

The Role of the 4-H Club Program in Poland

**Mr. Lee Stanish, Graduate Researcher in Youth Development and Agricultural Education
Purdue University – West Lafayette, Indiana**

**Dr. Jerry Peters, Professor of Youth Development and Agricultural Education
Purdue University- West Lafayette, Indiana**

**Dr. Czeslaw Nowak, Professor of International Agriculture and Extension
Agricultural University of Krakow- Krakow, Poland**

Introduction

4-H club programs emerged as an American idea in the early 1900's. These clubs expanded U.S. Extension's capacity by adding a youth audience to its mission. According to Reck (1951), 4-H clubs implemented hands on learning and practical education to youth in rural America. American 4-H would mature to chart a history defined by science-based, non-formal educational (NFE) activities that are family and community-based (Wessel & Wessel, 1982).

The 4-H non-formal education idea migrated and adapted outside U.S. borders. Between 1920 and 2002, 37 non-U.S. countries would emerge their version of the 4-H idea with organizations named 4-H, 4-I, 4-K, 4-C, 4-S, 4-F, and 4-A (Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service, 2008). A key to success of these programs was molding the core 4-H idea to the cultural, national, and local needs of each country. In a 1951 Cornell University conference for leaders of international youth programs, Dr. Hsin-Pao Yang said, "The cardinal principle governing the adaptation of 4-H Club work in other lands is the recognition of local needs and the importance of taking all the necessary steps to adjust the new system to meet these needs" (Federal Extension Service, 1958, p. 44).

Each non-U.S. 4-H system ranges in maturity and development. In a conversation about international 4-H developments, United Nations Senior Rural Youth Development Officer from 1993-2004, Bill Seiders, offered a timeline (R. William "Bill" Seiders, personal communication, August 26, 2008). Seiders timeline suggested that most early non-U.S. 4-H developments occurred within three periods of time. These included Pre-WW II, Post WW II, and during the U.S. Aid land grant movement of the 1960's. Additionally, new 4-H programs would form or be revitalized in the East Europe transition after 1989.

The post-communist changes in the early 1990's had a great impact on the formation and implementation of education in Central and Eastern Europe (Mitter, 2003). Specifically, Polish education faced a chaos of national and international opinions about what it should look like, linked with a low order in national priority (Tomiak, 2000). But just as the country was exploring new ideas in the formal education classroom, non formal education systems (NFE's) such as 4-H were developing to support youth. As a result, some 400 4-H clubs containing 7,000 members are active in Poland today.

The growth and staying power of the Polish 4-H movement post 1989 suggests that it was beneficial to Poles. In this turmoil of national and educational policy changes, Poland customized 4-H to benefit Polish youth and communities at the local level. Brennan (1997) stated that non-formal education systems (NFE's) can form as a quick reaction to educational needs when formal education is slow or absent in a response to need.

Purpose and Objectives

The Polish 4-H Foundation, Polish Agricultural Universities, the Polish Extension System, and USDA Foreign Agricultural Services all hold a common desire – to better understand and document the benefits of 4-H in Poland. However, no formal evaluation to determine the benefits of Polish 4-H has been conducted (K. Boczek, personal communication, June 29, 2008).

Polish Professor Dr. Kazimierz Wiek noted that this research gap perpetuates a lack of understanding and awareness of Polish 4-H (K. Wiek, personal communication, June 19, 2008). Additionally, Polish Professor and key Extension leader Dr. Joseph Kania noted that the lack of research also situates Polish 4-H in an environment of unstable funding (J. Kania, personal communication, June 19, 2008). Lastly, current USDA Agricultural Counselor, Eric Wenberg, encouraged the research to further document 4-H in Poland.

The authors of this paper therefore had the following three objectives:

- 1) To review and expand the literature in 4-H system evaluation.
- 2) To describe characteristics of the Polish 4-H system in the Sweitokrzyskie Voivodship (geographical region).
- 3) To explore the benefits of Polish 4-H in the Sweitokrzyskie Voivodship.

Literature Review

Objective 1

Research completed on American 4-H include evaluations taken from various perspectives in the 4-H system. This includes youth, 4-H leaders, 4-H alumni, Extension staff, volunteers, and 4-H parents. In 1987 American researchers investigated a systems approach to studying 4-H benefits called “Does 4-H Make a Difference” was published (Ladewig & Thomas, 1987). Here Ladewig and Thomas researched 4-H benefits by a national telephone survey of 710 randomly chosen 4-H alumni. The survey also included 743 former members of other youth organizations, and 309 nonparticipants in youth organizations. Impact was measured by life skills learned.

4-H alumni were highlighted again in a 2003 Nebraska study of life skill development through 4-H clubs (Fox, Schroeder, & Lodl, 2003). Here the researchers used a descriptive mixed methods paper survey developed by a focus group of 4-H leaders, volunteers, alumni, and Extension staff. The survey was given to 264 purposefully sampled alumni (representing a range of involvement, years of membership, and project interests) in Nebraska. Participants completed quantitative and qualitative questions pertaining to their perceived life skills and rank because of 4-H club experiences.

In 1997 a study by Taylor-Powell, Hutchins, and Reed (1997), 566 groups of Wisconsin 4-H leaders were surveyed across 48 counties in Wisconsin. This study particularly focused on the community service benefit aspect of participating in 4-H.

In 1999 a major study of 4-H clubs in New York was completed (Rodriguez, Hirschl, Mead, & Goggin, 1999). The study included several phases. First, 12 focus groups were held to represent geographic and rural/urban regions of the state. These groups contained 4-H Extension staff, club leaders, program assistants, volunteers, 4-H club members, and 4-H parents. These included an examination of youth development programming in 4-H, and to inform the construction of a 4-H member survey. The survey was sent to 14,000 eligible youth in 5th-12th grade. 3198 completed surveys were returned. Conclusions found that 4-H youth had gains in

the areas of public speaking, problem solving, goal setting, leadership skills, planning skills, self-confidence, citizenship, communication skills, understanding diversity, money management, improved performance at school, expanded horizons, organizational skills, respect for others, patience, loyalty, tolerance, real-world experience from hands on projects, and a desire to make a difference in their communities.

Research evaluating European 4-H systems includes an ethnographic study conducted in 2002 by a U.S. researcher comparing the Wisconsin 4-H and Finnish 4-H systems (Staude, 2002). Staude noted that though 4-H of various countries share the motto “learn by doing”, the outcomes produced by 4-H are very different. “In the United States projects focus on life skill development” while 4-H in Finland produced an outcome in “some type of income for the members” (Staude, 2002, p. 62). This example shows that researching a non-U.S. 4-H system requires specific attention in methodology. The use of a U.S. 4-H measurement instrument without review would be ethno-centric.

Additional research on European 4-H has been completed by Denmark 4-H in 1989. Here Denmark surveyed its 4-H members and looking at 4-H as one of several voluntary organizations in 1996 (K. Madsen, personal communication, September 1, 2008). These documents only exist in the native language.

Methods

Five populations of Polish residents were sampled for this study, including 4-H members, 4-H leaders, 4-H parents, 4-H alumni, and school administrators. A list of the (74) 4-H clubs of the Sweitokrzeskie Voivodship was provided to the research team. It was estimated that these 74 clubs held a total of 3,000 4-H members. A cluster sample approach was taken. Nine 4-H clubs of the total 74 were chosen by convenience sampling to represent the clusters. All five populations (members, alumni, leaders, parents, administrators) within each chosen cluster were invited to take the researcher developed survey. Surveys were hand delivered and retrieved from each club.

Participants’ perceptions of the benefits of Polish 4-H were measured by survey instrument. The instrument was 28 questions long, including multiple choice and likert type questions. Additionally, the instrument included questions allowing participants to provide their own comments regarding their perceived 4-H benefits. A Cron-bach’s Alpha test measured the reliability of the instrument to be .806.

Findings

Objective 2

Of the 97 total respondents, 66% identified themselves as 4-H members, 3.1% as 4-H alumni, 7.2% as 4-H parents, 19.6% as 4-H leaders, and 4.1% as school administrators. 70.1% of respondents rated themselves as having been a 4-H member for 1-4 years, and 88.7% of respondents identified as spending 1-5 hours a week involved in 4-H activities. 85.6% of respondents identified as female. 84% of respondents said that their 4-H meetings occur at their school (63.9% during school hours, 21.6% after school hours). Additionally, 85.6% of respondents identified their 4-H leader as a teacher in their school. Respondents rated 4-H activities from a list of choices, responding that environment/ecology (86.6%) and Polish art and tradition (89.75%) are the two most popular projects.

Objective 3

73.2% of respondents said that 4-H positively influences students' marks in school. 12 of the 97 respondents said they were able to visit the United States through a 4-H exchange program (8-Purdue, 4-Michigan State University). Respondents strongly agreed or agreed that because of 4-H they are active in community service (90.75%), complete hands on learning projects (95.8%), and make new friends (87.6%).

Polish 4-H is Perceived to Help Youth Learn About: (N=97)

Subject Areas	M	SD
Ecology	1.67	.574
Improving English Communication Skills	2.91	1.411
Improving English Writing Skills	2.95	1.407
Solving Problems	1.92	.749
Polish Traditions	1.41	.535
Communicating Ideas	1.65	.644
Working as a Team	1.49	.668
Leadership	2.42	.878
Polish Art	1.71	.655

*Scale: A=Strongly Agree, B=Agree, C=Not Sure, D=Disagree, E=Strongly Disagree

Activities members complete because of involvement in Polish 4-H: (N=97)

Activities	M	SD
Become Active in Community Service	1.59	.658
Do hands-on Projects	1.46	.578
Make Friends	1.61	.767
Become Leaders in Their Local Community	2.38	.879

*Scale: A=Strongly Agree, B=Agree, C=Not Sure, D=Disagree, E=Strongly Disagree

Respondents were additionally given an opportunity to express what they felt they had gained from being involved in 4-H through an open ended question and hand-written answer. Themes included learning about local Polish art and culture, learning about ecology, making positive environmental improvements in their local community, making friends, learning to work in a team, and building self confidence.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Participation in the Polish 4-H program yielded positive benefits to its members and their communities. As a curricular aid to teachers, youth experienced new ways to study about their local community and culture, their environment, and be proactive in positive engagement in both.

This survey was undertaken in one of 16 Polish voivodships. Further study of Polish 4-H could include conducting this survey in other voivodships to compare results. Additionally, use of the case study method could further develop research on Polish 4-H, by including analysis from in-depth interviews, club artifacts, and club documents.

Bibliography

- Barrett, C. B., & Cason, J. W. (1997). *Overseas Research: A Practical Guide*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Bodine, E. F. (2005). Radical Decentralization and the Role of Community in Polish Educational Reform. *European Education*, 37
- Brennan, B. (1997). Reconceptualizing Non-formal Education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 16(3).
- Cook, J. F. (1995). *Extension Rural Youth Programs: Summary of Country Papers*. Paper presented at the Expert Consultation on Rural Youth Programs and Sustainable Development.
- Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service, U. S. D. o. A. (2008). National 4-H Headquarters: About 4-H. Retrieved August 13, 2008, 2008, from http://www.national4-hheadquarters.gov/about/4h_about.htm
- FAO - Research, T., and Extension Division. (1995). *Extension Rural Youth Programs: Summary of Country Papers*. Paper presented at the Expert Consultation on Extension Rural Youth Programmes and Sustainable Development, Rome.
- Federal Extension Service, U. S. D. o. A. (1958). *Organization and Development of Rural Youth Programs*. Washington, D.C.: International Cooperation Administration.
- Foundation, P.-H. (2008). About Foundation. Retrieved August 12, 2008, 2008, from http://fundacja4h.org.pl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=48&Itemid=37
- Fox, J., Schroeder, D., & Lodl, K. (2003). Life Skill Development Through 4-H Clubs: The Perspective of 4-H Alumni. *Journal of Extension*, 41(6).
- Ladewig, H., & Thomas, J. K. (1987). *Does 4-H Make a Difference: The 4-H Alumni Study*. College Station: Texas A & M.
- McLaren, P. L., & Giroux, H. A. (1990). Critical Pedagogy and Rural Education: A Challenge from Poland. *Peabody Journal of Education* 67(4), 154-165.
- Mitter, W. (2003). A Decade of Transformation: Educational Policies in Central and Eastern Europe. *International Review of Education*, 49, 75-96.
- Peters, S. (1999). *Organizing Head, Heart, Hands, and Health for Larger Service: The Public Value of 4-H Youth Development Work*. Davis: University of California, Davis.
- Reck, F. M. (1951). *The 4-H Story- A History of 4-H Club Work*. Ames Iowa State College Press.
- Rodriguez, E., Hirschl, T. A., Mead, J. P., & Goggin, S. E. (1999). *Understanding the Difference 4-H Clubs Make in the lives of New York Youth: How 4-H Contributes to Positive Youth Development*. Cornell University.
- Russell, S. T. (2001). *The Developmental Benefits of Nonformal Education and Youth Development* Davis: University of California, Davis.
- Stauder, S. (2002). A Comparative Study of the Finnish 4-H Organization and the Wisconsin 4-H Organization. from <http://www.uwstout.edu/lib/thesis/2002/2002staudes.pdf>
- Taylor-Powell, E., Hutchins, G., Reed, R. (1997). *Community Service: What 4-H Youth Groups do to Make a Difference*: University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension.
- Tomiak, J. J. (2000). Polish Education Facing the Twenty-First Century: Dilemmas and Difficulties. *Comparative Education*, 36, 177-186.
- Wessel, T., & Wessel, M. (1982). *4-H: An American Idea*. Chevy Chase: National 4-H Council.