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## Preferred Life Model and the Importance of Family Life in the Contemporary Society in Poland, Slovakia and South Korea

### Abstract

The article presents the sociological aspect of the empirical research carried out among students of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra in Slovakia, the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul in South Korea and among students of the University of Silesia in Katowice, concerning their opinion on family life in the contemporary society and their preferred life model. The research was conducted on a research sample of 1341 students. The main research tool used during the research was a questionnaire containing 43 questions. The collected data were statistically analyzed in the program SPSS. The analysis of the conducted research shows a dissonance between the preferred life model and the significance of family life. Generally, most respondents preferred marriage as a type of relationship for the future, while claiming that family life is less and less important.

### Key words

cohabitation, family, marriage, family life, relationship

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Transformations family life is subject to<sup>2</sup> are increasingly evident. They cover not only ways of thinking about family but, above all, dynamics of changing the shape or the method of forming family. The changes include values of people as well, which to a large extent influence decisions at various levels of creating or reorganizing family, regardless of regional differences in living conditions. Contemporary family decreases in size and is at the same time the most important particle of social life<sup>3</sup>. Nowadays, these changes concern not only the structure of families, but also positions and roles of woman and man in the family. Changes in bonds and relationships of partners or spouses are focused on high personal quality of these relationships and bonds, as they result from progressing process of individualization of lives of individuals more and more focused on undertaking actions aimed at themselves, emphasizing autonomy, self-fulfilment and satisfying emotional and sexual needs, as well as financial ones<sup>4</sup>.

Shape and functioning of family, according to Z. Tyszka<sup>5</sup>, depend to a large extent on the “rest” of the social world that is external to the family. Global society, and, strictly speaking, some of its development stages (preindustrial, industrial and postindustrial society), along with related graduated social systems, affect family, modifying it and its subsystems accordingly, and modified family has a changing impact on the global society, its substructures and processes; those interactional influences intensify in periods of more rapid changes of the society. Family is thus an important element of social interactions.

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<sup>2</sup> See: A. Kwak, *Rodzina w dobie przemian. Małżeństwo i kohabitacja*, Warszawa 2005; K. Slany, *Alternatywne formy życia małżeńsko-rodzinnego w ponowoczesnym świecie*, Kraków 2006; Z. Tyszka, *Rodzina we współczesnym świecie*, Poznań 2002; Z. Tyszka, *Rodzina współczesna – jej geneza i kierunki przemian* [w:] *Rodzina współczesna*, M. Ziemska (ed.), Warszawa 2001; T. Szlendak, *Socjologia rodziny. Ewolucja, historia, zróżnicowanie*, Warszawa 2010.

<sup>3</sup> W. Świątkiewicz, *Rodzina w województwie katowickim. Opracowania i raport*, Katowice 1998, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> K. Juszczyk-Frelkiewicz, *Kohabitacja w Polsce i na Słowacji. Studium socjologiczne w środowiskach studenckich*, Katowice 2014, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Z. Tyszka, *Rodzina we współczesnym świecie*, Poznań 2002, p. 14.

## 2. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The article is based on research conducted among the students of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra in Slovakia, the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies and the University of Silesia in Katowice. The research was conducted on a research sample of 1341 students. The main research tool used during research was a questionnaire<sup>6</sup> containing 43 questions. The analysis of the results of empirical research was based on the statistical analysis carried out in the program SPSS.

Opinions of students as a sociological category are very important while studying family life. First of all, they are a model layer (reference group) for generation of their peers. Secondly, students are under the strongest pressure of postmodern culture and its individualized models of self-fulfilment. In this social environment plans for the future concerning choice of marriage-family life model and formulated opinions about importance of family life in the contemporary world are closely connected with recent forms of shaping family and partner relations and with directions of development of the phenomenon of cohabitation<sup>7</sup>.

## 3. THE RESEARCH RESULTS

Most of the surveyed students from South Korea (87.5%), Poland (67.8%) and from Slovakia (62.2%) preferred marriage as the most fulfilling form of relationship. One fifth of the students from Poland (20.7%), as well as one third of the students from Slovakia (29.9%) and about 8% students from South Korea chose cohabitation, claiming that such a type of relationship would be most suitable. A very small percentage of respondents would like to live in a partner relation living separately and in a short-term relationship in the future in these three countries (see Chart 1.).

The analysis shows that marriage is more frequently preferred by women from Poland (70.0%) and Slovakia (67.8%), than by men in these countries (Poland 64.8%, Slovakia 55.2%). In South Korea this situation was opposite – more men (92.7%) than women (85.7%) preferred marriage. It should be emphasized that marriage is definitely more preferred by both genders from South Korea - It may be due to the strong family tradition in that country. Cohabitation was chosen by

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<sup>6</sup> See: L.A. Gruszczyński, *Kwestionariusze w socjologii. Budowa narzędzi do badań survey-owych*, Katowice 1999.

<sup>7</sup> See: K. Juszczyk-Frelkiewicz, *Kohabitacja w Polsce i na Słowacji. Studium socjologiczne w środowiskach studenckich*, Katowice 2014.

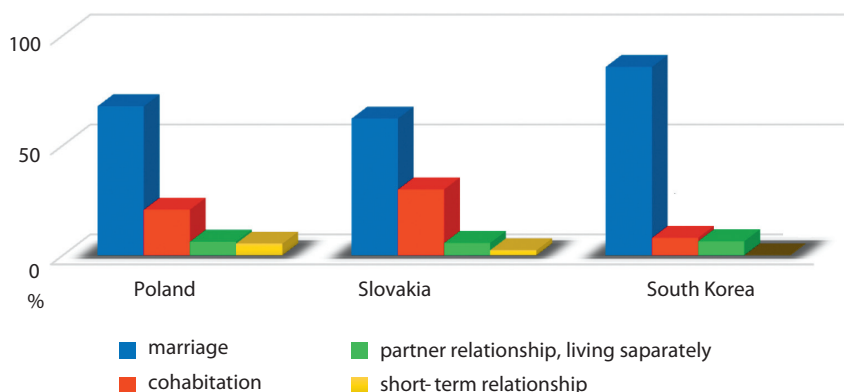


Chart 1. Preferred form of relationship according to country

Source: own research.

more women from Poland (23.0%) and South Korea (7.9%) than by men (Poland 16.8%, South Korea 4.9%). In Slovakia there were a little more men (32.5%) than women (27.8%) (see Chart 2. and Chart 3.). It may result from the fact that women want to live in a stable, lasting relationship and marriage is a relationship of this kind – even taking into consideration the recent growth in divorces and the image of marriage as an unstable institution, this kind of relationship is more stable in

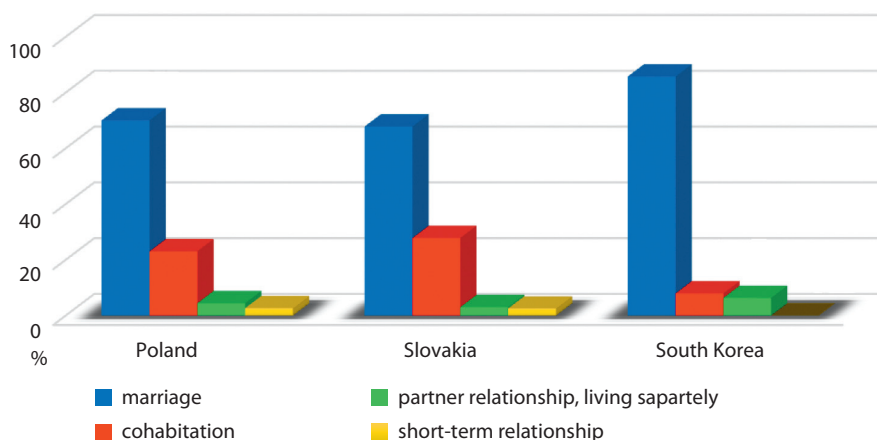


Chart 2. Preferred form of relationship by WOMEN in Poland, Slovakia and South Korea

Source: own research.

comparison to cohabitation that is usually a short-term relationship of small stability. However, it should be emphasized that nowadays more and more young people decide to live in cohabitation that gives the partners a higher degree of autonomy and self-fulfilment and smaller sense of responsibility for the other person.

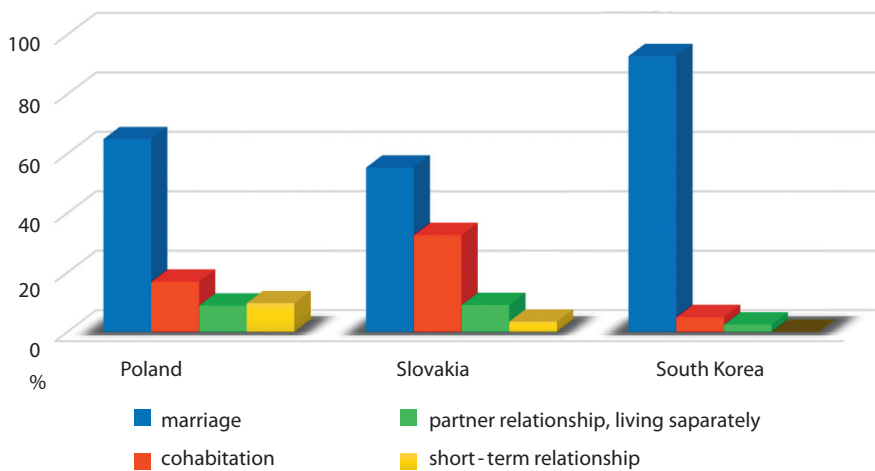


Chart 3. Preferred form of relationship by MEN in Poland, Slovakia and South Korea  
Source: own research.

The research shows that the higher the frequency of participation in religious practices, the greater the probability of choosing marriage as the preferred relationship type for the future – this tendency is observed in Poland and Slovakia. Marriage was indicated by more than 87% of students who participated in masses several times a week in Poland and Slovakia, and by more than 80% of those who took part in religious services once a week. The research indicates that students who did not take part in masses frequently also very often were choosing marriage as the preferred relationship type - there were 68.5% students from Poland and 71.7% students from Slovakia who took part in religious practices once or twice a month. Students in Poland and Slovakia who did not participate in religious practices were divided into two parts – one part of them preferred marriage (Poland 42.4%, Slovakia 50.0%) and the second part preferred cohabitation as a type of relationship in the future (Poland 39.4%, 40.4%). Attention must be paid to the fact that the less frequently students participated in religious practices, the more probable was the choice of cohabitation in their case (see Table 1. and Table 2.). In South Korea the situation is different. Most students who practise very often

(several times a week 100.0%) or very seldom (several times a year 96.0%) or do not participate in religious services (92.5%) preferred marriage as a suitable relationship for the future (see Table 3.).

**Table 1. Preferred form of relationship according to participation in religious practices in POLAND**

What relationship form do you find most suitable (for yourself)?		Participation in religious practices					Total
		several times a week	once a week	1–2 times a month	several times a year	I do not participate	
marriage	N	23	161	50	129	70	433
	%	88,5%	89,0%	68,5%	67,2%	42,4%	68,0%
cohabitation	N	2	11	16	37	65	131
	%	7,7%	6,1%	21,9%	19,3%	39,4%	20,6%
partner relationship, living separately	N	1	4	3	15	16	39
	%	3,8%	2,2%	4,1%	7,8%	9,7%	6,1%
short-term relationship	N	0	5	4	11	14	34
	%	0,0%	2,8%	5,5%	5,7%	8,5%	5,3%
Total	N	26	181	73	192	165	637
	%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100,0%

Source: own research.

**Table 2. Preferred form of relationship according to participation in religious practices in SLOVAKIA**

What relationship form do you find most suitable (for yourself)?		Participation in religious practices					Total
		several times a week	once a week	1–2 times a month	several times a year	I do not participate	
marriage	N	29	105	33	104	104	375
	%	87,9%	81,4%	71,7%	55,6%	50,0%	62,2%
cohabitation	N	3	15	10	68	84	180
	%	9,1%	11,6%	21,7%	36,4%	40,4%	29,9%
partner relationship, living separately	N	1	9	2	10	12	34
	%	3,0%	7,0%	4,3%	5,3%	5,8%	5,6%
short-term relationship	N	0	0	1	5	8	14
	%	0,0%	0,0%	2,2%	2,7%	3,8%	2,3%
Total	N	33	129	46	187	208	603
	%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Source: own research.

**Table 3. Preferred form of relationship according to participation in religious practices in South Korea**

What relationship form do you find most suitable (for yourself)?		Participation in religious practices					I do not participate	Total
		several times a week	once a week	1–2 times a month	several times a year			
marriage	N	2	12	5	24	49	92	
	%	100,0%	70,6%	71,4%	96,0%	92,5%	88,5%	
cohabitation	N	0	4	2	0	1	7	
	%	0,0%	23,5%	28,6%	0,0%	1,9%	6,7%	
partner relationship, living separately	N	0	1	0	1	3	5	
	%	0,0%	5,9%	0,0%	4,0%	5,7%	4,8%	
Total	N	2	17	7	25	53	104	
	%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	

Source: own research.

Regardless of the country of residence, gender and frequency of participation in masses, students preferred marriage as a form of relationship most suitable for them in the future. Such a choice of students proves that the institution of marriage has a great importance for them and most young people will live in a marriage. The choice of cohabitation by every fifth student from Polish, every third student

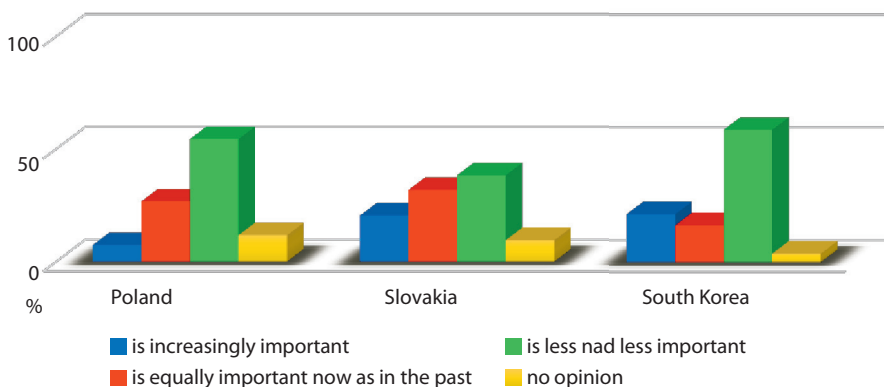


Chart 4. Opinion about family life in the contemporary society according to country

Source: own research.

from Slovakia and every twelfth student from South Korea may suggest that some young people appreciate liberal values and behaviour that more and more often gain social approval. However, we should remember that cohabitation is not only an alternative to marriage, it may also be an introduction to marriage. For this reason, most students that will start cohabitation relationship in the future will after a period of time transform it into marriage.

During the research students were also asked about their opinion concerning family life in contemporary society. The analysis indicates that students from Poland (54.4%) and South Korea (58.7%) more often than students from Slovakia (38.3%) believed that nowadays family life had an increasingly smaller importance. On the other hand, more respondents from South Korea (21.2%) and Slovakia (20.4%), than from Poland (7.3%) concluded that family life played an increasingly greater role in life (see Table 4.). It is an unexpected situation, considering the fact that most of the Polish society acknowledges traditional values and believes family is the most important social institution – students appear to be influenced by liberal values. There may be many reasons for this situation. Smaller importance of family in the contemporary world according to Polish students might result from a diffusion of liberal values from the countries of Western Europe, secularization of society<sup>8</sup>, lack of policy truly supporting family and young people, which would provide stability of family life in economic terms, lack of stable terms of employment and too low pay offered to young people, too short payable maternity leaves, or lack of payable parental leaves. However, the family policy in Poland is not favourable for young people, which contributes to the need of dedication of young people to learning, working and self-fulfilment, unfortunately at the expense of family life.

The surveyed women in Slovakia (43.6%) and South Korea (60.3%) much more frequently than the surveyed men in Slovakia (31.7%) and South Korea (56.1%) indicate that family life has an increasingly smaller importance. The percentage of women (53.8%) and men (55.4%) from Poland who had the opinion that family life has an increasingly smaller importance was very similar. Only most men from Slovakia claimed that family life is equally important as in the past (39,6%). On the other hand, more women than men from Slovakia (21.8%) and South Korea (23.2%) believe that family is increasingly important. In Poland there were less women (9.1%) and men (4.4%) who had the same opinion about family life (see Chart 5. and Chart 6.).

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<sup>8</sup> See: K. Dobbelaere, *Sekularyzacja. Trzy poziomy analizy*, Kraków 2008.



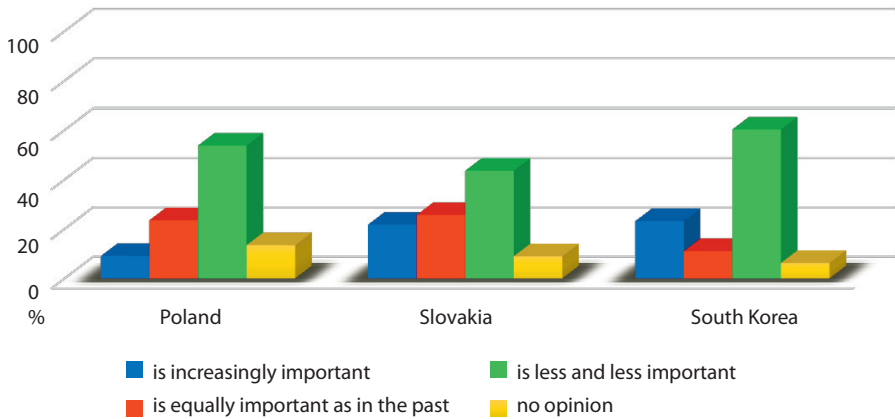


Chart 5. Opinion of WOMEN about family life in the contemporary society

Source: own research.

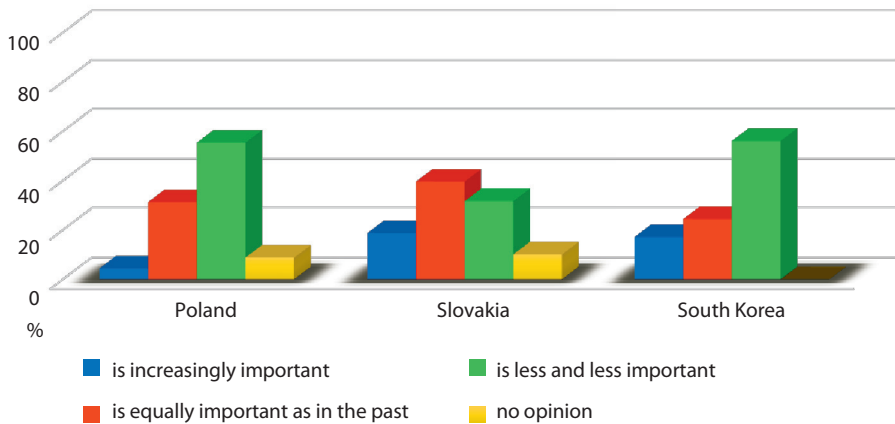


Chart 6. Opinion of MEN about family life in the contemporary society

Source: own research.

The analysis shows that in Poland, regardless of the frequency of participation in religious practices, a large percentage of students had an opinion that family life is less and less important. Every fourth student from Poland who practices often, seldom or does not participate at all, thought that the family life is equally important as in the past (26.7%) (see table 4.). In Slovakia the frequency of participation

in religious practices differentiates the students opinions regarding family life. Students were divided into three groups. One of them had an opinion that family life is less and less important in contemporary society (38.3%) – in this group most students participate several times a week (51.5%) and several times a year (40.1%) in religious practices. The second group said that family life was equally important as in the past (31.8%). The third group said that family life is increasingly important (20.4%) (see Table 5.). In South Korea most respondents claimed that family life is less and less important (58.7%) – this group the considerable percentage were students who take part in religious services several times a week (100%), once a week (58.8%) and several times a year (76,0%). Only every fifth student (21.2%) had an opinion that family life is increasingly important – in this group dominate respondents who practice once a week (23.5%) and do not participate at all (30.2%). There were no students with this opinion who participate several times a week and 1–2 times a month (see Table 6.).

**Table 4. Opinion about family life in contemporary society according to frequency of participation in religious practices in POLAND**

What is your opinion about family life in the contemporary society?	Participation in religious practices					I do not participate	Total
	several times a week	once a week	1–2 times a month	several times a year			
is increasingly important	N	2	11	6	12	15	46
	%	7,7%	6,1%	8,3%	6,3%	9,1%	7,3%
is equally important as in the past	N	6	44	16	57	46	169
	%	23,1%	24,3%	22,2%	30,0%	27,9%	26,7%
is less and less important	N	16	109	37	103	80	345
	%	61,5%	60,2%	51,4%	54,2%	48,5%	54,4%
no opinion	N	2	17	13	18	24	74
	%	7,7%	9,4%	18,1%	9,5%	14,5%	11,7%
<b>Total</b>	N	26	181	72	190	165	634
	%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	

Source: own research.

**Table 5. Opinion about family life in contemporary society according to frequency of participation in religious practices in SLOVAKIA**

What is your opinion about family life in the contemporary society?		Participation in religious practices					Total
		several times a week	once a week	1–2 times a month	several times a year	I do not participate	
is increasingly important	N	6	37	16	32	32	123
	%	18,2%	28,7%	34,8%	17,1%	15,4%	20,4%
is equally important as in the past	N	10	34	13	59	76	192
	%	30,3%	26,4%	28,3%	31,6%	36,5%	31,8%
is less and less important	N	17	44	14	75	81	231
	%	51,5%	34,1%	30,4%	40,1%	38,9%	38,3%
no opinion	N	0	14	3	21	19	57
	%	0,0%	10,9%	6,5%	11,2%	9,1%	9,5%
<b>Total</b>	N	33	129	46	187	208	603
	%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100%

Source: own research.

**Table 6. Opinion about family life in contemporary society according to frequency of participation in religious practices in SOUTH KOREA**

What is your opinion about family life in the contemporary society?		Participation in religious practices					Total
		several times a week	once a week	1–2 times a month	several times a year	I do not participate	
is increasingly important	N	0	4	0	2	16	22
	%	0,0%	23,5%	0,0%	8,0%	30,2%	21,2%
is equally important as in the past	N	0	2	4	3	8	17
	%	0,0%	11,8%	57,1%	12,0%	15,1%	16,3%
is less and less important	N	2	10	3	19	27	61
	%	100,0%	58,8%	42,9%	76,0%	50,9%	58,7%
no opinion	N	0	1	0	1	2	4
	%	0,0%	5,9%	0,0%	4,0%	3,8%	3,8%
<b>Total</b>	N	2	17	7	25	53	104
	%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	

Source: own research.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

The development of economy in Poland, Slovakia and South Korea as well as in European countries (particularly Western Europe), Scandinavian countries and the United States, the still progressing processes of industrialization, implementing IT solutions<sup>9</sup> and urbanization, together with the decreasing attachment to religious values and tradition make transformations of family and family life a continuous process. The more society becomes urbanized and industrialized, the larger changes can be observed (it will become more liberal, individualistic, pro-liberty – choice oriented). The increased number of divorces in recent years<sup>10</sup> proves a declining stability of marriage, which also influences society opinions concerning family life. The growth in the number of people living in a cohabitation relationship<sup>11</sup> proves that young people more often arrange their lives in a different way than marriage, due to benefits that are connected with life in cohabitation (greater autonomy, greater possibilities of self-fulfilment, financial independence, etc.). Undoubtedly, the dissonance shown in the research, between marriage as the preferred lifestyle and the opinion that family life has an increasingly smaller importance is a result of individualization<sup>12</sup> and secularization<sup>13</sup> processes progressing in Poland, Slovakia and South Korea, and of focussing on self-fulfilment and the desire to achieve success in professional life. Generally, young people undoubtedly will get married in the future and some of them will favour marriage rather than living in cohabitation, but most of their attention will be paid to their own development, education and self-fulfilment – this is individualism<sup>14</sup>. It is worth stressing that even students from South Korea claimed that family life is less and less important – it shows the influence of liberal values and norms, and also the influence of mass media on that kind of opinion in a country where family values are deeply rooted in its tradition.

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<sup>9</sup> *Spółeczeństwo informacyjne. Krok naprzód, dwa kroki wstecz*, P. Sienkiewicz, J.S. Nowak (eds.), Katowice 2008.

<sup>10</sup> *Rocznik Demograficzny*, GUS, Warszawa 2014, p. 280.

<sup>11</sup> *Rocznik Demograficzny*, GUS, Warszawa 2014, p. 165.

<sup>12</sup> M. Kędziński, *Industrializacja Korei Południowej – co Polska może wykorzystać?*, Warszawa 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Zob.: K. Dobbelaere, *Sekularyzacja. Trzy poziomy analizy*, Kraków 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Zob.: Z. Bokszański, *Indywidualizm a zmiana społeczna. Polacy wobec nowoczesności – raport z badań*, Warszawa 2007.

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