmental, political, social and economic problems of the modern world, the level and quality of life.

In addition to the systematic use of the atlas, geographic wall maps as well as the Internet cartographic resources, the authors of the core curriculum are especially concerned with the deployment of geographic information (GIS) technology. The objective of the usage of these geoinformation technologies and GIS applications is to transform Geography into a modern discipline and extend learning potential of students' cognitive sphere. Very ambitious goals were set and skills were identified that a student would develop through the use of geoinformation technology. These are as follows:

- searching for selected locations on the map;
- searching for data and information at geoportals;
- obtaining information and documents from various sources;
- map tool support (map navigation);
- analysis of aerial and satellite imagery and reasoning based on them;
- assessment of validity and reliability of data;
- using Google Earth;
- determining regularity or randomness of distribution of phenomena in the geographical space – identifying connections and co-occurrence in space;
- use of information and data for multimedia presentations (Project of core curriculum for geography upper secondary school).

It is a pity that the authors of the core curriculum have not paid due attention to the competences required by Geography teachers in this field, which are, unfortunately, very limited nowadays. It will be possible to develop these skills in additional courses for teachers and during postgraduate studies. Such a course has been planned by the Institute of Geography at the Pedagogical University in Cracow and ESRI Poland.

Geography will also be taught in a three-year vocational school, 1 hour per week for three years. In vocational schools – the element of vocational education after primary school – students are supposed to study theoretical basics

so as to be able to enter a profession. The core curriculum of Geography is considerably shallow in relation to that of the liceum, accentuating the human-environment relation. In the previous form of the two-year vocational school the subject was called "Geography with protection and shaping of the environment." It seems to be an attempt to return to a good tradition of vocational schools from the past, educating highly qualified workers mainly for industry and services and entering the labour market directly (without the Matura exams). In recent years, bitter criticism was levelled at vocational education in Poland due to its too narrow education in specialities that were not always needed for a dynamically changing labour market. Vocational schools did not educate young people as far as the current conditions of the labour market are concerned. Moreover, the superficial core curriculum of general subjects did not allow for mobility and independence of graduates in the labour market. There was indeed an unshakeable conviction, a stereotype claiming that young people attending vocational schools were for sure worse off, neglected, without prospects and ambitions. Recently however there has been a considerable demand for well-educated graduates to perform specific professions, good mechanics, plumbers, and even miners. The reconstruction of the vocational school is supposed to change the status quo.

7. Conclusions

The profound changes – planned and quickly introduced in 2017 – in the educational system in Poland are revolutionary and involve practically all levels of education – from kindergarten, primary school to liceum, and even higher education.

These changes do involve students, teachers and parents who entertain very different or even diametrically opposed opinions on the reform or some of its elements. Geography as the subject taught at all stages of education is likewise prone to changes in this process that stresses a different concept of teaching this subject. It is difficult to predict what the future holds as far as teaching Geography in Polish schools is concerned. The truth is that political changes have triggered changes in many areas of life, including education. Education should not depend on politics, but unfortunately it does in many situations. Education certainly needs transforming, but should it be so revolutionary? Possibly more evolutionary transformations could be better since one cannot experiment on children and adolescents. Time will tell whether these changes will improve the functioning of the educational system in Poland, whether they will increase the interest of young people in Geography, whether the significance of Geography as a subject will increase, or whether the students will achieve a much desired high level of competency to meet the challenges of a dynamically changing labour market in both Poland and European countries.

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