

Rozalia Ligus\*

## **SCHOOLS THAT “STAY AWAY” FROM THE COMMUNITY. IS IT A LOST CHANCE FOR COMMUNITY LEARNING AND DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP IN NGO SCHOOLS?**

Gert Biesta, in the book *Learning Democracy in School and Society* (2011) looks at the relationships between education, lifelong learning and democratic citizenship from the “wide angle, emphasizing the importance of the democratic quality of the processes and practices that make up the everyday lives of children, young people and adults for their ongoing formation as democratic citizens” (Biesta 2011, p. 1). Despite the fact that there are different models of cooperation between schools and local agents and not all are the ideal ones that promote the symmetrical participation of all partners, as Roman Dorczak (2012) describes, usually in small local communities there is the tradition of cooperation among all the agents that was described by Etienne Wenger as a “community of practice” (Wenger 1998, p. 5; Kurantowicz 2007, pp. 36-38; Kurantowicz 2012, pp. 15-16).

### **School, democracy and informal learning against the background of selected theoretical concepts**

At least five dimensions of local communities (territorial, demographic, institutional, socio-cultural and regulative) inspire transversal, intergenerational, and informal learning and empower the ties between the different local bodies, including schools (Pilch 1995). As the evidence indicates, the small local community becomes an educational space through everyday interactions between agents because those are the people/agents that share the values, aims, interests, socio-cultural heritage (tradition, identity, affiliation, neighborhood, forms of social lives, common biography of the place, landscape) and everything that was experienced individually or in a group and that helps in naming the identity of both the place and the individuals (Theiss 2001; Kurantowicz 2012; Hernik & Malinowska 2015). In such a small traditional community there is not much difference between public or non-public schools in the context of cooperation

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\* **Rozalia Ligus**, PhD – University of Wrocław, Faculty of Historical & Pedagogical Sciences, Institute of Pedagogy, Adult Education & Cultural Studies Department, Poland; e-mail: rozalia.ligus@uwr.edu.pl.

with the local agents, because all of them participate in local social life through the transfer of local knowledge, the mutual exchange of every day experiences, and the involvement of people in local actions. The mutual influences of the public and non-public spheres create the conditions for informal education of all – the school agents, the local institutions and the local people. The tradition of school participation in local development has been conceptualized and introduced as, the “environmental school” or the “open school”, for example, and it is said that the “symbiosis” of school with the social environment has always been an important issue for *public pedagogy* and that it influences community learning on all levels: macro, meso, micro (Znaniński 1973, p. 189 cited in Winiarski 2015, p. 57; Zachorska 2002). The concept of promoting learning potential that is embedded in the mutual cooperation between local communities and schools is well-known and has appeared in different places around the world<sup>1</sup>. One of the older concepts that has been revitalized in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is *public pedagogy* which according to Biesta (2011, p. 1) has strong connections with current educational processes and social development<sup>2</sup>.

The discussion of the educational work that can be done to support the public quality of common spaces and places focuses on three interpretations of the idea of public pedagogy: [...] as a pedagogy for the public [...] as a pedagogy of the public and [...] as the enactment of a concern for the public quality of human togetherness. The latter form of public pedagogy neither teaches nor erases the political by bringing it under a regime of learning, but rather opens up the possibility for forms of human togetherness through which freedom can appear, that is, forms of human togetherness which contribute to the ‘becoming public’ of spaces and places (Biesta 2011, p. 1).

An American interpretation of *public pedagogy* reveals at least ‘five primary categories of extant public pedagogy research: (a) citizenship within and beyond schools, (b) popular culture and everyday life, (c) informal institutions and public spaces, (d) dominant cultural discourses, and (e) public intellectualism and social activism’ (Sandlin, O’Malley & Burdick 2011; Malewski 2016; Skrzypczak 2016) and in these categories a concept of *public pedagogy* is directed to all “users” of social space, including

<sup>1</sup> Selected concepts of school cooperation with the local community: The Transparent School Model introduced by Jerold Bauch in the USA at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Mendel 2009, pp. 185-210). Reggio Emilia (Italy), in the 1960s ‘... an impulse for the Reggio experiment in the early education was the experience of fascism that taught the locals, that ‘Men subordinate and obedient are dangerous, while building the new society we must necessarily [...] nurture and preserve the vision of the child, that can think and act independently. [...]. A community has got a strong local infrastructure – provocative, supportive, exchangeable. Completion of this infrastructure should be tools supporting participation and discussion, such as pedagogical documentation, rooted in democratic practices developed in Reggio Emilia’ (Dahlberg 2000, p. 177, cited in Moss 2014, p. 31).

<sup>2</sup> The Public pedagogy concept was introduced for the first time in 1894 in the USA with a meaning close to ‘social pedagogy’ (Skrzypczak 2016, p. 88).

the processes that can be investigated according to the categories mentioned above. Thus lifelong learning becomes a project for all social participants.

The aim of institutional models (for instance schools), that promote social dialogue among all local bodies, is focused on creating local ties and becoming the centre of cultural life and environmental education, and it supports universal values such as justice, equality, liberty, solidarity, truth, fairness, dignity, autonomy, kindness, resourcefulness, protectiveness. As Mikołaj Winiarski concludes, the potential of the learning community is embedded in the whole local environment (material and symbolic) that is either a source for the educational tasks undertaken by schools, or it bears the huge potential of pro-school social forces that can be seen in parents' and students' participation in local associations, local government or in any other local actions that promote citizenship values (Winiarski 2015, pp. 57-61). The conceptualization of mutual cooperation between the school institutions and the social milieus that support informal learning of all and create the conditions for citizenship and democracy is widely discussed, promoted and applied and is introduced in the international project *Research and Innovation in Education for Sustainable Development* (2012-2014) (Lambrechts & Hindson 2016). The most popular expectations directed at the small local schools in Poland are explained as follows:

In the Polish conditions of dynamic development of local democracy, of expressive social revival and civic engagement in various spheres of life and in the functioning of the local community – especially security in the educational, cultural, social and welfare spheres – school, due to its pedagogical professionalism, territorial settlement and its universality, remains a key institution of environmental education, and it teaches socio-cultural animation at the local level (Winiarski 2015, p. 62).

The non-public schools in Poland embodied the promise to create the conditions for the type of bottom-up discursive practices (Putkiewicz & Wiłkomirska 2004) that Habermas recognizes as deliberative education for the development of deliberative democracy (Englund 2012, pp. 27-42).

### **From ideas to practice – a quick review of non-public schools in Poland**

The first non-public schools in Poland were allowed to be opened according to regulations established in 1961 but at that time only the Catholic Church managed to organize some secondary schools in Markowice, Pobiedziska, Kraków, and there was one non-public Catholic University in Lublin<sup>3</sup> (Putkiewicz & Wiłkomirska 2004,

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<sup>3</sup> There were also about 20 vocational schools run by the trade unions. By comparison, at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the years 1918-1932, there were over 800 private schools and 30% of students attended those schools (Putkiewicz & Wiłkomirska 2004, p. 11; Nalaskowski 2002, p. 302).

p. 11; Nalaskowski 2002, p. 302). At the end of the year 1988 A Congress of The Civic Educational Association (Społeczne Towarzystwo Oświatowe, STO) was established and in one month the first application for non-public school registration was submitted<sup>4</sup>.

The founding Congress of STO was a real euphoria [...]. Its participants went home with a strong decision to establish independent educational institutions. 'On the last day of December 1988 the STO was finally registered, this act was only the end of a few years of efforts made by a few people believing that de-monopolization of education means repairing it (Nalaskowski 1995, p. 5).

That was one of the most important social actions in the beginning of the year 1989. It happened before the political system in Poland was changed to a democratic one<sup>5</sup>. The Non-public schools broke the educational monopoly of the state. The program declaration of the STO claimed that the socialization of school can be achieved by widening autonomy and creating an internal system of decision-making in which teachers, students and parents are represented equally<sup>6</sup>. Till the end of the year 1989 ten more non-public schools were opened and during the next fifteen years up to 2004 there were 1000 of them including primary, lower secondary (gimnazjum) and general secondary schools (lyceum) led by different organizations in the private sector (Putkiewicz & Wilkomirska 2004, p. 9). Since the early 'nineties then, the number of schools in the private sector has been increasing systematically, even though the total number of primary schools in Poland is decreasing, especially in villages, the countryside or in small towns<sup>7</sup>.

The evaluation reports of the social and educational achievements of non-public schools were published quite systematically from 1990 till 2004 (Nalaskowski 1995; 2002; Putkiewicz & Wilkomirska 2004, p. 9) and they revealed that in the early 'nineties the state educational bodies were quite sceptical towards the non-public schools which had been expected to be more a supplement to state education institutions, but in fact they appeared to be a parallel educational option. The evaluation reports were focused on the social structure of non-public schools, their role in establishing the new democratic system, innovative teaching approaches, the quality of educational programs, on their values and capabilities. According to the data, two paradigms were confronted in school practices. The positivist paradigm, where the teachers from state schools were described as promoters of scrupulousness, patience and as experienced craftspeople,

<sup>4</sup> The author's school, led by Prof. A. Nalaskowski, was registered according to the Decision No 1 dated 24 of April 1989 (Nalaskowski 1995; 2002, pp. 301-302).

<sup>5</sup> The first democratic election was held on 4<sup>th</sup> June 1989 and that day is symbolically perceived as the beginning of the democratic system.

<sup>6</sup> Deklaracja Programowa STO, <http://www.sto.org.pl/deklaracja-programowa> [20.04.2017].

<sup>7</sup> In 2015/16 the number of primary schools in total was 13,563 and 1080 of them were the non-public primary schools. See Central Statistical Office, Education in 2015/16, Statistical information and elaboration, Warsaw 2016, <http://stat.gov.pl> [20.04.2017].

and the humanistic paradigm, according to which most non-public teachers were perceived as both experts in their subjects and as tutors caring for pupils (Putkiewicz & Wiłkomirska 2004, p. 16).

## **Two perspectives on the development of non-public schools**

One of the first qualitative reports, a summary of the first four years of the existence of non-public schools, is described in *Szansa szkoły z wyboru* (1993/1995) by Aleksander Nalaskowski. He carried out an analysis of the obstacles and mistakes that schools struggle with all over the country. It was said there were three main sources of the crises: the organizational problems, curriculum doubts and staff crises. All of them caused different kinds of oppression in schools that in turn influenced the former idealistic picture of the schools (Nalaskowski 1995; 2002).

### **a) *Struggling for ... the perspective of the school headmaster***

The biggest problem was the answer to the question “Who is the owner of the school?” – parents, teachers, NGOs? The next problems were caused by hasty and romantic attempts to innovate that were not accepted and finally came up against the criticism of the parents (Nalaskowski 1995; 2002). Those first years generated a few myths that had the power of a double-edged weapon. Many newly established schools, for example, disappeared because they believed that they could work without precise pedagogical concepts but with at least a flat in which to have the school meetings. It was in fact not true that non-public education was welcomed. The more schools were opened, the more enemies of non-public schools appeared. Next, while on the one hand the parents insisted on teachers being demanding towards their children, on the other hand ambitious teachers with interesting programs often did not meet the parents’ expectations who had wanted slightly less lazy schools than the public ones. The tension between ‘too much’ but/and “not enough” was a real problem in communication with parents (Nalaskowski 2002, p. 301-310). Parents started dominating the management and many school headteachers struggled with the crisis of having no support at all (Nalaskowski 1995, p. 32).

### **b) *Lost chance...? – the researchers’ perspective***

The most important values of the non-public sector in education were the promise and hope of promoting democracy through opening up self-directed spaces for all educational practitioners and creating for them the conditions to negotiate, share support, evaluate and look for solutions together (Putkiewicz & Wiłkomirska 2004;

Zbróg 2010, p. 145). A set of good practices was described in a qualitative report, *Szkoły autorskie w Polsce: realizacje edukacyjnych utopii*, published in 2001 by Monika Figiel with a detailed description of different authors' schools which explained to what extent utopian ideas were the foundation of experiments in non-public schools in the 'nineties and how they succeeded<sup>8</sup>. Apart from an innovative education non-public schools could have instilled in the system the values of the life-world, which include concern for others, ethical dilemmas and democratic principles. "These more or less spontaneous relationships, ranks and movements that seize, condense and strengthen resonance in the public sphere, where social problems are found in areas of private life" (Habermas 2005, p. 386). The years between 1989 and 1999 were a very fruitful time for the development of non-public education on all levels, from preschools to higher education institutions. This was also a decade of influencing public education through the alternative school forms, methods, approaches, activities and actions that non-public schools widely promoted. Thus, the development of models and the exchange of good practices between the non-public and public schools diversified the provision of education significantly and in addition the public educational sector also received some support from NGOs<sup>9</sup>. When the school reform was introduced in 1999 with an obligatory curriculum it was stressed that cultural heritage, regional education, and civic education should be based largely on cooperation with local entities (Dz.U. 1999, nr 12, poz. 96). In practice the school reform revealed numerous social barriers, tensions, contradictions, and the inertia of educational institutions. Apart from lowering the level of school financing by government, new rules were imposed on teachers without any debate with them, which made the "teachers community" very much opposed to the "decreed" changes which influenced the quality of both the state and non-public schools. Thus, the structure of the educational system was changed, practices were modified, but this was the period when the labour and educational markets started to be the first evaluators of educational values (Putkiewicz & Wiłkomirska 2004; Zbróg 2010). A general narrowing of pedagogical ideas and notions was the order of the day.

<sup>8</sup> Some schools that were important for Wrocław were established in the nineties: the Wrocławska Szkoła Przyszłości, 1990, set up by Ryszard Łukaszewicz, Krystyna Leksicka, Małgorzata Mitura, Jolanta Zwiernik, <http://www.wsp.wroc.pl>, the Autorska Szkoła Samorozwoju ASSA, by Dariusz Łuczak and Daniel Manelski in 1990, <http://www.assa.wroc.pl>, the Autorskie Licea Artystyczne ALA 1995 by Mariusz Budzyński, <http://ala.art.pl/> and three Jewish schools, the oldest of which stems from 1998 [20.04.2017].

<sup>9</sup> Among these was the Polska Fundacja Dzieci i Młodzieży, <http://www.pcyf.org.pl>, Fundacja im. Amosa Komeńskiego which supported the local schools' projects financially and substantively and focused on cooperation between the schools and local agents, promoting the practice of soft competences within and beyond the school, and promoting local heritage and culture, <http://www.frd.org.pl>. The other one, the Federacja Inicjatyw Oświatowych helped to save small schools from being closed and educated the local leaders and NGOs on how to become the owners of the state school so as not to close them <http://fio.org.pl> [20.04.2017].

Zbigniew Kwieciński (2000) criticized the spread of a false understanding of “alternative education” that was reduced to simply being different to previously experienced patterns of activities in public schools.

The *alternative* seems to be the least organized training, without axiological assumptions, without a teacher as a guide and organizer of development tasks, without imagining goals related to the model of future society and human competence, necessary for an active life in this society (p. 36).

The next decade showed that a shrinking educational market provoked rivalry between non-public and public schools. Teachers called it a ‘fight for pupils’ because “money follows each pupil” and this meant the financial support to the school. To enter the market or maintain the position already achieved, the non-public schools accepted parents’ domination of the schools. The school authorities forgot or even missed the internal subjects: the teachers and their needs, their aims and potential (Zbróg 2010, p. 155). As Paweł Rudnicki (2016) concludes, some of the non-public schools led by NGOs, instead of taking responsibility for education in fact are expanding the sphere of business activity and flattening the tasks of the state forces that is another role of the third sector (p. 20). In many non-public schools teachers have become the most overlooked group in decision making and the building of school development programmes. School government was overwhelmed by the school authority that in turn was personally chosen by parents (financial supporters) and was “dependent on” them (Zbróg 2010, p. 155). The latest studies regarding cooperation of schools with institutions and organizations from their environment, as well as with the local community (Hernik & Malinowska 2015), revealed not much interest in such cooperation between the schools and the local bodies<sup>10</sup>. Also the meaning of “cooperation” ranged along the continuum of ordinary interaction of two institutions through various forms of market exchange, purchases and sale of goods and services to activities that are regulated legally, ending with joint creative activities. The studies showed an absence of readiness on the part of schools and also on the part of certain external partners to build partner cooperation projects and similar relations.

Cooperation with the environment did not constitute a priority for principals and teachers in the researched schools. The school perceived cooperation with organizations that might extend the school’s offer as “supplementary” and not as activities which constituted an important element in the didactic process. The schools seemed to monopolize education and limited it to the curriculum fulfilled during school classes” (Hernik & Malinowska 2012, p. 7).

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<sup>10</sup> The study encompassed eight preschools, eight primary schools and eight lower secondary schools, diversified according to the size of their location (two administrative municipalities with four classes of size: village/town up to 20,000 inhabitants/ town 20,000-100,000 inhabitants/city above 100,000 inhabitants).

In another analysis Małgorzata Banasiak (2013) focused especially on perceptions of the non-public schools in the educational market. The research confirmed that the culture of schools and the quality of the educational process, as well as ways of communication with parents and didactic approaches, are still determined by the public school system. Differences between the public and non-public schools in the above spheres are evident, but there is little difference when speaking about the cooperation with local communities, the application of the concept of public pedagogy, and especially the promotion of civic education within and beyond the schools (Hernik & Malinowska 2015, Banasiak 2013).

## The project

**Methodology.** This is a qualitative ethnographic research where data has been collected through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews enriched by document analysis. The constructivist-interpretive paradigm is applied and the conceptual framework of the category *public pedagogy within and beyond schools* which is based on a critical and emancipatory approach to pedagogy represented by Jürgen Habermas and Paolo Freire and described by Jennifer A. Sandlin, Michael P. O'Malley & Jake Burdic (2011), Mieczysław Malewski (2016), Bohdan Skrzypczak (2016).

**The data.** This is a small research that was conducted in three different non-public schools (A, B, C) in Wrocław (600,000 inhabitants) in the years 2014, 2016, 2017 and data collecting ran for the three years I was employed as a part-time teacher. The analyses took into consideration:

- 1) main school documents (a statute, and an educational program),
- 2) the website information including school description,
- 3) 10 individual semi-structured interviews that were conducted in each school with headmasters, teachers, parents,
- 4) the interviews were complemented by field notes and participatory observation.

There was intense communication with the students but that material was not taken into consideration in the data analysis apart from one episode in which the students protested against reading a story about Halloween they found in their English handbook.

**The aim and the research questions:** The aim of the research was to find if the “elements” of the concept of *public pedagogy* focusing on *citizenship within and beyond the school* is consciously applied either in school everyday practices or if it is announced in any document. The research question was: What constitutes the activity of the non-public primary schools in a city? What kind of activities apart from didactic basics do the school agents (parents, teachers, headteachers) value? Are the schools involved



in participation in any local social actions/events? The direct questions were focused on school cooperation with local entities: Are the local entities interested in the presence of schools in the community? Are the schools interested in cooperation with local community entities? If yes, what are the ways of supporting mutual cooperation between the non-public school and the local community? If no, what are the obstacles to cooperation? In this paper I will present some selections from the data collected in schools A and B.

**The background information.** The schools A and B are both primary schools with a comparable number of students (30-40) between the ages 6-12, and teachers. A is located not far from the city centre but B is totally in the suburbs. Because of this B could have had much better possibilities to focus on recognizing the local actors and institutions and cooperate with them because this city district looks like a village. Both schools are led by different NGOs that are the school authorities, but the main supervision is conducted by the state educational body, the Kuratorium Oświaty<sup>11</sup>. What is special with non-public schools in a city of 600 thousand<sup>12</sup> inhabitants is that their localization is changed quite often and they move from one place to another because of the rent. That is why almost none of the pupils belong administratively to the community where the school is located. The students are brought to the school by their parents from all parts of the city. This is one of the obstacles for the small non-public schools: to be visible in a local community and to deepen the ties with the locals. The same is the case for parents' relations with the locals. They are only visitors in that area and do not know the people in that community well. By contrast, the situation of public/state schools differs greatly. The public schools are recognizable mostly because of their territorial rooting. They are strongly connected with the place where they were established years ago so they have been visible in the same place for a long time and their identity comes from their history and that a few local generations were involved in building the schools up. The stable localization allows them to work out much better connections with different local/regional agents than non-public schools.

**Selected findings.** The analysis of the interviews carried out on the school documentation (chronicle of events, statute, authors' programs) let me draw maps of the main categories and notions of the two schools regarding their long distanced goals.

In school A, apart from the national curriculum there are a few independent programs that promote a specific culture. The basic curriculum is focused on a) educational

<sup>11</sup> Kuratorium Oświaty – Regional department of the Ministry of Education which is responsible for supervising the national curriculum.

<sup>12</sup> Wrocław – the voivode capital of Lower Silesia Region, located in the south west part of Poland with 637,700 inhabitants. There are 25 non-public primary schools and 81 public primary schools including the special schools, [http://edu.wroc.pl/szkoly\\_podstawowe/niepubliczne.html](http://edu.wroc.pl/szkoly_podstawowe/niepubliczne.html) [23.04.2017].

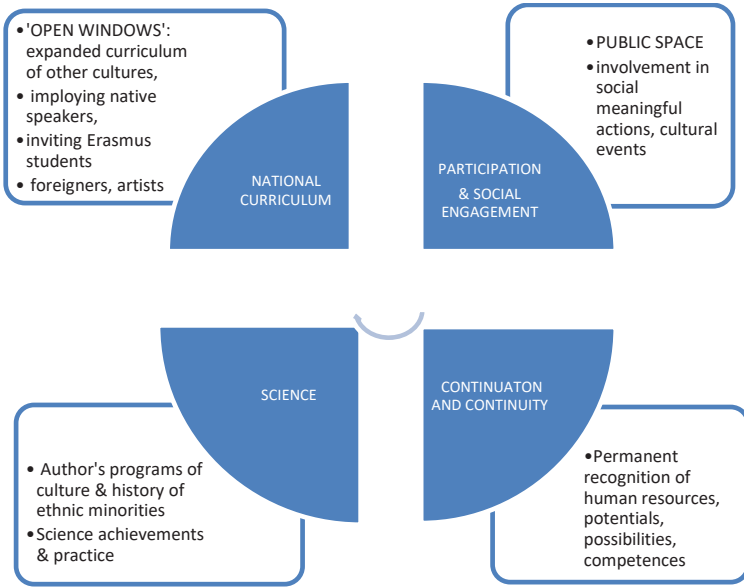


Figure 1. A map of notions and categories in school A  
Source: Author's own figure.

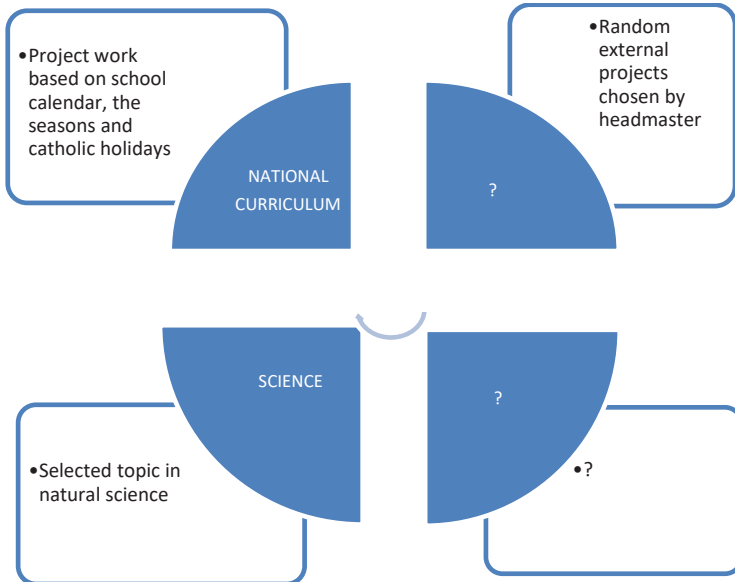


Figure 2. A map of notions and categories in school B  
Source: Author's own figure.

skills (through international meetings, employing native speakers whose “input” is a language and a foreign culture, inviting writers, artists, actors, other events organized so that the students take roles as leaders and experts), (b) social competences and abilities (through conscious participation in a public space for socially meaningful actions and events).

In school **B** an obligatory national curriculum is at the core of all proposals. There is a strong affirmation by the school headteacher for the promotion of project work, but the teachers complain that the project work is more a declaration than a reality. They also criticize the fact that the projects are mostly based on the school calendar and the seasons of the year and they employ only Catholic holidays. It was surprising for me when students of the third grade protested at an English lesson about Halloween when they saw it in a textbook, saying they did not want to commit a sin. Teachers complained that they were not invited to the planning of outside school activities and that they got the information at the ‘last minute’. They do not like the fact that they are neither able to prepare students for the outdoor activity nor can they evaluate the experience that students had while working outside the school. In comparison to school **A**, in school **B** there is not much evidence in the interviews about the engagement and participation in meaningful actions in public spaces, but the school is introducing this kind of activity on its website.

**Cooperation with the community.** In school **A** a parent denies that the school is interested in cooperation with the local community and says that it must be run by fulfilling the business project but not a social one so there is no need to make ties with local people. Another parent expressed the strongest negative opinion against occasional contacts with the local community. At the same time the headteacher is convinced that it is the parents of non-public schools who are not interested in joint action with local people. The last explanation comes from a teacher who sees the problem in a wider way and explains that the ethnic minority school faces some cultural and political problems so this is a barrier in making ties with local people. The students appreciated outside participation in community action but they treated it as a part of their obligations. By listening to different agents of the same school it seems that in school **A** there is not much discussion about the local community and common projects. Blame cannot be laid on anybody here. The feedback from the school agents (teachers, parents, students) does not strongly deny the need for cooperation. On the other hand, the same people do not see the benefits of cooperation apart from its effect on the number of new enrolled students. However, according to the documents, school **A** participates in socially meaningful events a few times a year and together with the pupils and their parents organizes social events for the local community in the public space. Despite the fact that the teachers see some problems in school management when

Table 1. Selected findings from the interviews in schools A &amp; B

SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B
<p><b>PARENTS:</b> <i>Local community is not interested in cooperation with non-public school (i1).</i>  <i>As long as non-public school are a business project there will always be the excuse that there is a lack of time for additional activities (i2).</i>  <i>I don't want my child to meet the locals. I am happy he does not have much occasion for this. (i3).</i></p> <p><b>TEACHERS:</b> <i>Parents perceive our school as a convenient place of learning for their children (i4).</i>  <i>They believe that the students will be well taken care of (i5).</i>  <i>There are difficulties in communication with local communities. We feel a kind of alienation from the environment, a lack of ability to make contacts, political and cultural differences, our specific point of view also does not help in making contacts (i6).</i></p> <p><b>HEADMASTER:</b> <i>Parents of non-public school do not see the need for inclusion of the local actors in joint actions. It is very difficult to work together with the locals because we are the school of an ethnic minority and we often experience difficulties in personal relations (i10).</i></p>	<p><b>PARENTS:</b> <i>There are different barriers to taking up cooperation with the local community (i11).</i>  <i>Non-public schools often have more programs and activities with students hence there may be no time for looking for the locals to involve them into the team (i12).</i></p> <p><b>TEACHERS:</b> <i>School authorities are not interested in cooperation with the local community (2x) (i13, i14).</i>  <i>The school program does not provide for cooperation with local entities (i15).</i>  <i>The school should promote local development through well-organized education, but there is no need to be the cultural centre (i16).</i>  <i>The non-public school is not always perceived positively. Often it is referred to as "those private places" – meaning 'wealthier and snobbish' (i17).</i>  <i>Everything takes time and above all a couple of people at school are needed who are ready to invest their time and find ways to the local community (i18).</i></p> <p><b>HEADMASTER:</b> <i>The teachers are not interested in cooperation with the local community; anyway, the school is a member of a Local Partnership Agreement. Common actions have been taking place for the last two years. The locals are interested in non-public schools only because there is no other of that type in the neighborhood (i20).</i></p>

Source: Author's own figure.

they are obliged to engage in what is suggested without their opinion being asked for, they nevertheless appreciate that the school authority supports the school to be active in the public space, and encourages them to deepen the communication and contacts with cultural institutions and their representatives, and helps as well in organizing the school as "open space with widely open windows". In school **B** the parents are trying to avoid the answer with the excuse that an overloaded schedule does not need any other activities. One of the parents says that he/she does not need it, because they want to be the 'elite' but not to mix with the "lower economic class of locals". In **B** there is a tension between the headteacher and the teachers and probably the lack of communication or agreement arises because both blame each other for not being interested in cooperation with locals. One of the teachers accuses the headteacher of parochialism because the headteacher does not see any benefits in using at least IT for communication with community bodies.

## Discussion instead of conclusion

This is a small pilot project and the main aim is to answer the question: what constitutes the non-public school in a city in the context of public pedagogy including civic education within and beyond the school? Taking into consideration my experience while working in a few non-public primary schools between the years 2014-2017, and seeing the conscious isolation from the community, I wanted to prepare a view of the possible field work to be carried out in future investigations. In the light of the existing evidence as well as this pilot project, the myth of the non-public schools in Poland as agoras for practicing the values of citizenship has been torn down. The democracy in the schools researched is broken at the levels of management and communication among all partners. There is no equal participation of the school agents in decision making processes. The headteachers mostly take decisions on their own. In both of the schools there is little concern about involving firstly, all school agents (students, teachers, parents, authorities) for democratic planning of the school program and secondly, both of the schools seem to be invisible to the local community – but the local community seems to be invisible also for the schools. The managers of non-public primary schools in a big city are mostly focused on finding good locations for their schools, keeping the webpage updated, ‘activating’ the school to be visible mostly to parents (clients) and then fulfilling the parents’ expectations. It seems that school activities in cooperation with the local communities are very limited, if not abandoned altogether. What educational potential – not only of pupils but also of adults – is missing when the schools “stay away” from the local community? The lack of clear rules and competences has become the problem in some non-public schools. There has been a period of regress of the democratic achievements there and maybe it is something more that is sometimes described as ‘cultural narcissism’ of schools (Jagięła 2007). Astrid Męczkowska-Christiansen (2014) points the “cultural narcissism” described in terms of an excessive concentration on itself at the same time weakening the bonds with others.

From my point of view, as long as the schools are not valued by both the parents and the school authorities for their active participation in public spaces, there will be no motivation in schools for cooperation with local entities. The paradox I have found in my research project is about the clash between the website self-promotion and the actual practice of non-public schools in their (non-)cooperation with local bodies. Some of the schools introduced themselves as socially engaged, cooperative agents, but when the collection of interviews was analyzed there was no evidence about any common action with the local subjects. And the opposite was true, namely that those who did not put their public engagement on their website in fact are much more involved in public actions with their students’ active participation and with some support from the

parents. However, the engagement in public actions needs wisdom and courage, firstly of the school leaders to convince parents of the educational value of engagement, and then parents should understand that only in a well-organized social milieu can their child acquire soft social competences and then civic assertiveness. They should not think only about the individual achievements of their child but should be interested in the achievement of the group their child belongs to. By way of an addendum to the argument we may be experiencing a psychological picture of the Polish school as a 'narcissistic school' as sketched by Jarosław Jagieła:

The quality of interpersonal relationships in a school testifies about the degree of school narcissism because narcissism is overall inability to communicate and establish good relationships with others. Real friendship, cordiality, trust and kindness cease to count. More popular are impersonal, formalized references between people, rivalry, interpersonal games more than cooperation. Lack of community and solidarity with others, there is no real responsibility for the next generations, greater willingness to compete than cooperation (Jagieła 2007, p. 134).

The dynamic changes on the school market could have been a potential for developing the democratic rules and using the conflicts as inspiration for looking for solutions and positive evaluation of the processes. However, it would have been necessary to develop habits of respect, negotiation, communicative assertiveness, the ability to listen and take into consideration all the voices of the agents that a school consists of – for the humanistic development of all.

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#### **SCHOOLS THAT "STAY AWAY" FROM THE COMMUNITY. IS IT A LOST CHANCE FOR COMMUNITY LEARNING AND DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP IN NGO SCHOOLS?**

**SUMMARY:** One of the most important values that the non-public sector brought into the educational system in Poland in the year 1989 was the breaking of the state monopoly in education. It brought the hope that school institutions would be able to open up new learning spaces for democracy, including agreement, the autonomy of teachers, the involvement of parents, and student self-government that in turn would have led to deep school socialization. Cooperation with the local communities became obligatory for schools after the introduction of the school reform in 1999. Civic education was expected to bring benefits for both the schools and society through creating the conditions for informal learning, democracy in practice and citizenship within and beyond the schools. The aim of this research was to recognize the main areas/fields that constitute the non-public schools in a Polish city today. The paper presents a qualitative pilot research project conducted in the years 2014-2017 in three selected non-public primary schools led by NGOs in a city of 600,000 inhabitants in Poland. The data reveals the syndrome of "cultural narcissism" that has probably become a feature of some urban non-public schools.

**KEYWORDS:** non-public schools, civic education, cultural narcissism.

#### **CZY SZKOŁY NIEPUBLICZNE, KTÓRE NIE ANGAŻUJĄ SIĘ W ŻYCIE SPOŁECZNE, TO UTRACONA SZANSA NA UCZENIE SIĘ DEMOKRATYCZNEGO OBYWATELSTWA?**

**STRESZCZENIE:** Jedną z najważniejszych wartości, jakie sektor niepubliczny wprowadził do systemu oświaty w Polsce w 1989 r., było przełamanie monopolu państwowego w edukacji. Zmiana ta wniosła nadzieję, że w instytucjach szkolnych otwarte zostaną nowe przestrzenie do wspólnego uczenia się demokracji. Dziesięć lat później reforma edukacji z 1999 r. postawiła przed szkołami wymagania,



aby te włączyły w swoje programy współpracę z lokalnymi społecznościami. Edukacja obywatelska przynosi korzyści zarówno szkołom, jak i lokalnym społecznościom poprzez stworzenie warunków do nieformalnego uczenia się, praktykowania demokracji i obywatelstwa. Prezentowany projekt badawczy realizowany w latach 2014-2017, w trzech wybranych niepublicznych szkołach podstawowych prowadzonych przez organizacje pozarządowe w mieście liczącym 600 tys. mieszkańców w Polsce, ujawnia syndrom „kulturowego narcyzmu”, który prawdopodobnie staje się cechą niektórych miejskich szkół niepublicznych.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: szkoły niepubliczne, edukacja obywatelska, kulturowy narcyzm.

