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Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust from the Perspective of Social Research

Introduction

Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust is a domain of practical activities undertaken by teachers; methodologists and designers of educational programmes; museum workers and methodologists of guided tours; and guides of memorial sites and museums. It is also a subject of scientific reflection in the field of pedagogy. As an area of teaching and education, it pursues various objectives and envisages various effects, principally related to the development of knowledge about the past; knowledge of facts and the causes of processes and events, and occasionally, above all, the shaping of the attitudes and values of its recipients, such as tolerance and openness, and the rejection of discrimination, anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia. The primary recipients of education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust are schoolchildren, and those who conduct this education are mainly teachers and guides. The recipients do, however, also include other groups, such as adults, families, students, selected social and professional categories like the clergy, police officers, prison staff, soldiers, and – last but not least – people with special educational needs. An important feature of education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust, as well as education in general, is that it is conducted in changing cultural, social, and political conditions that strongly affect its objectives, content, form and results.

The issues of education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust – in particular its goals and effects, as well as its determinants, which are

the subject of practical activities of educators and theoretical reflections of teachers – have also become the subject of empirical research. This is conducted by representatives of various disciplines within the social sciences, especially psychology and sociology, as well as their practitioners. In Poland, such studies have been conducted since the 1960s, but their development has been ongoing since the 1990s. Most studies have mainly focused on Polish recipients, although there have also been studies involving foreigners. One of the leading problems undertaken both in pedagogical reflection and educational practice, as well as in empirical research, was and is the question of the effectiveness of teaching about Auschwitz and the Holocaust as a way of shaping the attitudes and values of young people through the transfer of knowledge. In this article, we discuss this issue based on the results and methodological assumptions of the most important social research on education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust that has been carried out in Poland, among Polish recipients of this education, since the 1990s. We focused our analysis and summary on research carried out among young recipients of the educational process, mainly schoolchildren, and omitted research among other recipients, including teachers and guides.

We classified the research of interest to us into three groups. First, we conducted research on people visiting memorial sites and museums established on the grounds of the former concentration and extermination camps, particularly KL Auschwitz. Here, we focused on the research (or sections of the research) that concerned Polish school students – participants of the so-called standard visit, which may be considered a single educational event. Secondly, we analysed research carried out among Polish school students who are recipients of educational programmes, museum lessons or thematic workshops on Auschwitz and/or the Holocaust conducted off school grounds, at memorial sites and the Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek Museums, organised by various entities. Thirdly, we also took into account selected research conducted in Polish schools among students – recipients of formal education. We did not, however, take into consideration research on

the broader subject of the memory of World War Two. We also did not take into account research that would have illustrated factors of education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust other than places of remembrance, museums and schools, such as family, the media, religion, politics and culture, even though they have a significant impact on the effectiveness of this education. In our analyses, we focused on who, when, where, among what groups, how, and what the research was about. We focused on the results of these studies. We ignored the methodological criticism of individual studies (comparisons of the questions asked, amongst others), but instead dealt with the methodological challenges of research on Auschwitz and the Holocaust.

Before we present the selected research, we would like to point out that it was not always explicitly aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of the process of education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust in terms of improving the level of knowledge or shaping the attitudes of its participants. They often addressed the broader background and conditions of educational activities, taking into account the unintended and even undesired effects of these activities. The research mentioned here did not always contain direct recommendations on how to effectively teach about Auschwitz and the Holocaust. Furthermore, there were only a few strictly evaluative studies among them, consisting in the assessment of the degree of accomplishment of objectives and effects assumed within the framework of particular educational programmes. The majority focused on a single, often episodic, educational experience. Nevertheless, the included studies are certainly some of the most important sources of knowledge on education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust in Poland, and in particular, its effects on the transfer of knowledge and shaping of attitudes.

In the following three excerpts of this article, we present selected research on education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust carried out in Poland among Polish recipients. In the subsequent sections, we summarise and discuss the results of these research works and formulate recommendations for future research work.

Studies carried out among visitors to memorial sites and museums, especially school students

Among Polish empirical studies of visitors to memorial sites and museums established in the post-camp areas, it is worth making a preliminary reference to surveys conducted by the **historian Jolanta Adamska in 1994**.⁶⁰ These surveys aimed to assess the impact of the content presented by memorial sites and museums in Oświęcim, Majdanek, Sztutowo and Rogoźnica on young people aged 14–19 years. The author of the survey attempted to determine the effects of a visit to the museums mentioned above, even though the analysis focused on the perception of these places and not on the knowledge of basic facts about the history of the former camps. Adamska's survey is the first Polish empirical research study on the importance of memorial sites and museums. Regrettably, the results of these studies were never published extensively and, therefore, cannot be thoroughly evaluated in terms of the value of the findings, as well as the adequacy and correctness of the adopted methodology.

Studies of Polish school youth visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum by **sociologist Marek Kucia, conducted in the years 1998, 1999, 2000, and 2005**, deserve particular attention.⁶¹ These studies were part of broader research on the social awareness of KL Auschwitz in Poland. The most comprehensive study was carried out in 2000 using the repetitive survey method through the auditorium survey

⁶⁰ J. Adamska, „Muzea – miejsca pamięci w oczach młodzieży. Omówienie rezultatów ankietyzacji przeprowadzonej w 1994 r. przez Radę Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa”, *Przeszłość i pamięć*, 1(2) (1997), pp. 8–13.

⁶¹ M. Kucia, *Opinie polskich uczniów na temat obozu Auschwitz A.D. 2000*. vol. 1 Summary report, vol. 2 Aggregated survey results, vol. 3 Table of annexes, vol. 4 Records of responses to open-ended questions, vol. 5 Records of group interviews, Kraków 2000 [typescript]; M. Kucia, „KL Auschwitz w świadomości społecznej współczesnych Polaków”, *Pro Memoria*, 15 (2001), pp. 31–44; M. Kucia, „Auschwitz w percepcji polskich uczniów”, *Pro Memoria*, 16 (2001), pp. 17–26; M. Kucia, „Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w opinii zwiedzających”, *Pro Memoria*, 20 (2003), pp. 49–54; M. Kucia, *Auschwitz jako fakt społeczny. Historia, współczesność i świadomość społeczna KL Auschwitz w Polsce*, Kraków, 2005; M. Kucia, *KL Auschwitz w percepcji polskich uczniów. Komunikat z badań*, Kraków, 2005 [typescript]; M. Kucia, „KL Auschwitz w percepcji polskich uczniów”, *Pro Memoria*, 27 (2007), pp. 99–108.

technique, immediately before visiting the Memorial site and Museum (N=408) and a week or two after visiting (N=341). The questionnaires were supplemented with focused group interviews. The largest questionnaire survey was conducted in 2005 (N=977). The research concerned, among other things, knowledge of the basic facts about Auschwitz (its history, structure, function, and number and identity of victims); perception of the meaning and conviction of the importance of Auschwitz; perception of its symbolism; attitudes towards Jews and anti-Semitism; and the impact of a visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum. Kucia's research is one of the most comprehensive sources of information on the perception of Auschwitz – the camp, Memorial site and Museum – by Polish school youth.

The continuation and development of Kucia's research was undertaken **in the years 2008–2010 by the sociologist Katarzyna Stec** among Polish school youth aged 13–21 years, visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, the State Museum at Majdanek and the Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka.⁶² The most important stage of the project was quantitative research based on the repetitive survey method using the auditorium survey technique, conducted before the visit (N=1,632) and after the visit (N=780) in the places mentioned above. The main goal was to present the results of the visit to two selected Memorial sites and Museums – Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek – as well as a comparative reference to the perception of the Memorial site and Museum in Treblinka. The survey was complemented by interviews with teachers and observations of young people during visits to the sites mentioned above, with elements of visual sociology and quality workshops among selected groups of previously surveyed young people conducted about three months after the visit.

⁶² K. Stec, „Symbolika i znaczenie miejsc pamięci utworzonych na terenach byłych obozów koncentracyjnych i zagłady z perspektywy współczesnego młodego człowieka”, in: M. Kucia (ed.), *Antysemityzm, Holokaust, Auschwitz w badaniach społecznych*, Kraków, 2011, pp. 37–54; K. Stec, „Rola wizyty w muzeum-miejsu pamięci dla współczesnego młodego człowieka – doświadczenie edukacyjne czy turystyczne”, in: P. Trojański (ed.), *Auschwitz i Holokaust. Edukacja w szkole i w miejscu pamięci*, Oświęcim, 2014, pp. 287–297.

Another empirical study carried out on smaller research samples, which to some extent concerned issues related to the impact of a visit to memorial sites, but focused on a specific topic, was a study by the **museologist Agnieszka Praga** among Polish youth (N=58) and German youth (N=50), conducted immediately after their visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum **from the end of April to the beginning of May 2013**.⁶³ The author used the questionnaire technique with closed and open questions. These studies were mainly concerned with analysis of the effect of the earlier impressions of young people, formed during socialising, on the perception of the visited site. The aim was to examine whether individual memories acquired in the socialisation process, with family and other social contexts, are relevant to school education to a greater or lesser degree and, above all, to the young person's experience of an authentic memorial site.⁶⁴

In turn, the main objective of the quantitative longitudinal study designed and conducted by **social psychologists Michał Bilewicz and Adrian Dominik Wójcik in 2012** was to assess the scale of secondary traumatisatisation among visitors to such places – the appearance of symptoms of so-called secondary post-traumatic stress disorders due to indirect exposure to trauma, resulting from visiting a memorial site.⁶⁵ The research was conducted using a standardised questionnaire completed by Polish youth, all participants of a visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum organised by the Jewish Centre in Oświęcim (N=686), in three-time frames – one month before the visit, immediately after the visit, and one month after the visit.

Taking into account the state of Polish empirical research on education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust in authentic memorial sites, it

⁶³ A. Praga, „Rola i znaczenie pamięci o KL Auschwitz-Birkenau w edukacji historycznej Polaków i Niemców. Konfrontacja pamięci indywidualnej z doświadczeniem miejsca”, *Załącznik Kulturoznawczy*, 1 (2014), pp. 541–660.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ M. Bilewicz and A. Wójcik, „A. D. 2018. Visiting Auschwitz: Evidence of secondary traumatization among high school students”, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 88(3) (2018), pp. 328–334.

is also worth referring to the concept of dark tourism in the analysis of contemporary socio-cultural functions of these sites. The first in Poland to directly use the concept of dark tourism to analyse the significance of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum is the work edited by **geographer Jadwiga Berbeka**.⁶⁶ In this work, the author refers to the results of a survey she designed and **conducted in 2011** among domestic and foreign tourists after their visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum (N=728). The aim of the research was primarily to analyse tourist behaviour, learn the motives of a visit to this place, the premises determining the visit and the sources of knowledge about the visited place.⁶⁷ However, the empirical research conducted under the supervision of Berbeka does not provide a deeper reflection on the perception of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum. The author treated both the issues of motivation and the effects of the visit quite superficially and focused mainly on evaluation of tourist offers, including the available services and infrastructure at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum.

Also worthy of note among the few studies addressing the subject of thanatourism in Poland, in the context of visits to museums and memorial sites, are the works of the **geographer Sławoj Tanaś**, in which he refers to visits to museums and memorial sites created in post-camp areas in the context of distinguishing different types of dark tourism.⁶⁸ The works of this author are not based on social field studies generating induced data, but primarily on the analysis of existing data. As one of few studies in this area, however, it provides comprehensive knowledge about the phenomenon of thanatourism – from the importance of death in relation to existing cultural norms, through the development of space for so-called dark tourism, to the specifics of the participant's perception of this tourism.

⁶⁶ J. Berbeka (ed.), *Turystyka martyrologiczna w Polsce na przykładzie Państwowego Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, Kraków, 2012.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ S. Tanaś, *Przestrzeń turystyczna cmentarzy. Wstęp do tanatoturystyki*, Łódź, 2009; S. Tanaś, *Tanatoturystyka. Od przestrzeni śmierci do przestrzeni turystycznej*, Łódź, 2013.

Research conducted among young people - recipients of educational programmes about Auschwitz and the Holocaust undertaken outside school

Another type of empirical research on the effects of educational activities on Auschwitz and the Holocaust is the analysis of the effectiveness of educational programmes on this subject conducted outside the school environment, usually by various non-governmental organisations dealing with the issue of education about the Holocaust or as an educational offer of memorial sites and museums.

Two sub-types can be identified in principle within this research type. Firstly, research is carried out using the methodology of evaluation studies, the aim of which is to assess the degree to which the objectives and effects of particular educational programmes have been achieved and to test the effectiveness of the offer in terms of acquired factual knowledge and the declared attitudes, beliefs and values of its participants. Secondly, besides the strictly evaluative research, the researchers also attempt to measure the general understood impact of programmes on their participants, without necessarily referring directly to the intended educational objectives of these programmes.

Among the examples of evaluation studies of specific educational programmes, the evaluations carried out by **the team led by social psychologist Michał Bilewicz** are noteworthy. They encompassed two educational programmes: 'Oświęcim Otherwise – Anti-Discrimination Workshops', a programme run by the Oświęcim Jewish Centre in 2011 and 'The School of Dialogue', a series of workshops conducted by the Forum for Dialogue Foundation since 2008.⁶⁹

The evaluation studies of the 'Oświęcim Otherwise – Anti-Discrimination Workshops' programme were conducted longitudinally. Respondents completed the questionnaire one month before the workshops, directly after the workshops and one month after the workshops. The

⁶⁹ A. Wójcik and M. Bilewicz, *Oświęcim inaczej. Ewaluacja warsztatów antydyskryminacyjnych*, Centrum Badań nad Uprzedzeniami, Warszawa, 2012; M. Witkowska, A. Stefaniak, M. Bilewicz, „Stracone szanse? Wpływ polskiej edukacji o Zagładzie na postawy wobec Żydów”, *Psychologia Wychowawcza*, 5 (2014), pp. 147–159.

goal was to see if participation in the workshops had a long-term effect on the change of attitudes of the participants (N=860 out of 27 different workshop groups). Conversely, evaluation studies of ‘The School of Dialogue’ programme were conducted twice – in 2012 (N=437) and 2013 (N=486). They involved assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme in terms of the correctness and extent of the knowledge acquired and the impact on shaping the attitudes and convictions of participants.

The measurement of effects or broadly understood impact of educational programmes on its participants is becoming an integral part of such projects, although these studies are not always strictly evaluation-based. Consequently, we can distinguish the second sub-type of empirical research – mainly due to its methodological assumptions – which addresses the issue of the impact of educational programmes on its participants, taking into consideration factors that could differentiate such impact.

An example of the second sub-type is research conducted by the **linguist and pedagogue Grzegorz Żuk in the years 2012–2013** among the participants of a lesson on museums conducted by the educators of the State Museum at Majdanek (N=261, aged 15–18).⁷⁰ The author of the survey used a questionnaire with open questions to identify the subjective opinions of young people about one of the aspects of the Second World War – the activities of Nazi German concentration camps – and to learn about the attitudes of young participants in museum activities towards the camp events and phenomena. One of the goals of the study was to examine possible differences in perceptions of the reality of the concentration camp by women and men. The researcher assumed that the same historical material assimilated by young people during their

⁷⁰ G. Żuk, „Refleksja w miejscu pamięci. Badania empiryczne wśród uczestników lekcji muzealnych w Państwowym Muzeum na Majdanku. Edukacja pozaszkolna”, in: W. Wysok (ed.), *Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku. Jak przygotować, przeprowadzić i podsumować zajęcia dla uczniów*, Lublin, 2014, pp. 103–109.

stay in the Museum might lead to different reflections, presumably due to the gender of the respondents.⁷¹

Another example of this research sub-type is the questionnaire survey conducted following the completion of participation in educational programmes carried out by the International Youth Meeting Centre in Oświęcim (IYMC). One such notable survey was conducted by the **political scientist and educator Alicja Bartuś** on the memory of Auschwitz among the youth of Lesser Poland's secondary schools (N=357), participants in the project 'Małopolska Pamięta' (Lesser Poland Remembers), conducted in the spring of 2016.⁷² The educational programme included a two-day visit to the Museum, participation in workshops and sightseeing tours of the town and synagogue, among other things. The research was conducted after completion of the programme and consisted mainly of a questionnaire survey and group discussion on general reflections regarding participation in the programme.

Subsequent studies include research by **Marta Berecka and Tomasz Kobyłański**, employees of the International Centre for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. The research was conducted among the participants of the project 'Auschwitz and the Perception of the Contemporary World,' of which the first edition was held in the autumn of 2016.⁷³ The project was addressed to students of Lesser Poland and Silesian middle and secondary schools. The project was implemented in stages: an inaugural conference, preparation of young people at school, a study visit to the Memorial site and Museum, and a competition entry. The study visits and the survey were conducted directly after the visit and involved 24 groups of young people from middle and upper secondary schools (N=486).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² A. Bartuś, „Edukacja w Miejsce Pamięci Auschwitz w świetle ankiet przeprowadzonych wśród małopolskich uczniów w 2016 roku”, in: A. Bartuś (ed.), *Dzieci wojny*, Oświęcim, 2016, pp. 271–289.

⁷³ M. Berecka and T., Kobyłański, *Auschwitz a postrzeganie współczesnego świata. Opis projektu i wyniki badań ankietowych*, 2018 [materials provided by the authors].

Research conducted among school youth - recipients of formal education conducted in schools

When considering the issue of education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust, it is impossible not to refer to research regarding teaching this issue within the framework of formal education in schools. In this context, the assessment of effectiveness and efficiency remains a rather marginal issue in empirical research. The research projects carried out so far have focused on the broadly understood impact of educational activities in schools and the substantive analysis of their content.

The most notable of these studies is **Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs'** extensive research conducted among Polish school youth (1998/1999) on the attitudes of students towards Jews and their historical knowledge about Jews.⁷⁴ The author also conducted longitudinal evaluation studies of a specific educational programme conducted in schools in Łomża between the years 2008–2010. At the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009, the researcher conducted a survey in 95 high schools, which aimed to identify and explain the attitudes of young people towards other nationalities, cultures and religions, especially towards Jews. The study covered three categories of schools: comprehensive secondary schools, technical secondary schools (including specialised secondary schools) and basic vocational schools.

The issue of the effectiveness of educational activities conducted in schools was also addressed by a research team of **social psychologists composed of Marta Witkowska, Anna Stefaniak and Michał Bilewicz**, who carried out a questionnaire survey among 1,250 students from 20 secondary schools in Warsaw, aged 15–25, in 2013.⁷⁵ The funda-

⁷⁴ J. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, "Attitudes of Young Poles towards Jews in Post-1989 Poland", *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 14(3) (2000), pp. 565–596; J. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, *Me, Us, Them. Ethnic Prejudices and Alternative Methods of Education*, Kraków, 2003; J. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, „Świadomość Holokaustu wśród młodzieży polskiej po zmianach systemowych 1989 roku”, in: F. Tych and M. Adamczyk-Garbowska (eds.), *Następstwa zagłady Żydów. Polska 1944–2010*, Lublin, 2011, pp. 625–658.

⁷⁵ Witkowska et al., „Stracone szanse?”; M. Bilewicz, M. Witkowska, S. Stubig, M. Beneda, R. Imhoff, „How to Teach about the Holocaust? Psychological Obstacles in Historical Education in Poland and Germany”, in: C. Psaltis, M. Carretero, S. Čehajić-Clancy (eds.), *History Education and Conflict Transformation*, Cham, 2017, pp. 169–197.

mental question which researchers raised is to what extent the curricula conducted so far have accomplished the intended goal, i.e. have they reliably transferred knowledge and shaped the attitudes of the younger generation? The subject of the analyses covered three main substantive areas: the level of factual knowledge related to the history of the Holocaust, the assessment of young people in terms of the historical attitudes of Poles towards Jews and the declaration of their attitudes towards Jews.

In other studies, conducted by the same team a year later, the researchers attempted to identify the level of knowledge and attitudes towards Jews among young people from small towns and cities.⁷⁶ The research covered 700 secondary school students from 15 cities. In addition to the issues of knowledge and attitudes of the surveyed group of young people, the research also referred to sources from which young people acquire knowledge and based on which they develop their views and attitudes. The role of formal education in schools was also discussed in this context.

One of few research projects that primarily relied on a qualitative methodology to obtain answers regarding the specific impact of knowledge gained during formal education in schools on shaping the attitudes and imaginations of young people was a study conducted under the direction of **Magdalena Gross in the years 2010–2013**.⁷⁷ In the course of her three-year study, the author conducted qualitative research among 188 students of public schools in Poland using visual material (popular and recognisable war photographs). The research aimed to answer the question of how young people perceive the role of Jews, Germans, Russians and Poles in the context of events related to World War Two and to what extent they correspond to general social and academic views or scientifically acknowledged narratives.

⁷⁶ M. Witkowska and M. Bilewicz, „Czy prawda nas wyzwoli? Przełamywanie oporu psychologicznego w przyjmowaniu wiedzy o Zagładzie”, *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały*, 10 (2014), pp. 803–822.

⁷⁷ M. H. Gross, “Struggling to deal with the difficult past: Polish students confront the Holocaust”, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 46(4) (2014), pp. 441–463.

This analysed collection of empirical research should also be supplemented with analyses and research works, which, have not been conducted strictly based on the results of empirical research, but initiate a debate on the effectiveness of education about the Holocaust, mainly in the context of assumptions of the education of remembrance. Long-term analysis of education about the Holocaust, primarily implemented outside the school context, has thus far been led by a team of researchers and practitioners from the State Museum at Majdanek. The issues of the effectiveness of this education, its conditions and proposed effects are discussed in the works of **Tomasz Kranz** and **Wiesław Wysok**, amongst others.⁷⁸ One of the results of their reflections and analyses is, among others, the typology of the effects of the educational visit to a museum of remembrance or a set of recommendations for methodologically optimal teaching about the Holocaust in an extracurricular environment.

The results of education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust

Acquisition of knowledge

As we pointed out earlier, education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust as a sphere of practical activities has various goals and assumes various effects, regarding knowledge of facts and shaping of attitudes and values. This first set of goals and educational results – acquiring knowledge about Auschwitz and other camps, the Holocaust and, more broadly, World War Two – is often regarded as a context condition, but is essential for achieving the goal of developing attitudes and values.

The empirical research we have analysed does not provide clear conclusions as to the effectiveness of educational activities aimed at acquiring knowledge about Auschwitz and the Holocaust. On the one hand, the results of part of the research prove that educational processes

⁷⁸ T. Kranz, *Edukacja historyczna w miejscach pamięci*, Lublin, 2002; T. Kranz, *Edukacja historyczna w miejscach pamięci. Zarys problematyki*, Lublin, 2009; W. Wysok, „Wokół problematyki uwarunkowań i efektów edukacji w muzeum upamiętnienia”, *Zeszyty Majdanka*, vol. 26 (2014), pp. 311–340.

have a positive impact on the increase of correctness and scope of the participants' factual knowledge. On the other hand, some studies point to only a small impact of these activities on changes in young people's impressions and level of knowledge before participation in various educational processes, regardless of whether we are referring to the effects of a standard visit to a memorial or the results of an extended educational programme.

Marek Kucia's quantitative and qualitative research provides conclusions on the positive educational effect of a visit to a museum and memorial site, based on the example of a standard visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. The author states: 'A visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum contributes to a significant increase in the awareness of Polish youth about Auschwitz.'⁷⁹ The visit results in a change in the perception of the symbolism of Auschwitz and is also a great emotional experience. Among the effects of a visit to the Museum, the author mentions an increase in the sense of the importance of Auschwitz; awareness of facts related to the camp, especially in terms of the number and identity of victims; as well as the structure and function of the camp as a whole. In the light of his data, the visit also strengthens the diversity of perception regarding the purpose of the camp's existence, and young people indicate that the aim of the camp was 'to murder, exterminate, destroy, liquidate, exterminate Jews and others, including Poles and Gypsies'.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the sociologist emphasises that after the visit, the sense of the importance of Auschwitz grows among young people as well, and opinions about who created the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp become more detailed and less conventional.

Similarly, a questionnaire survey conducted by educators Marta Berecka and Tomasz Kobyłański among the participants of the project 'Auschwitz and the Perception of the Contemporary World' testify to the positive educational effect of a visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau

⁷⁹ M. Kucia, „Auschwitz w percepcji polskich uczniów”, *Pro Memoria*, 16 (2000), p. 26. See also Kucia, *Auschwitz jako fakt społeczny*, pp. 73–91.

⁸⁰ Kucia, *Auschwitz w percepcji polskich uczniów*, p. 19.

Memorial and Museum in terms of broadening knowledge about the concentration camp and extermination centre.⁸¹ It is worth noting that in this case, it is an extended study visit, and not a standard visit, as in the research of Kucia. In Berecka and Kobylański's research, the vast majority of young people surveyed immediately after visiting the Memorial site and Museum were capable of correctly identifying Jews as the main victims of the camp, who were condemned to total extermination (96% of those surveyed). Slightly fewer respondents – but still a considerable majority – were able to state the total number of victims of the camp (84%). In a series of 15 questions concerning the knowledge of facts about KL Auschwitz, which made up the questionnaire survey, the issue of the extermination of the Roma was the most challenging for young people. The question concerning this aspect of the history of the camp was correctly answered by 66% of respondents.⁸² The high percentage of correct answers to the survey questions, which is a test of knowledge, enabled the authors of the study to acknowledge the high effectiveness of the educational programme in the accomplishment of cognitive goals.

This positive cognitive effect was also reflected in the evaluation study of 'The School of Dialogue' programme conducted by a team under the supervision of social psychologist Michał Bilewicz. In this case, knowledge acquired by the participants of the programme referred to the understanding of facts about the former local Jewish community. Upon completion of the programme, the young people in the study expressed a greater sense of knowledge about the Jewish population formerly living in their area, and their place of residence. Several of the participants also pointed out that participation in the workshops had changed their perception of the Jewish minority and strengthened their willingness to engage in the search for further information about their history.⁸³

⁸¹ M. Berecka and T., Kobylański, *Auschwitz a postrzeżenie współczesnego świata. Opis projektu i wyniki badań ankietowych*, 2018 [materials provided by the authors].

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Witkowska et al., „Stracone szanse”.

In turn, the results of research conducted by political scientist and educator Alicja Bartuś among youth from high schools participating in the project 'Małopolska Pamięta' provided quite different conclusions regarding the effectiveness of educational activities.⁸⁴ Surveys conducted immediately after the end of the project, which consisted of workshops and standard visits to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, showed that the young people participating in the project had little knowledge of the history of World War Two, including a low level of memory regarding basic facts about Auschwitz. Bartuś found the results unsatisfactory, according to which only 44% of the participants in her educational project were capable of correctly stating the year of establishment of the camp, and 58% correctly stated the number of its victims. Moreover, research has shown that those who visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum again during the project did not remember the information about the camp any better than the others.⁸⁵ Bartuś' research findings lead to sad conclusions about the low cognitive effectiveness of both visits to memorial sites and educational workshops, as well as school education.

Several authors indicated the decreasing role of schools in the process of acquiring knowledge about the Holocaust.⁸⁶ In this context, the results of research conducted by social psychologists Marta Witkowska, Anna Stefaniak and Michał Bilewicz are of particular significance.⁸⁷ In their opinion, the level and validity of students' factual knowledge are practically unrelated to school History education. The researchers noticed that knowledge about the Holocaust is systematically decreasing among school pupils, while students without basic knowledge in this field are

⁸⁴ Bartuś, „Edukacja w Miejsu Pamięci”, pp. 271–289.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ See e.g. Kucia, *Auschwitz jako fakt społeczny*; Praga, „Rola i znaczenie pamięci”, pp. 541–660; J. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs and R. Szuchta, „The intricacies of education about the Holocaust in Poland. Ten years after the Jedwabne debate, what can Polish school students learn about the Holocaust in history classes?”, *Intercultural Education*, 25(4) (2014), pp. 283–299.

⁸⁷ Witkowska et al., „Stracone szanse?”.

also unfamiliar with other facts from the past.⁸⁸ In the research in question, the knowledge of school youth was tested based on three questions on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (the date of its outbreak, the name of the leader and the result of the Uprising), supplemented with questions regarding the success of the most important national uprisings.⁸⁹ The accuracy of the answers to the above questions was compared with the grade obtained by a given student in History as well as with the number of lesson hours devoted to the subject of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in their schools. The research showed that one in four secondary school students surveyed misunderstood most of the basic facts about the Ghetto Uprising, while answers to questions about the fate of Jews did not differ significantly from the students' general lack of historical knowledge, measured in this case by the level of accuracy of the answers about the success of the most important national uprisings. The analysis of the correctness of the answers to the above questions, along with the final evaluation and the number of hours dedicated to the subject of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, also revealed a weak correlation between the correct answers to the fact-finding questions and the evaluation of history, and the absence of such a correlation for the length of time spent teaching about the Uprising.⁹⁰ The results obtained helped to formulate conclusions about the low effectiveness of the school in transferring knowledge about the Holocaust, as well as in the teaching of History in general.

Building a conviction about the importance of Auschwitz and the Holocaust

From an educational perspective, fostering a belief in the importance of Auschwitz and the Holocaust is defined as a desirable result of educational activities. A discussion is ongoing, however, within the milieu on how to use the special and historical character of the Holocaust and its universal dimension as a crime against humanity and an

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid; Bilewicz et al., "How to Teach about the Holocaust?"

⁹⁰ Ibid.

example of human rights violations in education.⁹¹ In this discussion, we will find advocates of an educational concept focused on the Holocaust primarily because of its historical significance, as well as proponents of an approach in which education about the history of the Holocaust should be an introduction to teaching about contemporary cases of crimes against humanity and human rights violations.⁹²

From the perspective of empirical exploration of the outcomes of educational activities, research seems to provide results showing that these activities, especially those carried out in memorial sites and museums, strengthen the sense of the significance of Auschwitz and the Holocaust.

The questionnaire survey conducted in 2000 under the supervision of Marek Kucia among students visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, before and after the visit, showed the great importance of Auschwitz in the historical memory of young Poles. What is more, the visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau strengthened this conviction. When asked to indicate one of the most important events in the history of Poland during World War Two from a list, the participants of the survey most often pointed to 'Oświęcim'. 42% of respondents indicated this before the visit and 56% after the visit.⁹³

According to Alicja Bartuś' research, almost 90% of the students of Małopolska schools she surveyed are convinced that the history of Auschwitz is very important or quite important for Poles. A similar percentage of young people participating in the research declared that history in general, and especially the history of World War Two, is of interest to them.⁹⁴

Katarzyna Stec's research conducted in 2010 among school children visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek and Treblinka Memorial sites

⁹¹ J. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, „...wobec rozmiarów Zagłady świat doświadczył ogromnej winy...” Debaty wokół nauczania o Holokauście”, *Studia nad Autorytaryzmem i Totalitaryzmem*, 38(2) (2016), 23 et seq.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Kucia, *Auschwitz jako fakt społeczny*, p. 302.

⁹⁴ Bartuś, „Edukacja w Miejscu Pamięci”, p. 283.

and Museums provides analogous results about the significance of the past. A vast majority of the surveyed youth believed that preserving the memory of the past is important or very important for every individual (over 80%), including themselves (approx. 75%). Simultaneously, more than 80% of the surveyed young people also agreed that everyone should visit the memorial sites and museums founded on the grounds of the former camps at least once in their lifetime, chiefly because of the importance of the subject matter they address.⁹⁵

Fundamentally, it seems that at the declarative level, young people in Poland are characterised by a great deal of cognitive curiosity and interest in the subject of camps, the Holocaust and World War Two in general. In this regard, the results of empirical studies are consistent. The majority of participants in the research conducted by Katarzyna Stec, Agnieszka Praga, Grzegorz Żuk and Alicja Bartuś declared their willingness to deepen and further the knowledge gained during their visit to the Memorial site.⁹⁶ Similarly, participation in educational programmes seems to stimulate young people to explore the subject matter further and sensitise them to its importance. Michał Bilewicz and his team also came to such conclusions during a study involving participants of ‘The School of Dialogue’.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ K. Stec, „Symbolika i znaczenie miejsc pamięci utworzonych na terenach byłych obozów koncentracyjnych i zagłady z perspektywy współczesnego młodego człowieka”, in: M. Kucia (ed.), *Antysemityzm, Holokaust, Auschwitz w badaniach społecznych*, Kraków, 2011, pp. 37–54; K. Stec, „Rola wizyty w muzeum-miejscu pamięci dla współczesnego młodego człowieka – doświadczenie edukacyjne czy turystyczne”, in: P. Trojański (ed.), *Auschwitz i Holokaust. Edukacja w szkole i w miejscu pamięci*, pp. 287–297.

⁹⁶ Stec, „Symbolika i znaczenie miejsc pamięci”, pp. 37–54; Praga, „Rola i znaczenie pamięci”, pp. 541–660; G. Żuk, „Refleksja w miejscu pamięci. Badania empiryczne wśród uczestników lekcji muzealnych w Państwowym Muzeum na Majdanku”, in: W. Wysok (ed.), *Edukacja pozaszkolna w Państwowym Muzeum na Majdanku. Jak przygotować, przeprowadzić i podsumować zajęcia dla uczniów*, Lublin, 2014, pp. 103–109; Bartuś, „Edukacja w Miejscu Pamięci”, p. 283.

⁹⁷ A. Stefaniak, *Szkoła Dialogu jako narzędzie budowania lokalnego kapitału społecznego. Wyniki badań ewaluacyjnych 2012–2017. Raport z badań ewaluacyjnych*, Centrum Analiz Międzynarodowego Instytutu Społeczeństwa Obywatelskiego, 2018, https://camiso.org.pl/fileadmin/user_upload/Szkoła_dialogu_Raport.pdf [accessed: 01.10.2018].

In turn, however, it seems that the declarations of young people about their interest in the subject of camps, the Holocaust and the past in general, and the significance of this subject, do not necessarily go hand in hand with real practices. Admittedly, there are no studies that would verify declarations by comparing them with real practices, but the analysis of declarations of practices in this field allows us to conclude that the real involvement of young people in exploring this issue is extremely low. For instance, Alicja Bartuś' study indicates that there is little real interest in the subject of Auschwitz and the Holocaust, both in terms of deepening knowledge through the independent use of additional sources and in the context of personal, family history.⁹⁸ In response to a question on knowledge of literature and films about Auschwitz, 83% of those surveyed replied that they had never read any books on the subject of the camp, while 42% had not seen any films on the subject. More than 40% of the respondents were also not interested in whether any of their loved ones had been imprisoned in KL Auschwitz or had lost their lives there during the war. Moreover, half of them never learned about the fate of any of the prisoners of the camp.⁹⁹ In the survey by Agnieszka Praga, 66% of the young Poles questioned had no such knowledge of their relatives, and according to their declarations, this subject rarely appeared as a topic of conversation in the family.¹⁰⁰

The diminishing role of the family and the intergenerational message in the process of assimilating knowledge about the Holocaust are also evidenced by the results of other studies.¹⁰¹ For example, Robert Szuchta's survey showed that only 34% of young people indicated family as a source of knowledge and information about recent history in general.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Bartuś, „Edukacja w Miejsce Pamięci”, p. 283.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 277 et seq.

¹⁰⁰ Praga, „Rola i znaczenie pamięci”, p. 557 et seq.

¹⁰¹ Kucia, *Auschwitz jako fakt społeczny*; Idem, „KL Auschwitz w percepcji polskich uczniów”, pp. 99–108; Stec, „Symbolika i znaczenie miejsc pamięci”, pp. 37–54; Ambrosewicz-Jacobs and Szuchta, „The intricacies of education”, pp. 283–299.

¹⁰² Ambrosewicz-Jacobs and Szuchta, „The intricacies of education”, pp. 283–299.

In Katarzyna Stec's research, however, as many as 71% of respondents believed that families should discuss the fate of people during World War Two.¹⁰³ Conversely, in the context of other institutions, such as schools, museums and memorials or the media, the family was not often identified as the main channel of knowledge about the past. In response to the question who should, above all, disseminate knowledge about the fate of people during World War Two, 30% of respondents indicated the family (among others), whereas only 2% listed it as the sole and primary source of knowledge.¹⁰⁴

Developing sensitivity and empathy

In addition to providing reliable knowledge and awareness of the importance of these events in history, education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust should, according to its theoreticians and practitioners, also promote specific attitudes and values, especially openness to others, responsibility, empathy and sensitivity to the needs of others.¹⁰⁵ The goals and educational results are extensive. They relate, on the one hand, to general moral and ethical issues, including sensitivity to the fate of others. On the other hand, they refer to the problem of discrimination against other people related to the causes of the Holocaust, including the phenomena of anti-Semitism or ethnocentrism. From a broader perspective, they also touch upon the issues of authoritarianism, threats and consequences of violating the norms and values of democracy.

¹⁰³ Stec, „Symbolika i znaczenie miejsc pamięci”, pp. 37–54.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ T. Kranz, *Edukacja historyczna w miejscach pamięci*, Lublin, 2002; T. Kranz, *Edukacja historyczna w miejscach pamięci. Zarys problematyki*, Lublin, 2009; A. Stępnik, „Rola wizyty w muzeum-miejsu pamięci z punktu widzenia dydaktyki historii”, in: T. Kranz (ed.), *Wizyty edukacyjne w Państwowym Muzeum na Majdanku. Poradnik dla nauczycieli*, Lublin, 2012, pp. 51–63; W. Wysok, „Wokół problematyki uwarunkowań i efektów edukacji w muzeum upamiętnienia”, *Zeszyty Majdanka*, vol. 26 (2014), pp. 311–340; G. Żuk, „Refleksja w miejscu pamięci. Badania empiryczne wśród uczestników lekcji muzealnych w Państwowym Muzeum na Majdanku”, in: W. Wysok (ed.), *Edukacja pozaszkolna w Państwowym Muzeum na Majdanku. Jak przygotować, przeprowadzić i podsumować zajęcia dla uczniów*, Lublin, 2014, pp. 103–109.

In terms of developing the sensitivity of participants in education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust, empirical research clearly shows that a visit to memorial sites and museums created in the post-camp areas has a strong emotional impact on young people, and in shaping and strengthening their empathy and compassion for the victims of the camps. It is, however, worth noting in this context that it is not the only way to channel emotions evoked by the visit. As indicated by Katarzyna Stec's research, a visit to museums and memorial sites also evokes a feeling of appreciation and respect among young people for Poles, their compatriots, who, in their opinion, fought heroically at that time and died as martyrs. Some participants of her qualitative research also pointed to feelings of reluctance or even hatred towards the perpetrators as a result of the visit.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, the results of the first survey conducted by Jolanta Adamska among visitors to the Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek, Sztutowo and Rogoźnica Memorial sites and Museums showed that visits to these places were, first of all, received very emotionally by young people, and their comments testified above all to their great sensitivity. The most common expressions used by young people to verbalise their reflections are: 'shock, feelings of surprise, anxiety, disbelief, dejection, bitterness, horror, fear and incomprehension of human nature, compassion for prisoners, and fear of recurrence of the past'.¹⁰⁷

A study carried out in 2011 under the guidance of Jadwiga Berbeka provides similar data on the effects of a visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and Memorial Site.¹⁰⁸ Accordingly, more than 90% of those surveyed believed that the visit had instilled in them respect for life, while a similar percentage indicated that it had aroused their sensitivity

¹⁰⁶ Stec, „Symbolika i znaczenie miejsc pamięci”.

¹⁰⁷ J. Adamska, „Muzea – miejsca pamięci w oczach młodzieży. Omówienie rezultatów ankietyzacji przeprowadzonej w 1994 r. przez Radę Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa”, *Przeszłość i pamięć*, 1(2) (1997), pp. 10 et seq.

¹⁰⁸ J. Berbeka (ed.), *Turystyka martyrologiczna w Polsce na przykładzie Państwowego Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, Kraków, 2012.

to human suffering, prompted reflection on genocide and forced them to reflect on the contemporary moral condition of societies.¹⁰⁹

Sławoj Tanaś considers the evoking of emotions characteristic of communing with death and suffering through a visit to the Museum and Memorial site as a factor that 'shapes feelings that are a conscious interpretation of emotions, sensitises to the sacrum of death, liberates empathy towards suffering and pain after the death of a fellow human'.¹¹⁰ In the opinion of the author, tourism to such places can, therefore, play an andragogical role, by accomplishing the tasks of pedagogy oriented towards patriotic education, as well as universal sensitivity to other people.¹¹¹

On the other hand, however, attention must be drawn to the results of studies that analyse in more detail the range and direction of emotions triggered by a visit to an authentic memorial site. Firstly, at a declarative level, young people are dominated by emotions that are typical of identifying oneself with the victims, or of interpreting the actions of prisoners in the camps in almost heroic terms.¹¹² Therefore, the most frequently mentioned emotions are 'regret', 'sadness' and 'respect' or 'admiration', whereas the most rarely mentioned are 'shame', 'guilt' or 'feelings of responsibility'.¹¹³ Secondly, the selective sensitivity of young people is also mentioned by Alicja Bartuś who, based on her survey results, concludes that the compassion expressed among the students participating in her research for children in Auschwitz did not translate into the same feelings on the victims of contemporary wars in Africa or Asia.¹¹⁴ To the open question, 'What is Auschwitz to you?' the surveyed youth rarely referred to the situation of the victims of contemporary wars and

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 156 et seq.

¹¹⁰ S. Tanaś, *Tanatoturystyka. Od przestrzeni śmierci do przestrzeni turystycznej*, Łódź, 2013, p. 133.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Stec, „Symbolika i znaczenie miejsc pamięci”, pp. 37–54; Żuk, „Refleksja w miejscu pamięci”, pp. 103–109.

¹¹³ Bilewicz et al., "How to Teach about the Holocaust?".

¹¹⁴ Bartuś, „Edukacja w Miejscu Pamięci”, p. 283.

conflicts; they did not see the connection between the mechanisms of crime in the past and the present world.¹¹⁵

Surveys on the effects of formal education conducted in schools provide comparatively more information on the impact of education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust regarding the abatement of anti-Semitism and ethnocentrism. Unfortunately, both the research of Ambrosewicz-Jacobs and Witkowska, Stefaniak and Bilewicz showed poor results of school education in mitigating anti-Semitism and ethnocentrism.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, the latter's research showed that the scope of school education about the Holocaust, and the students' assessments, seem to be significantly related to their idealised views on national history: the broader the school teaching about the Holocaust, the more likely it was that the students noticed that the assistance provided by Poles to Jews was overly extensive. Thus, the authors of the research conclude: "The school's efforts to combat prejudice proved to be far from sufficient, and paradoxically counterproductive in some respects, thereby strengthening negative attitudes towards Jews."¹¹⁷

Arousing patriotic, civic and humanistic feelings

Another effect of education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust, mentioned in the context of sensitivity towards the fate of others, is the awakening and shaping of patriotic and civic feelings and, in a broader sense, humanistic feelings.¹¹⁸

In this case, empirical research carried out among young people visiting memorials and museums provides relatively better information. According to these studies, a visit to such sites triggers the closest frame of reference in the interpretation of the meaning of memory

¹¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 285 et seq.

¹¹⁶ J. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, "Attitudes of Young Poles toward Jews in Post-1989 Poland", *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 14(3) (2000), pp. 565–596; Witkowska et al., „Stracone szanse?”.

¹¹⁷ Witkowska et al., „Stracone szanse?”, p. 153.

¹¹⁸ Żuk, „Refleksja w miejscu pamięci”, pp. 103–109.

– the national frame, strengthening the conviction about the value of participation in one's national group and the sharing of 'our' mutual past.¹¹⁹ Additionally, a visit to a memorial site increases the belief in the martyrdom of one's group and even generates fear of the extinction of one's national group.¹²⁰ It also automatically stimulates negative thinking about the German nation and increases social distance towards Germans.¹²¹

Referring to the results of her empirical research, Bartuś emphasises that after a visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, young people often discussed the subject of patriotism, which usually referred to the context of the war, because it is associated with the struggle for the homeland and the defence of its freedom.¹²² Such an interpretation often went hand in hand with a high level of declared national pride and even nationalist attitudes.¹²³

The treatment of visits to memorial sites and museums by young people as an experience embedded in discussions about national identity is not a phenomenon specific only to this age group. Generally speaking, for Poles, the Second World War remains above all a source of pride. According to a nationwide survey conducted by the Polish Academy of Sciences and Pentor on a representative sample of adult Poles in 2003, World War Two was indicated as a reason for pride by half of the respondents to the questionnaire interviews; it was considered a period

¹¹⁹ Stec, „Symbolika i znaczenie miejsc pamięci”, pp. 37–54; K. Stec, „Rola wizyty w muzeum-miejsce pamięci dla współczesnego młodego człowieka – doświadczenie edukacyjne czy turystyczne”, in: P. Trojański (ed.), *Auschwitz i Holocaust. Edukacja w szkole i w miejscu pamięci*, Oświęcim, 2014, pp. 287–297.

¹²⁰ K. Skarżyńska, K. Przybyła, A.D. Wójcik, „Grupowa martyrologia: psychologiczne funkcje przekonań o narodowej krzywdzie”, *Psychologia Społeczna*, vol. 7, 4(23) (2012), pp. 335–352; A. Wójcik, M. Bilewicz, *Oświęcim inaczej. Ewaluacja warsztatów antydyskryminacyjnych*, Warszawa, 2012.

¹²¹ M. Kucia, *KL Auschwitz w percepcji polskich uczniów. Komunikat z badań*, Kraków, 2005 [typescript]; Kucia, „KL Auschwitz w percepcji polskich uczniów”, pp. 99–108; Stec, „Symbolika i znaczenie miejsc pamięci”, pp. 37–54; Wójcik and Bilewicz, *Oświęcim inaczej*; Bilewicz et al., „How to Teach about the Holocaust?”.

¹²² Bartuś, „Edukacja w Miejsce Pamięci Auschwitz”, p. 288.

¹²³ Ibid.

of Polish bravery and perseverance.¹²⁴ Tomasz Kranz emphasises that, ‘in the common consciousness of Poles, World War Two was restricted to two types of historical narration: heroism and martyrdom’.¹²⁵ Marcin Kula asserts that such an interpretation particularly accompanies ‘history that deviates from standards,’ which most certainly includes the history of concentration and death camps.¹²⁶ Therefore, we are dealing with one of the interpretations of history learned during a visit to the Memorial site and Museum: a simplified interpretation of the past presented by young people mainly in black-and-white categories, clearly distinguishing heroes and villains, victims and perpetrators.

At the same time, the results of the analysed research show that a visit to a museum and memorial site does not have a significant impact on the perception of the symbolism of such a site. Marek Kucia’s research has shown that Auschwitz is perceived by young people primarily in Polish-Jewish and universal terms, and a visit to the Museum has little impact on changes of this opinion.¹²⁷ Similar conclusions were reached by Katarzyna Stec in her research. A visit to memorial sites preserves the order of remembrance of the past in terms of ‘ownership’ – it is primarily a carrier of universal values in the case of Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek, but also strengthens the multinational symbolism of these sites.¹²⁸ Thus, the narration of memorial sites, especially the one constructed for the needs of the museums’ operation, structures the experience

¹²⁴ P.T. Kwiatkowski, „Czy lata III Rzeczypospolitej były „czasem pamięci”?”, in: A. Szpociński (ed.), *Pamięć zbiorowa jako czynnik integracji i źródło konfliktów*, Warszawa, 2009, pp. 275 et seq.

¹²⁵ T. Kranz, *Zbrodnie Nazizmu w świadomości i edukacji historycznej w Polsce i Niemczech*, Lublin, 1998, p. 21.

¹²⁶ M. Kula, *Miedzy przeszłością a przyszłością. O pamięci, zapominaniu i przewidywaniu*, Poznań, 2004, p. 80.

¹²⁷ Kucia, „Auschwitz w percepcji”, pp. 17–26; Idem, *Auschwitz jako fakt społeczny*; M. Kucia, *KL Auschwitz w percepcji polskich uczniów. Komunikat z badań*, Kraków, 2005 [typescript].

¹²⁸ Stec, „Symbolika i znaczenie miejsc pamięci”, pp. 37–54; Stec, „Rola wizyty w muzeum-miejscu pamięci”, pp. 287–297.

of young Poles and is a tool for transmitting universal symbolism and human values.¹²⁹

Emotional experience, affective cognition

On the role of visits to memorial sites and museums established in the post-camp areas, the researchers all agree that such visits have a particular impact on the emotional sphere, especially on young people. This effect does not only apply to the emphatic reactions of the visitors to the fate of the camp victims, but also the mental and physical wellbeing of the visitors themselves. Some studies provide data that show that the emotions evoked by this experience last longer than the visit itself.¹³⁰ Roma Sendyka speaks in this context of a sudden affective experience. As she argues, it is an affective experience, not an emotional one, because in her opinion, 'the event takes place inside the visitor, in a pre-personal area beyond the conscious control of the visitor.'¹³¹

The emotional dimension of the visit is no surprise, bearing in mind both the history of the memorial sites and museums established on the grounds of the former camps and the factual or visual aspect (the remains of the camp, the objects left behind by the deportees and prisoners). The fact that emotional experience is the distinctive factor after the visit is also of little surprise. A visit to memorial sites and museums such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek, Treblinka and the like undoubtedly evokes emotions that seem to last for some time after the visit and, along with the knowledge acquired, become the basis for reflection on the importance of memory about the past, past generations, history and its significance for young people. Interaction, albeit symbolic, with death and suffering, especially in the extreme conditions of a concentration

¹²⁹ Stec, „Symbolika i znaczenie miejsc pamięci”, pp. 37–54; A.M. Wierzbicka, *Architektura miejsc pamięci jako forma strukturyzująca doświadczenia zbiorowe na przykładzie obiektów świadectwa Holokaustu*, Kraków, 2011.

¹³⁰ Bilewicz and Wójcik, „Visiting Auschwitz: Evidence”, pp. 328–334.

¹³¹ R. Sendyka, „Miejsca, które straszą (afekty i nie-miejsca pamięci)”, *Teksty Drugie*, 1 (2014), pp. 84–102.

and extermination camp, arouses emotions such as fear or anxiety, but also indirectly stimulates reflection.¹³² The results of the study mentioned above, conducted in 2011 under the direction of Jadwiga Berbeka, testify to the intense emotionality of the visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum.¹³³ Although the survey focused on visitors from different age groups, nearly half of them were under 24 years of age. The participants of the questionnaire survey were asked, after the visit, to share their feelings during the tour of the former camp. The participants most often listed three types of feelings: sadness (64%), reverie and reflection (54%) and affection (37%).¹³⁴

In the study by Katarzyna Stec, young people underlined that it was very important, and also emotional, to experience a real, tangible story during a visit to a given memorial site. The visited site is for them an authentic image of history, which allows them to ‘feel the enormity of the tragedies of those years and stimulate imagination, but also sensitivity’ and, above all, ‘fully recognise and understand the horror of war’.¹³⁵ Jolanta Adamska wrote earlier about the significance of the authenticity of the visited site, stating that it is ‘the authenticity of the site, facilities, prisoners’ objects and their number’ that seems to have the greatest impact on the perception of a young person exploring places of remembrance and museums.¹³⁶

To this end, it is also worth mentioning the experimental psychological studies conducted by Michał Bilewicz and Adrian Dominik Wójcik, whose main purpose was to assess the scale of secondary traumatisations among visitors to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum. The study showed that secondary post-traumatic stress disorder was observed among 13.2% of young visitors, whilst a longitudinal analysis confirmed

¹³² Adamska, „Muzea – miejsca pamięci w oczach młodzieży”, pp. 8–13; J. Berbeka (ed.), *Turystyka martyrologiczna*; S. Tanaś, *Przestrzeń turystyczna cmentarzy*; S. Tanaś, *Tanatourystyka. Od przestrzeni śmierci do przestrzeni turystycznej*, Łódź, 2013.

¹³³ Berbeka (ed.), *Turystyka martyrologiczna w Polsce*.

¹³⁴ Ibid, pp. 156 et seq.

¹³⁵ Stec, „Symbolika i znaczenie miejsc pamięci”, pp. 51–52.

¹³⁶ Adamska, „Muzea – miejsca pamięci”, p. 10.

that emphatic reactions to the visit to Auschwitz (e.g. strong identification with the fate of victims) were associated with a higher level of secondary post-traumatic stress and persisted even one month after the visit.¹³⁷ Consequently, the researchers concluded that visits to places connected with traumatic events in the past should be preceded by more intensive preparations, not only substantive but also appropriate psychological preparations.

Challenges to research on education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust

In analysing the results of research projects conducted so far on the issues of education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust, it is also advisable to look at the conceptual and methodological layers of these research projects. Such empirical research dimensions are particularly important for discussing the challenges of measuring the effects of education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust. The empirical research discussed above does not always seem to provide an explicit interpretation of how this education translates into an increase in the level of knowledge or a change in attitudes and values of participants in this process.

At a methodological level, the previous empirical studies are based on the acquisition of data using survey techniques, which rely on the answers given by the participants in these studies. Some studies also have an important qualitative component that broadens the interpretation of derived quantitative results. Research using evaluation methodologies to measure the degree of achievement of the assumed objectives and obtained results are also becoming increasingly popular. To measure a possible change in knowledge, attitudes and values, longitudinal research methodology is also used, i.e. conducted on the same research group over a longer period of time, or panel research, in which a specific measure is performed repeatedly on the same group of people, using the same research tool (e.g. a questionnaire).

Difficulties in measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust, however, appear from the basic

¹³⁷ Bilewicz and Wójcik, "Visiting Auschwitz: Evidence", pp. 3 et seq.

operational level of research. While the definition of the goals and effects of Holocaust education in the conceptual layer, using a certain simplification, boils down to indicating two of its basic components – transfer of reliable knowledge and shaping of specific values and attitudes – in the case of measuring these components there is no compatibility and certainty as to how and where to establish the so-called satisfactory minimum in terms of the scope or durability of the expected change.

This also raises the question of the research subject itself. In the case of the study of the effectiveness of education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust, does one refer to the so-called net value of education, i.e. the effect attributed solely to educational activities, with the deduction of changes resulting from the influence of other non-educational factors? And if so, is it possible to obtain such a value at all? As the research discussed above shows, participants in the organised educational process, be it at schools, memorial sites, museums or other institutions, are equipped at the outset with a certain set of ideas about history, shaped by family or culture and conditioned by the socio-political or media discourse prevailing in a given context. After all, the issue of Auschwitz and the Holocaust is not taught in vain. Moreover, in the case of young recipients of structured educational activities, the process of developing knowledge and shaping beliefs and attitudes is not only a long-term process but also a dynamic one, given the impact of various factors and the development period of the recipients.

From the above, two directions of empirical exploration of the issues of education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust seem to be the most reasonable and worth pursuing.

Firstly, in terms of optimisation of educational activities, the broader use of evaluation studies designed for specific educational programmes may be a valuable source of recommendations on the effectiveness of different methods in working with students and provide guidance on how, and to what extent, knowledge about Auschwitz and the Holocaust should be transferred to achieve the desired educational goals and effects. The trend in question is still not sufficiently applied in evaluation research, and in our opinion, it should be an integral part of any

educational activity. The optimal way would be to take measurements in several time frames to capture any possible change in both factual knowledge and attitudes and convictions.

Secondly, in analysing the broader educational process, it seems particularly important that the identification of factors that differentiate the effectiveness of education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust should be explored further. This trend in empirical research allows us to identify and explain various social and cultural contexts, as well as individual factors that determine the functioning of educational processes. In its structured form, the educational process conducted in schools or other educational institutions is also regarded as one of the components contributing to the acquisition of knowledge in the field of the discussed issues. In the methodological dimension, the proposed in-depth identification of factors in the educational process requires measurement spread out over a period of time to capture the variability of analysed factors and contexts. It also seems justified to supplement the declarations of direct participants of the educational process with data collected from other people involved in the process: families, educators, teachers or even the neighbouring community. Given its complexity and variability over time, this research trend poses a particular challenge to researchers of the discussed issues.

Alternatively, case study research could be the starting point for identifying these factors and discovering mechanisms, using case study methodology and analysis with the assumption of measurement over time, according to the principles of longitudinal studies but limited to a certain test sample. As a research strategy, a case study focuses on understanding the dynamics of a single set of cases in a specific situational context. Nevertheless, multiple case studies provide the possibility of formulating certain generalisations while maintaining the specificity of individual sets. Simultaneously, this research strategy offers the possibility of using different research methods, both qualitative and quantitative.

As for research on education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust in different contexts, the case study strategy may serve to build a model of

educational impact on knowledge, impressions and attitudes, as well as on the values of young people, together with identification of the possible distinguishing factors of this effect. At a further stage of analysis, this type of model could be tested and modified in broader research sets. Such a research approach seems to combine both the contextual diversity of educational activities and the attempt to capture more general, perhaps even universal, mechanisms occurring during these activities.

Summary

The aim of the analysis carried out in this article was to indicate the main directions of the empirical research on education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust, summarise the results of the research in the context of considerations on the effectiveness of this education and indicate possible directions for further development of empirical research in this area.

The analysis showed, among other factors, that the issue of effective education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust is increasingly often discussed not only as a sphere of practical activities and the subject of pedagogical reflection, but also as a subject of empirical research, primarily in the field of the social sciences. While the analysed research does not always provide clear and consistent conclusions as to the effectiveness of teaching about Auschwitz and the Holocaust, it certainly constitutes an important source of information about its effects, especially those unintended and unexpected as desirable goals of educational activities. Nevertheless, empirical research is still not an integral part of the processes related to the evaluation of the effectiveness of these activities.

Accordingly, among the potential directions for further development of empirical research in this area, we see the need for greater inclusion of research in pedagogical practice as a tool for measuring the effectiveness of education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust. Furthermore, we notice the usefulness of further and broader exploration of the issue of this education in terms of identifying individual, social and cultural factors that may have an impact on its effectiveness, including using a longer-term perspective than the educational activity itself.