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## CHANGES AND DIFFERENCES IN POLES' HIERARCHY OF VALUES – ON BASIS OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL SURVEY

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present the changes that have place with regard to Poles' value system over the last 12 years, as well as to demonstrate differences based on sex, level of education and household income level. The analysis was based on the results of the European Social Survey (ESS). The research results indicate that the hierarchy of values cherished by Poles does not undergo significant changes. The most important values are security, universalism and benevolence. The least significant values include hedonism, stimulation and power. There are no identifiable differences in the hierarchies of values of women and men. However, there are noticeable differences depending on the level of education, household income level and age of surveyed respondents.

**Keywords:** human values, hierarchy of values, existing data

**JEL classification:** A14, J17, Z13

## Introduction

Values create a framework for individual's thoughts, stances and behaviours. They form a consistent system that makes it possible for a person not only to survive, but also to achieve happiness in private life as well as professional success and satisfaction. The adopted value system influences one's everyday life, the choice of future directions to pursue as well as one's attitude towards other people (Lachowski, 2012, pp. 19–21).

A system of values is also a significant part of the culture an individual lives in and it forms the reality, towards which one must take a stance. Values stimulate and shape an individual's awareness, they motivate him/her to take up activity, influence the intended purposes of actions and in addition integrate people and unify societies, stimulate, orientate and sustain development (Dyczewski, 2001, p. 39).

The term “value”<sup>1</sup> is used in philosophy, sociology, psychology, cultural anthropology, economics and management theory.<sup>2</sup> That is the reason why its definitions differ and why it is presented from different perspectives. As a result numerous different theories of values and various research methods are used. Due to the existing diversity of hierarchies of values, while looking for similarities between them, we have to realize, what the possible levels of analysis are. We can name at least five following levels of analyzing values and hierarchies of values. There are: 1. individual level, 2. group level (applicable to e.g. family, students taking a class, group of friends), 3. community level (applicable to a local or regional community), 4. culture level (applicable to a nation, ethnic group) and 5. transcultural level (basic human level). The aforementioned levels correspond with the following hierarchies: 1. individual, 2. group, 3. typical for a community, 4. model (typical for a culture) and 5. universal (Brzozowski, 2007, p. 11). According to J. Szymczyk research into values can be conducted from two perspectives. The first one is the “macrostructural” perspective (“orientation towards the society”) that comprises viewing different forms and categories of social life through the lens of axiology. It is not excluding the possibility of conducting research from the perspective of the individual (“orientation towards the individual”) i.e. trying to identify certain values in the individuals under study, or the sets of values or at least some kind of “axiological atmosphere” that the subjects subscribe to. In connection with the aforementioned perspectives, the author divides values into: sociocentric (viewing reality through the lens of social systems and groups) and

<sup>1</sup> The term *value* is often substituted with numerous similar terms such as: judgement, norm, aspirations, goals, objectives, interests. Jałowiecki (1976), p. 206.

<sup>2</sup> An overview of issues connected with the ways of defining values in philosophy, economics, cultural anthropology and other social sciences can be found in the anthology *Wartość dla klienta...* (2011).

allocentric (perceiving the world from the standpoint of another human being as an autonomous unit) (Szymczyk, 2010, p. 4).

Among examples of cyclical research concerned with the values of Polish society one can name the World Value Survey (WVS), the European Value Survey (EVS), the European Social Survey (ESS) or surveys of public opinion research agencies (e.g. CBOS) (*Wartości i normy*, 2013). Results of research into the Poles' system of values can be found among others in the following works *Wartości i zmiany* (2012), P. Brzozowski (2007), whereas deliberations on the theme are included in the works by e.g. S. Nowak (2007) or J. Szymczyk (2010) or M. Ziółkowski (2006).

The purpose of this paper is to present the changes in the Poles' values system that have been taking place during the last 12 years, as well as to show the differences in terms of sex, age, education level and household income. The results of research conducted within the European Social Survey (ESS) for the years 2002–2013<sup>3</sup> were the basis for the analyses.

## **1. Research and analysis methodology**

The analysis of changes in the hierarchy of values has been based on the existing primary data of a subjective kind. The data originates from the results of international comparative research (European Social Survey, ESS). The objective of the ESS research is to observe the social changes happening in Europe, i.e. changes in attitudes towards key issues, changes in systems of values and behaviours. Some of the questions asked within individual rounds of the survey are the same and some of them (the rotating modules) are subject to change. This analysis uses the answers to questions asked within the core module regarding values held. The measurement of values is based on the theory of S. Schwartz, which proposes the existence of 10 values that can be arranged according to their contents in such a way that categories of values create a comprehensive system linked by relations of content similarity and dissimilarity as well as compatibility and conflict of motives that the contents relate to (Brzozowski, 2007, p. 9). The measurement of values held by the subjects was based on a specially constructed scale comprising of 21 statements. The answers to the questions were scaled on a 6-level ordering scale.<sup>4</sup> For the needs of further analyses the assumption of quasi-quantitative nature of the ordering scale has been adopted. The reliability of the scale has been estimated using the

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<sup>3</sup> When the article was submitted to the editorial board (February 2015), the results of 2014 survey were not yet available. The results of the seventh round of the survey were published in October 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Where 1 stood for "very much like me", whereas 6 stood for "completely not like me".

Cronbach alpha. The results calculated for the individual rounds of the survey are above 0.8, which means that the scales are characterized by a high level of reliability.

In the next stage the answers were divided into groups corresponding with the basic values defined by S. Schwartz (1992, 2005). The characteristics of individual values were presented in Table 1. Based on the received answers the indexes have been determined for individual values. Each of the indexes is the difference between the mean of aspects forming a given value and the mean of all the answers.

Table 1. The characteristics of human values according to Schwartz

No.	Name	Characteristics
1	Self-Direction	Independent thought and action: choosing, creating, exploring
2	Stimulation	Excitement, novelty and challenge in life
3	Hedonism	Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself
4	Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards
5	Power	Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources
6	Security	Safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships, and of self
7	Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms
8	Tradition	Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide the self
9	Benevolence	Preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact
10	Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature

Source: own work based on data available on the website <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org> (access date: 15.07.2014).

The categories of values described above form a circular structure ordered according to the content relation “similarity – dissimilarity” of values and according to “compatibility – conflict of interest”. The first proposition for ordering is based on the principle of similarity, which enables us to identify group values (benevolence, tradition, conformity), individual values (self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power) and common (mixed) values i.e. universalism and security. The second proposition of ordering is also situated within a two-dimensional space and assumes that the two extreme poles corresponding to the dimensions should be marked as: self-transcendence – self-enhancement and openness to change – conservation. The details regarding the placement of individual values are presented in Figures 1 and 2.

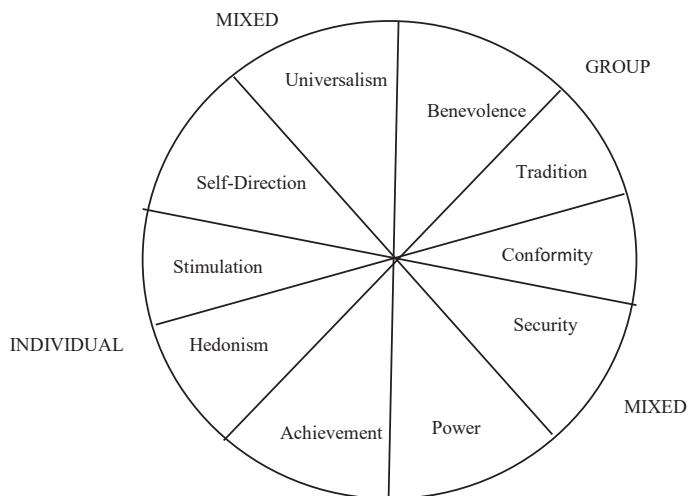


Figure 1. Ordering the categories of values according to the principle of interest

Source: Brzozowski (2007), p. 61.

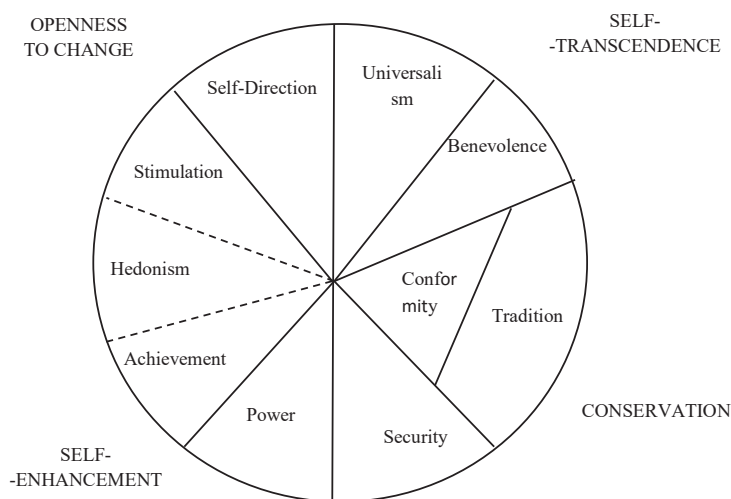


Figure 2. Theoretical model of relations between the ten kinds of values based on the principle of compatibility and conflict

Source: Schwartz (2003).

## 2. Changes in Poles' hierarchy of values

The comparison of hierarchies of values originating from six rounds of the research has been conducted using the frequency of declarations of a particularly high degree of identification with people who hold the individual values (1 or 2 on a scale from 1 to 6).<sup>5</sup> As a result of analyzing the data presented in Table 3 we can see the following ranking:

1. Within the hierarchy of individual's values the most fundamental domain contains the values associated with universalism, benevolence and security. On average, between 70% and 80% of surveyed population identified with them on a level of 1 or 2, depending on the round of the research. Most frequently the subjects identified themselves with the following aspects comprising the values: the conviction that all people should be treated equally (ca. 80% of answers in each round of the survey); loyalty towards friends (between 78% and 85% of answers); the conviction of a duty to care for the environment (between 73% and 81% of answers). The issues of understanding and caring for other people are an exception in that group. In these cases the percentage of answers is lower than in the aforementioned examples and falls within the range between 55% and 69%. That is why it is difficult to draw a clear line between the first and the second group of values.
2. The second place belongs to the domain of values connected with tradition, conformity<sup>6</sup> and self-direction. These values were indicated as especially important by 45% to 69% of participants. In particular, they pointed at: the duty to behave properly (over 60% of answers in each round of the survey) and the importance of being humble and modest (between 47% and 53% of answers). It is worth noting that there is a high percentage of answers asserting the importance of tradition and making one's own decisions regarding one's own matters, which brings them closer to the first group.
3. The next place is occupied by the group of values related to stimulation, hedonism, achievement and power. It needs to be emphasized that the individual aspects comprising the values have a different meaning in the opinion of participants and as a result the percentage of highest responses varies between 20% and 45%. Within this group the participants identified themselves most frequently with the importance of getting respect from others (between 43% and 52% of answers) as well as with trying

<sup>5</sup> The assessment of degree of identification was based on a 6-point scale, where 1 stood for "very much like me" and 6 for "completely not like me."

<sup>6</sup> Conformity and benevolence values both promote cooperative and supportive social relations. However, benevolence values provide an internalized motivational base for such behaviour. In contrast, conformity values promote cooperation in order to avoid negative outcomes for self.

out new things in life (over 45% of answers in each survey). In contrast, the lowest degree of identification is declared in case of the importance of being rich and seeking exciting adventures.

Table 2. Ranking of aspects comprising individual values according to the frequency of responses with the level of identification “1” and “2” (on a scale of “1 to 6” in %)

Value	Aspects comprising a given value	2002		2004		2006		2008		2010		2012	
		Percent-age of answers	ranking	Percent-age of answers	ranking	Percent-age of answers	ranking	Percent-age of answers	ranking	Percent-age of answers	ranking	Percent-age of answers	ranking
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Conformity	important to do what is told and follow rules	67.8	8	62.9	10	64.2	9	60.9	11	59.4	11	64.2	11
	important to behave properly	67.7	9	68.8	8	68.5	8	61.9	10	63.8	9	69.0	9
Tradition	important to be humble and modest, not draw attention	51.6	12	51.4	12	50.9	12	47.7	13	48.6	14	53.8	12
	important to follow traditions and customs	73.4	6	74.2	6	72.8	7	69.4	6	70.8	6	74.8	7
Benevolence	important to help people and care for others well-being	60.5	10	64.5	9	61.1	11	63.3	8	68.0	8	69.4	8
	important to be loyal to friends and devote to people close	79.1	4	84.1	1	81.1	2	78.3	1	82.0	1	84.6	2
Universalism	important that people are treated equally and have equal opportunities	85.0	1	81.3	2	82.8	1	77.0	2	80.1	2	84.9	1
	important to understand different people	55.0	11	53.4	11	64.1	10	62.3	9	63.2	10	68.6	10
	important to care for nature and environment	75.1	5	78.1	4	76.1	4	73.4	4	74.7	5	81.1	3

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Self-direction	important to think new ideas and be creative	46.7	14	45.7	14	45.8	15	48.7	12	49.4	13	48.6	14
	important to make own decisions and be free	73.0	7	72.3	7	74.6	5	68.9	7	70.6	7	76.9	6
Stimulation	important to try new and different things in life	47.6	13	45.1	15	47.6	14	45.4	15	45.1	15	46.1	16
	important to seek adventures and have an exciting life	21.0	20	22.5	20	18.8	20	18.0	21	19.3	20	20.8	20
Hedonism	important to have a good time	28.7	18	28.4	18	26.5	18	28.3	18	25.4	18	29.3	18
	important to seek fun and things that give pleasure	27.5	19	26.5	19	25.9	19	24.5	19	23.0	19	25.2	19
Achievement	important to show abilities and be admired	37.4	17	42.7	17	38.3	17	38.7	17	42.7	17	45.4	17
	important to be successful and that people recognize achievements	40.8	16	43.2	16	40.7	16	40.7	16	44.0	16	47.4	15
Power	important to be rich, have money and expensive things	20.2	21	17.5	21	15.5	21	18.8	20	19.3	21	18.6	21
	important to get respect from others	42.9	15	50.2	13	50.0	13	46.9	14	50.1	12	52.6	13
Security	important to live in secure and safe surroundings	80.6	2	79.6	3	78.3	3	73.6	3	76.2	3	80.6	4
	important that government is strong and ensures safety	80.4	3	77.3	5	73.7	6	70.1	5	75.9	4	79.7	5

Source: own work based on survey data (<http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org>, access date: 15.07.2014).



By comparing the ranking based on the results of the last and the first survey, we can notice the changes in its composition (see Table 2). The importance of the following aspects has increased:

- loyalty towards friends (up from the 4th place to the 2nd place),
- belief of a duty of caring for nature (up from the 5th place to the 3rd place),
- making one's own decisions in matters regarding oneself (up from the 6th place to the 7th place),
- helping other people (up from the 10th place to the 8th place),
- hearing out people with different views and convictions (up from the 11th place to the 10th place),
- the desire to get respect from others (up from the 15th place to the 13th place)
- achieving meaningful success (up from the 16th place to the 15th place).

A decrease in importance can be noticed in the following cases:

- living in safe surroundings (down from the 2nd to the 4th place),
- expectation to be protected by the state from all kinds of danger (down from the 3rd to the 5th place),
- need of abiding by rules and regulations (down from the 8th to the 11th place),
- following religious and family customs (down from the 6th to the 7th place),
- willingness to seek out new activities (down from the 13th to the 17th place).

There is also a group of stances the position of which has not changed in comparison to the first survey. They include among others:

- creative approach and coming up with new ideas (in the 14th place),
- desire to be rich (in the 21th place),
- conviction that people around the world should be treated equally (in the 1st place),
- being modest and humble (in the 12th place ),
- displaying one's abilities (in the 17th place).

More general conclusions on the changes in Poles' hierarchy of values can be formulated based on indicators determined for each of the domains of values<sup>7</sup> (Table 3).

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<sup>7</sup> Each of the calculated indicator scores is the difference between the average for aspects comprising a given value and the average for all the answers. Before the scores were calculated the coding of the answers had been changed. Now 1 is the lowest score and 6 is the highest.

Table 3. Indicator scores for individual human values

	ESS round					
	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012
	average indicator score					
Security	0.66	0.59	0.51	0.46	0.56	0.63
Conformity	0.32	0.24	0.26	0.20	0.2	0.25
Tradition	0.21	0.19	0.17	0.15	0.13	0.23
Benevolence	0.43	0.49	0.41	0.47	0.52	0.55
Universalism	0.45	0.42	0.49	0.48	0.48	0.57
Self-Direction	0.12	0.12	0.09	0.15	0.15	0.18
Stimulation	-0.79	-0.82	-0.77	-0.77	-0.81	-0.79
Hedonism	-0.97	-0.99	-0.94	-0.93	-1.07	-1.00
Achievement	-0.44	-0.36	-0.37	-0.37	-0.32	-0.27
Power	-0.80	-0.73	-0.71	-0.66	-0.61	-0.66

Source: own work based on survey data (<http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org>, access date: 15.07.2014).

High indicator stores are maintained with regard to security (between 0.51 and 0.66), benevolence (0.41-0.55) and universalism (0.42–0.57). In contrast, the following values have a negative indicator score: stimulation (between -0.81 and -0.77), hedonism (between -1.07 and -0.93) and power (between -0.8 and -0.61). The calculated indicator scores show that the importance of some groups of values is not subject to change and remains on a similar level in consecutive rounds. This applies to: hedonism, stimulation, security and tradition. On the other hand an increase in indicator scores is noticeable in the case of: self-direction (an increase by 50%), achievement (by 62%), benevolence (by 28%), universalism (by 27%) and power (by 21%).

Ordering values according to the “interest principle” demonstrates that within Poles’ system of values a much greater importance is ascribed to values belonging to the categories of common and group values. Values comprising the group of individual interest have a lesser importance. By ordering the values according to the principle of “compatibility and conflict” we can come to the conclusions that the Poles’ set of values is rather directed towards conservation than openness to change. At the same time self-transcendence prevails over self-enhancement.

### 3. Differences in Poles’ hierarchy of values

The next part of the analysis consisted of examining whether there are differences in declared values based on age, sex, level of education and household income level. The differences pertain to both the place in the hierarchy of values, as well as the determined indicator score. Detailed data is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Poles' hierarchy of values based on the indicator score with differentiating variables included

	Security		Conform- ity		Tradition		Benevo- lence		Universal- ism		Self- direction		Stimula- tion		Hedonism		Achieve- ment		Power	
Level of education																				
Elementary school or lower	0.89	2	0.8	4	0.9	1	0.39	5	0.82	3	-0.49	7	-1.39	10	-1.37	9	-0.7	8	-0.49	6
Middle school	0.31	2	-0.29	8	-0.4	9	0.48	1	0.23	3	0.23	3	-0.18	6	-0.25	7	0.11	5	-0.40	9
Vocational school	0.59	1	0.28	5	0.28	4	0.34	3	0.47	2	0.22	6	-0.70	9	-0.81	10	-0.28	7	-0.63	8
Secondary school	0.66	1	0.23	5	0.16	6	0.56	3	0.58	2	0.23	4	-0.75	9	-1.07	10	-0.25	7	-0.69	8
Higher education	0.52	3	0.21	5	0.04	6	0.61	2	0.62	1	0.40	4	-0.85	9	-1.09	10	-0.12	7	-0.65	8
Net household income																				
1st decile group	0,71	1	0.55	5	0.66	3	0.57	4	0.71	1	-0.08	6	-1.12	9	-1.20	10	-0.45	7	-0.70	8
2nd decile group	0,74	1	0.39	5	0.50	4	0.55	3	0.64	2	0.01	6	-0.87	9	-1.18	10	-0.39	7	-0.78	8
3rd decile group	0,68	1	0.33	5	0.39	4	0.62	3	0.65	2	0.13	6	-0.98	9	-1.18	10	-0.32	7	-0.69	8
4th decile group	0,67	1	0.32	5	0.34	4	0.58	3	0.60	2	0.25	6	-0.81	8	-1.04	10	-0.40	7	-0.82	9
5th decile group	0,62	1	0.34	4	0.23	5	0.52	2	0.49	3	0.08	6	-0.71	9	-0.90	10	-0.32	7	-0.60	8
6th decile group	0,65	1	0.20	6	0.23	5	0.56	3	0.58	2	0.26	4	-0.77	9	-0.96	10	-0.36	7	-0.70	8
7th decile group	0,66	1	0.24	4	0.20	6	0.57	3	0.60	2	0.24	4	-0.93	9	-1.01	10	-0.26	7	-0.61	8
8th decile group	0,59	1	0.18	5	0.07	6	0.56	2	0.55	3	0.30	4	-0.70	8	-0.88	10	-0.16	7	-0.78	9
9th decile group	0,55	3	0.09	5	-0.01	6	0.57	1	0.57	1	0.25	4	-0.56	8	-0.87	10	-0.17	7	-0.72	9
10th decile group	0,31	4	0.06	5	-0.01	6	0.52	2	0.56	1	0.50	3	-0.57	8	-0.88	10	-0.15	7	-0.62	9
Age																				
15–19	0.27	2	-0.32	9	-0.28	8	0.44	1	0.23	3	0.22	4	-0.19	6	-0.27	7	0.17	5	-0.41	10
20–29	0.41	3	-0.11	6	-0.22	7	0.51	1	0.44	2	0.28	4	-0.47	8	-0.59	10	<b>0,00</b>	5	-0.49	9
30–44	0.52	2	0.13	5	0.07	6	0.53	1	0.52	2	0.25	4	-0.63	8	-0.95	10	-0.10	7	-0.63	8
45–59	0.72	1	0.40	5	0.41	4	0.59	3	0.63	2	0.20	6	-0.93	9	-1.17	10	-0.43	7	-0.74	8
60 and above	0.89	1	0.65	4	0.68	3	0.59	5	0.74	2	<b>0,00</b>	6	-1.21	9	-1.39	10	-0.59	7	-0.78	8
Sex																				
Male	0.50	1	0.15	5	0.12	6	0.45	3	0.48	2	0.26	4	-0.68	9	-0.76	10	-0.23	7	-0.53	8
Female	0.75	1	0.35	4	0.33	5	0.65	3	0.66	2	0.11	6	-0.90	9	-1.24	10	-0.31	7	-0.77	8

Source: own work based on survey data (<http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org>, access date: 15.07.2014).

Statistical analysis of indicator scores proves that the hierarchy of values of male and female respondents is the same. Differences between individual values are not statistically relevant. However a difference can be noticed with regard to the place of individual values in the hierarchy. This applies to conformity, tradition and self-direction. Differences in declared values are also based on the level of education. The result of variance analysis shows that the hypothesis that average indicator scores remain the same in view of the same level of education should be dismissed. Respondents with elementary school education value tradition (0.90) and security (0.89). Indicators for these values decrease along with the increasing level of education.<sup>8</sup> For subjects with higher education the indicator scores are 0.04 and 0.52 respectively. An opposite situation has been identified in the case of self-direction (−0.49), stimulation (−1.39) and achievement (−0.70). Low indicator scores increase along with the changing level of education.

A similar pattern is noticeable, if net household income is taken into account.<sup>9</sup> Participants with a low income level ascribe greater significance to security, conformity and tradition than subjects with the highest income level. It is worth noting that regardless of income level similar indicator scores apply to benevolence and there is also little difference in the case of valuing universalism. However, it does not translate to identical places in the hierarchy. Both values occupy different but close places in the hierarchy in individual income groups.

In the case of the remaining values i.e. self-direction and achievement it is not possible to identify a clear tendency, since in spite of low scores for the lowest income groups and higher scores for the highest income groups the scores for the middle decile groups are diverse. This indicates that the significance of these values for those groups is diversified.

The last variable included in the analysis was the age of the respondents. The result of variance analysis proves that the hypothesis that average indicator scores remain the same regardless of age should be dismissed. Calculated scores indicate that the youngest subjects (i.e. aged between 15 and 19) place lower value on security comparing to other age groups. A similar situation is present in the case of universalism. This age group is also characterized by an opposition to conformity and breaking with tradition. Both values occupy last places in the hierarchy of values of the youngest respondents while in the following age groups they gain an increasingly greater meaning. A reverse situation is noticeable in the case of self-direction,

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<sup>8</sup> Subjects with middle school education are an exception from the observed relation. This group consists predominantly (90%) of people aged between 15 and 19. In that case including middle school education in the analysis would be equivalent to conducting an analysis based on age.

<sup>9</sup> Statistically relevant differences between average indicator scores for individual decile groups were identified in the case of all the values except for benevolence and power.

hedonism and achievement. Youngest participants ascribe greater importance to these values comparing to older respondents comprising other age groups.

## **Conclusions**

The results of ESS indicate that the hierarchy of values cherished by Poles remains relatively stable. The most significant values are security, universalism and benevolence. The least important values are hedonism, stimulation and power. The significance of the following values has not been subject to change: hedonism, stimulation, security and tradition. On the other hand we can observe an increase in importance in case of the following values: self-direction, achievement, benevolence, universalism and power.

There are no identifiable differences in the hierarchies of values of women and men. However there are noticeable differences depending on the level of education, household income level and age of surveyed respondents. The increase in the level of education translates into a decline in the value of indicators related to tradition and security, and increase in the value of self-determination, stimulation and needs of accomplishments. Great importance to tradition and security is also attached by the people on the lowest income, while the importance of these values decreases among those with the highest income.

The youngest respondents attach less importance to security issues, they have less understanding of the issues of universalism and tradition. Among them there is also lack of consent for conformity. This situation is changing in the successive age groups where you can observe the increase in the value of respective indicators.

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