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PUBLIC PARTICIPATION OF POLISH MILLENIALS - PROBLEMS OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATION AND INVOLVEMENT IN MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS

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Annotation

The aim of the paper is to diagnose the degree of involvement of representatives of the Y generation (students) in the processes of co-management at the municipal level. It was devoted among others to the area of creating a participatory budget and analysis of the scope of use by the respondents of communication instruments used by local government units in the area of public communication. The work involved desk research and direct questionnaire surveys. The study used descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlations, distribution analysis. The millennials' identification with their local communities is rather low - only 36% of respondents are familiar with such issues. Additionally only about 20% of respondents believe they have some influence on local issues. The percentage of people actually participating in specific activities other than local elections was very low (5 to 11%). In terms of participatory budget, only 39.42% of respondents are familiar with this form of participation. The problem is low involvement of these people in creating budget projects as only 6.09% presented their own proposals. Among people who were familiar with the notion of participatory budget most of them acquired information through social media 54.32%, posters (33.33%), friends (30.86%) and the city website (28.4%).

Key words

citizen participation, civil society, public communication

JEL classification: *H72, D83, O12.*

1. Introduction - public participation and participatory budget

Development constitutes an important goal for every territorial unit, including municipality, which is considered as a local social system. Its social character makes participation and social communication gain particular importance in the local development process. The concept of participation in this context has been inconclusively described in the subject literature and thus may refer to:

- social participation – participation of individuals in collective actions undertaken in communities (in the process of creation and functioning of local civic groups and non-governmental organizations, volunteering),
- public participation (civic, vertical, participatory management) – engaging individuals in the actions of government branches and institutions of public authority,
- individual participation – actions undertaken by an individual that express preferences as to the character and type of society in which they wish to live (Inglot-Brzęk, 2017).

The subject of this study is public participation – referring to citizens' participation in law and decision-making. The definition introduced by J. Creighton states that public participation is a process by which public concerns, needs and values are incorporated into governmental and corporate decision-making procedures; it is a two-way communication and interaction that is guided by one general goal – better decisions supported by the public opinion (Creighton, 2005). This approach emphasizes the communication aspect of public participation, which according to the author is a kind of continuum based on four main components:

- inform the public,
- listen to the public,
- engage in problem solving,
- develop agreements (Creighton, 2005).

The individual elements, constituting subsequent levels of participation, involve the residents to varying degree and require the use of different tools and media (Table 1).

Tab. 1: Characteristics of participation levels

Degree of participation	Characteristics	The role of residents	Tools
Inform the public	It is the foundation of the policy of transparency and openness. Objective: educating, building a network of trust, awareness of the actions taken	Residents are passive, they can accept the given information, use it in practice	Leaflets, posters, local media, internet portals, meetings, education, trainings, presentations
Listen to the public	Objective: to obtain a social opinion on problems, alternative solutions/decisions	Residents can express their opinion, they can also express dissatisfaction	Polls, surveys, group interviews, analysis of complaints, motions, comments, expert opinions, protests, happenings
Conducting public consultations	Constant exchange of information. Objective: engagement in problems solving, setting criteria for the decision-making process, improving the substantive quality of the decision-making process	The nature of a bilateral relationship, the adoption of a solution by many people, the expectation that the new rules will be followed and applied	Public meetings, open days, workshops, working groups, debates
Co-decision, co-management, co-implementation	Partnership between government and residents; transferring the competences, but also responsibility for actions and decisions, to the residents. Objective: working out a consensus, putting a decision initiative into people's hands, including the community in the decision-making process	Defining problems and seeking solutions together	Advisory and initiative teams, local initiative, citizens' initiative, referendum, implementation of the municipality's own tasks, volunteering, social committees

Source: Inglot-Brzęk, (2017)

According to the classic concept by S. Langton, public participation encompasses four categories of citizens' participation in the life of a political community:

- public activity – actions initiated and controlled by citizens, e.g. protests, lobbying, public education. This category of participation belongs to the field of community development, which assumes that public activity is beneficial for both citizens and authorities,
- engaging citizens – actions initiated and controlled by public authorities in the course of fulfilling their statutory tasks. Their aim is to improve the decision-making process and the quality of public services provided, and to win citizens' favour and achieve consensus,
- electoral participation – participation in elections,
- compulsory participation – forced activity, which aims to support the authorities in fulfilling functions and tasks (e.g. paying taxes) (Langton, 1978).

S.R. Arnstein presented one of the first classical proposals of the typology of participation types, assuming the decision-making power of stakeholders as a criterion (Arnstein, 1969). The lowest levels of the "ladder of participation" – manipulation and therapy do not constitute the actual participation, because they are aimed at shaping attitudes of stakeholders by the government (they form only an illusion of participation – they can take the form of consultative groups or discussion panels moderated by the administrators and propagating their ideas). Subsequent levels of participation – information, consultations, and mitigation are a substitute for proper participation, since pursuant to the obtaining information about the current tasks, citizens are not able to influence their form (informing), or despite hearing the stakeholders, collecting surveys, conducting other research, the authorities do not undertake actions aimed at the implementation of the suggestions or there is no possibility for the representatives of stakeholders involved in the planning and implementation of the tasks to influence the actual actions of the authorities. The above three levels of participation are only an illusion of the government taking up issues addressed by the residents. Actual participation manifests itself, firstly, in the form of partnership – where in the process of negotiation and joint responsibility, stakeholders are able to influence the decisions of the government; secondly, in the form of delegated authority – where stakeholders primarily decide on the shape of a given project; thirdly: in the extreme form, participation means taking control over a part of management actions in a relevant area.

The importance of public participation began to grow along with the emergence of the New Public Management (NPM) concept. Its idea boils down to the use of such a set of rules that are aimed at improving the efficiency and rationality of public services and entities' actions (Owsiak, 2016). The NPM evolved from market government to the approach stressing the participation of residents in participative government (Peters, 1996). Turning towards the residents launches the mechanisms of governance. Public governance, being the next stage in the development of the NPM concept, is related to the matters of civil society. The idea of governance presupposes the use of various forms and tools of civic participation as well as the diversity of participants in the process of governance. In Poland, the concept of public governance is based on such instruments as: public consultations, regulatory impact assessment, public-private partnership and participatory budgeting (Owsiak, 2016). Actions equated with the concept of a participatory budget can have a very different character depending on the country's circumstances (Dias, 2015). In Poland, basing on the analysis of projects implemented by local government units, defined in documents as a civic or participatory budget (Bednarska-Olejniczak, Olejniczak, 2017), it can be concluded that the participatory budget is understood as:

- formalized actions regulated by local provisions of law (resolutions of the municipal councils),
- initiated by local authorities,
- aimed at systematic consultations with the residents (of various forms),
- requiring active two-way communication, municipality residents,
- usually concerning the possibility of improvement, increasing the functionality or improving the comfort of life of members of local communities through the implementation of various investment tasks
- increasing public participation – focused mainly on residents and not NGOs.

The key issues here are as follows (Sintomer et al., 2008):

- there has to be discussion of the financial and/or budgetary dimension (problem of limited resources);
- participation of responsible for budgeting policy administration (e.g. municipality);
- it has to be a repeated process (e.g. every year);
- it must include some form of public deliberation (meetings, forums, deliberations);
- some accountability on the output is required.

The impact of PB is considered on many levels. C. Souza indicates that it is possible to distinguish four areas (Souza, 2001): management realm, education realm, political realm and social change realm. A. Shah in the overview of one of the first broad studies of the World Bank about participatory budgeting indicates, based on the examples collected in the study, that "It is a tool for educating, engaging, and empowering citizens and strengthening demand for good governance. The enhanced transparency and accountability that participatory budgeting creates can help reduce government inefficiency and curb clientelism, patronage, and corruption." (Shah, 2007). It should be emphasized that educating participants and gathering information for decision-making processes are widely recognized in the literature as important goals of citizen participation in budgeting (Ebdon, Franklin, 2006). In the literature, research on the educational dimension of participatory budgeting was undertaken by Schugurensky, Myers or Streck (Schugurensky, 2006; Schugurensky, Myers, 2008; Streck, 2010) indicating that PB is an important tool for informing and activating the citizens.

The correct sequence in the introduction of participation instruments within the planned socialization strategy plays an important role in the co-management process as well as conducting appropriate communication activities using appropriate channels and communication instruments (Sobol et al., 2017). In the case of public communication processes we deal with formal communication which aims to exchange and share information used publicly as well as maintain social bonds for which public institutions are responsible (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2004). The public communication practice consists of five categories of activities: the obligation to inform the public about the activities of public administration and communication of public data for its attention; conducting a dialogue and creating mutual partner relations between public representatives and their recipients; public presentation and promotion of public service proposals offered by public administration; distribution of the knowledge about the functioning of public institutions; conducting information campaigns that serve for the general good of a society (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2004). Many participatory instruments used in public management also constitute instruments of public communication (Table 1). The ability to factually engage community members to take public decisions depends largely on the ability to use them. The inclusion of citizens in co-management requires bilateral, symmetrical communication based on the active participation of both sides. These requirements are met by the participatory budget, which at the same time is fully in line with the principles of public governance and, as practice shows, is an excellent educational tool, shaping the civic attitudes. Today, in the majority of highly developed countries various forms of citizen participation in the activities of the authorities are in place. However, solutions operating in Poland can be considered very limited. The basic forms regulated by law are information (via BIP - public information biuletin on internet, websites, access to public information) and consultation processes resulting, for example, from the Act on Municipalities. In Poland, procedures related to the

participation of citizens in the activities of local government units in the form of a participatory budget are usually associated with the "goodwill" of the authorities of individual local government units-mainly due to the continuous lack of systemic solutions contained in normative acts(Olejniczak, Bednarska-Olejniczak, 2015). However, considering the location of this form of participation on the previously discussed participation ladder, it should be noted that the characteristics of participatory budget presented in the literature-and in particular the real impact of stakeholders on the direction and the form of public spending, places this form of participation at least at the level of partnership.

2. Social participation and public participation in Poland

Characteristics of the condition of civil society in Poland is one of the elements of the report, published cyclically, entitled „Diagnoza społeczna. Warunki i jakość życia Polaków“. (Eng. Social Diagnosis. The conditions and quality of Poles' lives) (Czapiński, Panek, 2015). The latest report (2015) analyzes, among others, the issues related to: voluntary affiliation of the respondents to the organizations (the tendency to associate is treated here as the simplest measure of the condition of civil society), undertaking mutual activities and work for the benefit of one's community, as well as issues of participation in elections. In Poland in 2015 only 13.4% of the respondents were members of organizations, associations, committees, parties, councils, unions, etc., with 10.3% belonging to only one association. In the years 2003-2015, the association rate fluctuated within the limits of 12.1-15.1 percent, which proves that the civil society in Poland, understood as acting in voluntary organizations, does not develop, nor does it pull more and more members into its structures (Czapiński, Panek, 2015). Associating is socially diverse, with the percentage of members being the lowest in the age group up to 34 years of age and the largest in the age group of 45-59. Actions for the benefit of one's own community do not have to be associated with formal association; it can also be undertaken individually. Research indicates that this is just as rare as belonging to an organization - only 15.4% of respondents were involved in activities for the benefit of the local community during the analysed period (in previous years the figures in this regard were as follows: 2003 - 12.9%, 2005 - 13.6%, 2007 - 14.1%, 2009 - 15.6%, 2011 - 15.6%, 2013 - 15.2%) (Czapiński, Panek, 2015). As it may be noted, the slow but steady growth of engagement in one's communities observed over the last decade has slowed down. The last analysed issue was participation in elections, which is the most common civic experience. Participation in the last local elections was declared by 66.5% of respondents, however, it should be noted that the percentage of voters obtained in the survey was seriously overstated in comparison to the actual frequency, which according to the National Electoral Commission equalled 47.4%. Participation in elections was much more often declared by older people than the younger ones, and the least often by the youngest group of voters (up to 24 years old). To sum up - the data contained in "Diagnoza Społeczna" (Eng. Social Diagnosis 2015) show that Poles have little social and civic experience, which is normally gained through activities in organizations and participation in bottom-up social initiatives. At the same time, the lack of such activities signifies that residents do not have the opportunity to learn enough about organized social activity and acquire the skills needed to live in a civil society(Czapiński, Panek, 2015). Research on „Poczucie wpływu na sprawy publiczne” (Eng. The feeling of having an impact on public affairs) conducted in Poland by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) indicates that there is a clear relationship between the willingness to undertake social and political activities (such as participation in elections, social consultations, acting in organizations and bottom-up initiatives) and a sense of influence on public affairs - if citizens want to engage in any form of activity, they must feel that their actions have a real influence on social reality (CBOS, 2017). According to CBOS (2017) data in Poland, in the early nineties people were convinced that they influence the shape of the public sphere both at the national and local level. Over the next fifteen years, this conviction continued to grow, especially on a local scale, but this trend has slowed down in recent years. Currently, compared to the data from 2016, the sense of citizens' influence on state affairs decreased by 7 percentage points to the level of 34%. This means that almost two-thirds of the respondents believe that they have no impact on the affairs of the country, which indicates a high level of alienation of citizens from the public sphere. The issue of the sense of influence on the local community presents itself more positively- more than half of Poles (55%) think that their actions affect the affairs of the city or municipality (CBOS, 2017). The issue of citizens' participation in municipal activities is particularly interesting in the case of generation Y, which on the one hand has potential in the form of modern knowledge, entrepreneurial attitudes, openness to innovations and knowledge of innovative technologies, and, on the other hand, is commonly associated with a strong focus on the pursuit of its own and not social goals. The Polish generation Y, also referred to as Millennials, constitutes people born in the years 1980-2000 (in the literature you can also meet other proposals, e.g. 1980-1994, 1977-1997), brought up in the era of technological revolution, political transformation, Poland's accession to the European Union and the opening of borders within the Schengen area, which had a significant impact on shaping their openness to the world, multiculturalism and professional and life mobility (Kisiel, 2016). The key features of the Polish generation Y include: excellent knowledge of advanced technologies, high level of education, good knowledge of foreign languages, good preparation for functioning in a multicultural environment and the global economy, the ability to perform multiple tasks at the same time, focus on change and diversity in all aspects of life, lack of attachment to

the workplace and place of residence - millennials are very mobile in a psychological sense (Dolińska-Weryńska, 2016). Referring to the aforementioned features of the Y generation, the question arises whether, and if so to what extent, are the millennials willing to participate in the activities of their municipalities and to what extent do they participate in the public communication process aimed to intensify public participation of residents. These issues were the premise for undertaking empirical research, the results of which have been presented in the next part of the article.

3. The purpose and method of research

The aim of the research was to diagnose the degree of involvement of representatives of the Y generation in the processes of co-management at the local (municipal) level, especially in the area of creating a participatory budget and analysis of the scope of use by the respondents of communication instruments used by local government units in the area of public communication. The research posed the following questions: Do representatives of the Y generation feel as members of the community that may influence local government unit's activities? Do millennials engage in local government unit's activities, and if so, which forms of participation do they prefer? Are millennials interested in what is happening in their community, and if so, where do they get information on this topic - do they prefer passive acquisition of information, or rather active, conducted in the form of a dialogue? The work involved desk research and direct questionnaire surveys (an audience survey and an online survey). The questionnaire, which is a tool for questionnaire surveys, included two blocks of substantive questions - the first part consisted of 30 questions regarding the respondents' attitude to the possibility of participation in the activities of the municipality that was their place of residence (the five-point Likert's scale was used here), the second part verified knowledge and participation in shaping the participatory budget in the municipality. The research was carried out in the period of June-July 2017. It included full-time and part-time students of first and second degree studying at two Wrocław economic universities - the University of Economics and the WSB University. Targeted selection was based on the age criterion, distinguishing only those respondents who belong to the Y generation for research. The research sample consisted of 208 respondents, of which 131 were women and 71 men. As mentioned before, the criterion of selection was the fact of belonging to the Y generation, and therefore the respondents belonged to the 19-35 age group, of which 203 were persons aged from 19 to 24 years of age (including 128 women and 69 men), and 5 persons aged from 25 to 35 years of age. The research was of an observational (correlation) nature, no impact was assumed on any of the variables, only relationships (correlations) between the selected subsets of variables were registered. The study used basic statistics (descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlations, distribution analysis). Due to the use of targeted selection, research results should not be treated as representative for the studied population. They are solely of exploratory nature and can provide an introduction to the discussion on the issues raised in the study.

4. Survey results and discussion

The first research question posed in the article may be considered at two levels. First of all, the millennials' identification with their local communities and, secondly, their perception of the influence they have on local issues. Roughly 36% of respondents are familiar with such issues, but for 23% of them they are irrelevant. The remaining part expresses moderate interest in these issues. On the other hand, only about 20% of respondents believe they have some influence on local issues while more than 50% think they have no impact on them whatsoever. It means that the study group is either not aware that they may participate in social affairs or the existing mechanisms are assessed by them negatively. Based on the answers to questions about their evaluation of mechanisms and the increase of the level of participation "when their voice will matter", it may be inferred that both the negative view of consultation procedures (about 40% of respondents take a negative view while 22% regard them positively) and a lack of knowledge that such procedures exist (about 40% of respondents) have an influence on respondents' passive attitude. Additionally, one should point out the perception of significance of one's vote in consultation processes, where about 50% of respondents expressed their willingness to step-up participation in terms of local issues had their votes been taken into consideration by local authorities. These survey results correspond to the results of the second question raised in the article. It focused on the preferred forms and Generation Y's involvement in actions undertaken by the municipalities. As it may be observed in the table below, 51.44% gave a positive answer for the Q2 question about their interest in local issues, but the percentage of people actually participating in specific activities (Q3, Q4, Q6, Q7) other than local elections (Q5) was very low. The Q3 question was related to public consultations other than participatory budget (as with consultations under parish funds and referenda) in which 8.65% of respondents declared participation. In terms of participatory budget, only 39.42% of respondents are familiar with this form of participation and more than a half of the respondents (54.88%) voted in it (3/4 via the Internet). The problem is low involvement of these people in creating budget projects as only 21.95% participated actively in consultations and 6.09% presented their own proposals. What is interesting, though, is the fact that among people interested in local issues more than 30% declare possibility of taking an active part in public discussion had their voice been taken into account (Q25 vs.

Q2). It may be connected with the necessity to improve the information policy of municipalities with regard to participatory budget consultations.

Tab.2: Survey results (selected, Likert's scale)

Question	1	2	3	4	5
Q2.I am interested in what is generally happening in the municipality	6.73%	12.98%	28.85%	36.54%	14.90%
Q3.I take part in social consultations conducted by the municipality	67.79%	17.31%	9.13%	4.81%	0.96%
Q4.I take part in activities of social organisations in the municipality	56.25%	19.71%	12.98%	8.17%	2.88%
Q5.I take part in local elections	25.00%	5.77%	13.46%	21.15%	34.62%
Q6. I meet with my councillors during their term	68.27%	13.46%	9.13%	6.73%	2.40%
Q7.I take part in activities of such units as parishes, estate councils ...	67.31%	14.42%	9.62%	4.81%	3.85%
Q19. I have a real influence on what happens in my municipality	18.27%	31.73%	31.25%	11.54%	7.21%
Q21. I am satisfied with the information policy implemented by my municipality	8.65%	17.79%	48.56%	19.71%	5.29%
Q23. I am informed about the planned referenda and social consultations on time	22.12%	27.88%	32.21%	12.02%	5.77%
Q24. I can express my opinion about investment projects in my municipality in a way that it reaches the officials	27.88%	29.33%	26.44%	12.50%	3.85%
Q29. Is there a procedure in your province by which they may gather information from inhabitants about important matters?	8.65%	22.60%	38.46%	25.96%	4.33%
Q30. Does this procedure make it possible to successfully obtain information from inhabitants?	14.90%	19.23%	44.23%	18.27%	3.37%

Source:own calculations based on survey results

The analysis of the value of Pearson's correlation coefficient between a sense of influence on local issues (Q19) and questions from Q2 to Q7 indicates the existence of weak or no correlation. The resulting coefficients vary from 0.28 (Q7), 0.24 (Q6, Q4) to 0.15 (Q3, Q5) and 0.05 (Q2). It means that in the studied sample there is no connection between a sense of influence on local issues and an interest in them (from the distribution of answers analysis it is clear that regardless of the sense of influence on municipality's decisions the group expresses an interest in them - 51.44% of respondents), but there is a low relation between activating cooperation with the local administration and a sense of influence on local matters – it results mostly from the majority of people declaring a lack of influence on local issues and a lack of active participation - 46% of respondents (Q19 vs Q7).

The last posed research question was connected with the interest in municipality's issues in the context of sources of information acquisition. As mentioned above, a significant proportion of respondents expressed interest in local issues (51.44%). It should be pointed out that economic and investment issues are of interest to about 31% of respondents (Q8, Q9, Q10). Among people who were familiar with the notion of participatory budget (Q31 - 38.94%) most of them acquired information (Q32) through social media 54.32%, posters (33.33%), friends (30.86%) and the city website (28.4%). This indicates the possible tools and communication channels which can be used in the process. At the same time, local press (29.8%) and municipality websites (18.75%) are most widely used as a source of information among the respondents (tab. 3 – regardless of the degree of interest in local affairs). It is also worth noting that among the respondents interested in local issues the main source of information is also the local press (36.44% of them and 18,8% all respondents) and WWW of municipality (24,3% of them and 12,5% all respondents), while the other media have a marginal meaning. This corresponds to the previously mentioned territory for obtaining information from social media.

A distinct issue is the information policy and a method of acquiring information from its inhabitants. It is worth to point out the discrepancies between an active acquisition of information about inhabitants' needs (Q29, Q30) and a mere gathering of opinions about the projects implemented by the municipality (Q24) indicated by the surveyed group. It points to the existence of potential possibilities of encouraging millennials to actively participate.

Tab.3: Comparison between interest in local affairs(Q2) and sources of information (Q14-Q18)

		1	2	3	4	5
Q 14. I often use my municipality's websites to obtain information about it	1	3.8%	4.3%	7.2%	6.7%	2.4%
	2	1.4%	4.3%	11.1%	11.1%	4.3%
	3	1.4%	3.8%	4.8%	10.1%	4.3%
	4	0.0%	0.5%	4.3%	4.8%	1.9%
	5	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%	3.8%	1.9%
Q 15. I often use the (local) press to obtain information about my commune	1	2.9%	4.3%	8.2%	5.8%	2.9%
	2	2.4%	2.4%	5.8%	8.2%	2.9%
	3	0.5%	4.3%	6.7%	10.6%	2.4%
	4	1.0%	1.9%	5.8%	7.2%	3.4%
	5	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%	4.8%	3.4%
Q16. I often use information materials / folders of the municipality in order to obtain information about my municipality	1	4.3%	4.3%	11.1%	8.7%	5.3%
	2	0.5%	5.3%	8.2%	11.5%	4.8%
	3	1.4%	2.4%	6.7%	10.6%	2.9%
	4	0.5%	1.0%	1.9%	4.3%	1.4%
	5	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	1.4%	0.5%
Q 17. I often use commune bulletin boards to obtain information about my commune	1	2.9%	4.8%	12.0%	6.7%	5.8%
	2	1.9%	4.3%	7.7%	10.1%	4.3%
	3	1.4%	2.4%	5.8%	11.5%	2.4%
	4	0.5%	1.4%	2.9%	5.3%	1.9%
	5	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	2.9%	0.5%
Q 18. I often use internet forums about the commune to obtain information about my commune	1	3.8%	5.8%	11.1%	7.2%	3.4%
	2	1.0%	4.3%	7.2%	11.1%	5.3%
	3	1.4%	1.4%	6.3%	11.1%	4.8%
	4	0.0%	1.4%	4.3%	3.8%	1.0%
	5	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%	0.5%

Source: own calculations based on survey results

5. Conclusion

The issue of inhabitants' participation in the actions carried out by Polish municipalities has become a recurring topic because of a growing awareness of the possibilities other than taking part in local elections, NGO work or the way authorities spend public funds. Though it is a pilot study, it shows a younger generation's (here Generation Y) very low level of interest in local issues. There may be many reasons of this situation, but this article introduces only some of the aspects directly connected with the development of province-citizen interaction. However, there is a need of intensifying actions in terms of propagating such forms of participation as participatory budget as well as a need of educating young people about civil society. In this context it would seem that this topic will require further in-depth and systematized research on a representative sample, taking into account other factors which determine the attitudes of Generation Y.

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