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Historical, patriotic and regional education and intercultural tolerance in Stanisław Jędryka's film *Zielone lata*¹

Edukacja historyczno-patriotyczna i regionalna oraz nauka tolerancji międzykulturowej w filmie Stanisława Jędryki *Zielone lata*

Keywords: *Zielone lata* film (1979), Jędryka Stanisław (1933–2019), historical and regional education, patriotic education, intercultural tolerance

Słowa kluczowe: *Zielone lata* film (1979 r.), Jędryka Stanisław (1933–2019), edukacja historyczna i regionalna, wychowanie patriotyczne, tolerancja międzykulturowa

Abstract

The article analyses the significance of Stanisław Jędryka's film *Zielone lata* in teaching intercultural tolerance and promoting historical, cultural and regional education. The film is set in the director's hometown of Sosnowiec in Dąbrowa Basin, shortly before the outbreak of World War II and during the German occupation. The research hypothesis postulating that Jędryka's and Przeździecki's work remains relevant was examined by exploring timeless themes in the film, analysing film reviews in the press, popular science literature, and audience reception. The film's high artistic merit, the conveyed message, and positive responses from the viewers confirm the validity of the research hypothesis. In the article, the content of the film and its artistic value were examined with the use of a comparative analysis and an analysis of the media, including press publications and viewer commentaries posted online.

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The aim of this article was to analyse the significance of Stanisław Jędryka's 1979 film *Zielone lata* (Green years) in promoting intercultural tolerance and historical, cultural and regional education. The research hypothesis postulating that Jędryka's and Jerzy Przeździecki's work remains relevant was examined by exploring timeless themes in the film, analysing film reviews in the press, popular science literature, and audience reception. The film's high artistic merit, the conveyed message, and the positive response from the audience confirm the validity of the research hypothesis. In the article, the film is examined with the use of the methodology proposed by Seweryn Kuśmierczyk (Kuśmierczyk 2015: 11–27), a comparative analysis, and an analysis of the media, including press publications and viewer commentaries posted online. In the comparative analysis, *Zielone lata* was examined in the context of the original novel – Jerzy Przeździecki's *Troje nad czarnej rzeki* (The three who lived on the black river), and selected Polish film productions dedicated to the Polish experiences of World War II.

Intercultural tolerance is often an educational goal in historical, patriotic and regional education. Patriotism and regionalism need not be at odds with openness to foreign cultures (Roguska 2012: 173). This is particularly relevant in areas where different national or regional cultures coexist. Such examples include Polish borderland regions of Upper Silesia and Dąbrowa Basin, and Polish-Ukrainian and Polish-Lithuanian borderlands.

Regional education can be defined as a process of disseminating educational and instructional content related to the local and regional environment. National consciousness is shaped at the local and regional level as community members begin to identify with their historical, sociocultural, and regional traditions, as well as their language (Bednarska-Bajer 2008: 11). This process should be accompanied by respect for cultural differences (Guziuk-Tkacz 2017: 171) and the willingness to establish dialogue with members of cultural minorities. This dialogue must take place in a friendly atmosphere that invites mutually respectful interactions (Kobylińska 2017: 180). "Interculturality" can be defined as a reciprocal relationship between members of diverse cultures. Cross-cultural communication should be accompanied by tolerance and dialogue, rather than nationalistic views and attitudes (Nikitorowicz 2009: 125).

Historical education is the teaching of universal and native history. Literary scholars and educators combine the transmission of knowledge about the history of a country or nation (including literary history) with patriotic education and building and strengthening national identity (Zabawa 2017: 63–83). National minorities should be taught about local historical traditions to encourage a sense of community with the country they inhabit. Both critical and positive interpretations

of historical events can carry patriotic values, provided that they are presented objectively.

The concept of intercultural tolerance is also combined with patriotic upbringing and regional education by cultural contributors. These values were promoted by Stanisław Jędryka (1933–2019) who directed many films about Polish cultural relations, including in Upper Silesia and Dąbrowa Basin. Most of his films were addressed to children and adolescents. Jędryka was born and raised in the city of Sosnowiec in Dąbrowa Basin.

Zielone lata is set in Jędryka's hometown of Sosnowiec. In the film, the city is portrayed as a melting pot of languages, ethnic groups, and cultures. The director returns to his childhood experiences in the years directly before the outbreak of World War II and during the German occupation (Lewandowski 2009: 42–45). In an interview, Jędryka emphasised the autobiographical overtones of his cinematic works, including *Zielone lata*, *Do góry nogami* (Upside down), and *Koniec wakacji* (The end of summer). *Zielone lata* depicts the friendship between three children, aged seven to nine, who live in Sosnowiec: Wojtek Lewiński, a Pole, Abramek Rotbaum, a Jew, and Erna König, a German. Due to the realistic and accurate portrayal of historical events, the educational message conveyed by the film has a powerful impact on the audience and promotes intercultural tolerance. Jędryka commented on his approach in the process of writing screenplays and directing films for children: "It was never my intention to educate anyone. I wanted to tell interesting stories involving children, to make these stories attractive and to convey positive values. I'm aware that my approach could have attracted criticism from educators, but my films focus on the protagonists' life stories. Friendship, family relations, and emotions were the main themes in my films" (Wróblewska, Jędryka 2014: 51, 55). According to Jędryka, *Zielone lata* has considerable narrative value by presenting a lively and interesting plot that the viewers can easily identify with. As a result, the film fosters the development of educational values (Pilawska 2021: 210–213, 221–223). Jędryka deliberately guides the viewers' emotions (Przyłipiak 2016: 139–150).

Zielone lata is an adaptation of Jerzy Przeździecki's (1927–2020) novel *Troje znad czarnej rzeki*, published in 1975 by Nasza Księgarnia in Warsaw. Both Przeździecki and Jędryka were born in Sosnowiec. Przeździecki wrote the screenplay for Jędryka's film (Marzęcka 1999: 493–495; Toczowska 2002: 152–157; Filmpolski.pl – biography of Jerzy Przeździecki; Przeździecki 1975). The novel was reviewed in *Literatura* magazine by Jan Edward Kucharski, also a native of Sosnowiec. Kucharski praised Przeździecki's novel for its realistic depiction of the protagonists' social background and psychological profiles. He noted that the

novel could be a difficult read for children, the target audience. Young readers would probably need assistance from adults to understand the elaborate historical and social narrative. Kucharski argued that *Troje znad czarnej rzeki* is a book “for adults, but it will be fascinating only for adult readers who have an interest in children’s world” (Kucharski 1977: 11). The novel could also attract adult readers who have an interest in the regional affairs of Upper Silesia and Dąbrowa Basin, and childhood memories dating back to the war and the German occupation.

Zielone lata was produced in 1979 by Silesia, and it premiered on 29 February 1980 (Filmpolski.pl – synopsis of *Zielone lata*). On 12 August 1979, six months before the premiere, photographs from the film set were published in *Film* magazine. The article featured a brief commentary on the film’s contribution to patriotic and intercultural education: “Upper Silesia and Dąbrowa Basin on the eve of the war and in the first year of the German occupation. Personal relations and events are depicted through the eyes of children of various nationalities who are bound by close ties of friendship, the first true friendship in their lives. The war brings anxiety into their world and accelerates the first attempts at national identification. The protagonists are forced to adopt new attitudes in the face of adversity, but they never lose sight of the most important value, namely sincere and selfless friendship” (*Zielone lata* 1979, photographs by Roman Sumik: 6–7). The claim that cross-cultural relationships are the main theme of the movie is undisputed. However, the argument that the war accelerates the protagonists’ “first attempts at national identification” is somewhat simplistic. The main characters may be very young, but they did not have any qualms about their national identity. The protagonists are members of three distinct national groups, and their life stories represent the fate of their respective nations during World War II.

The *Filmowy Serwis Prasowy* biweekly magazine published an article on Jędryka’s film three months before its premiere. The intercultural themes conveyed by the film were analysed exhaustively by Krzysztof Białokórski. He noted that the three protagonists – a Pole, a Jew and a German – were able to maintain and even strengthen their friendship despite the dire reality of the German occupation. Białokórski praised the producers for conveying the message directly “without pathos” and for the accurate historical representation of the pre-war reality and life during the occupation (Białokórski 1979: 6–8).

A review that appeared in *Film* magazine on 24 February 1980, several days before the premiere screening, commented on the realistic portrayal of the friendship and fate of the three protagonists who represented three nationalities, “whose homes were taken away and whose childhood was destroyed by the war” (*Zielone lata* 1980: 23). A similar observation was made by Małgorzata Dipont in a review

published in *Życie Warszawy* daily on 11 March 1980. The publicist emphasised that the main message conveyed by the film was the hope that young Poles, Jews and Germans could establish friendly relations in the future. In her opinion, the main weakness of the film was its inability to paint an expressive portrait of the children's emotions. Emotions were overshadowed by a detailed historical narrative of the late 1930s and the beginning of the German occupation in Sosnowiec. According to the reviewer, the film's excessive focus on historical and cultural authenticity detracts from the dramatic narrative. Dipont concluded that young viewers would not be significantly influenced by *Zielone lata* for this very reason (Dipont 1980: 7).

Zielone lata received two awards: *Złote Poznańskie Koziółki* and the main prize (Marcinek) awarded by the children's jury at the 7th National Festival of Children's and Youth Films in Poznań in 1981. The film also received special mentions at the International Short Film Festival in Tomar (Portugal) in 1980, Frankfurt Film Festival in 1981, and the International Film Festival for Children and Youth in Teheran in 1985 (Film Polski.pl – synopsis of *Zielone lata*; Hendrykowski 1994: 161; *Twórcy filmu dziecięcego w Polsce* 1987: 47; Armata 2014: 358; Jędryka 2012: 114).

Zielone lata has considerable educational value because it recognises the need for intercultural tolerance, combined with historical, patriotic, and regional education. The friendship between children of three different nationalities is convincingly portrayed in the historical and social reality of Sosnowiec in the late 1930s, at the beginning of World War II, and during the German occupation. The educational message imparted by the film accentuates the need for mutual tolerance between people of different nationalities. Przeździecki and Jędryka convey this message in outdoor scenes, where the three children can be seen playing together shortly before the outbreak of the war. These scenes accurately depict the sociocultural context of these times. Erna's brother Rudi has strong anti-Polish sentiments and he argues with Wojtek about the military prowess of Poland and Germany. Abramek Rotbaum's father, a shoemaker, is a positive character who is hospitable and ready to help others. He sells shoes to Wojtek's mother at a reduced price and does not expect immediate payment. The Jewish shoemaker, a representative of an ethnic minority, was portrayed in a positive light to make the audience averse to xenophobic attitudes and stereotypes.

During the occupation, Wojtek and Erna save Abramek from the Holocaust. The depicted situations are credible because the children seek help from an adult, a Polish doctor (doctor Turowski) who is played by Henryk Bista. The children's actions before and during the war are presented as exceptional in the context of the xenophobic attitudes that were prevalent at the time. This is particularly true of the German girl's attitude towards Wojtek and Abramek. During the occupation, the Polish boy and the

German girl are admonished and punished by their parents for playing together. The screenwriter and the director portray their friendship through the lens of reality and without idealistic undertones. The resulting educational message appears to be more effective than a distorted and idealised narrative of past events.

Wojtek and Erna maintain their friendship, while Erna's German friends join the Hitler-Jugend during the occupation. Erna's parents, especially her father König, an apothecary, support Hitler, and they hang a flag with the swastika on the balcony when Germany invades Poland. Przeździecki and Jędryka present the concept of Polish-German reconciliation in the context of the Holocaust: two children – a Polish boy and a German girl – help their Jewish friend. This personal narrative plays a very important role by promoting anti-xenophobic attitudes and intercultural education.

The scenes presenting Poland's preparations for a defensive war against Germany, including the ceremony during which a machine gun purchased by Sosnowiec's residents is donated to the National Defence Fund, make a valuable contribution to historical and regional education and promote patriotic upbringing. The ceremony features performances by military and miners' orchestras, a military parade, and the residents, including Wojtek's parents, sing the *Rota*, the Polish celebratory anthem. Wojtek and his mother say goodbye to his father who was mobilised for military duty before September 1939. Intercultural communication is also the central theme in scenes depicting the September campaign and the occupation of Sosnowiec. Young viewers learn about the Nazi occupants' efforts to Germanise Polish children, including in Upper Silesia and Dąbrowa Basin, through the story of Wojtek's baby sister Ewa. In countries with a history of mutual political and military conflict, this is the only approach to promoting the concept of reconciliation and intercultural tolerance, provided that historical facts are presented in a true and objective manner.

The film significantly contributes to regional, historical, and patriotic education because the entire narrative is set in Sosnowiec, in its streets and courtyards, against the background of the city's industrial landscape. The protagonists hide Abramek in a safe place by the Czarna Przemsza River which intersects the city. In Przeździecki's novel and Jędryka's film, Sosnowiec plays a pivotal role that goes beyond that of a mere backdrop (Zabawa 2017: 53–61).

The last scene in *Zielone lata*, in which Wojtek says goodbye to Erna, has a symbolic significance. After her father's death, the girl and her mother leave Sosnowiec and join their family in Germany. The children talk about Abramek, and they hope to meet after the war. This scene is an expression of the director's hope that young Poles, Germans and Jews can establish a peaceful dialogue

(Kobylińska 2017: 180). *Zielone lata* may have therapeutic value for some viewers (Pilawska 2021: 218-220), in particular those who are affected by discrimination, not only on grounds of nationality or ethnicity. The message conveyed by Jędryka's film can give comfort to this group of viewers. The film is also an attempt at psychotherapy in that it encourages viewers with xenophobic and intolerant views to reconsider their attitudes and behaviours. The film's educational value lies in the director's attempts to challenge stereotypes and black-and-white thinking. The above applies not only to the war period, but also to the social situation in Poland, including in Dąbrowa Basin and Upper Silesia, in the 1930s. Before finding employment in a coal mine, Wojtek's father works as a wagoner to support his family. He continues to work when the miners go on strike, and he is beaten by the strikers who do not understand his dire financial situation. This incident was portrayed in the film to demonstrate that stereotypical thinking should be discouraged in all areas of life, not only in the national and religious context.

Jędryka relies on various means of artistic expression to enhance the educational value of *Zielone lata*. The poverty of wartime Sosnowiec was masterfully captured by production designer Bolesław Kamykowski as well as set and costume designers Hanna Morawiecka and Małgorzata Kańska. Dilapidated buildings in Sosnowiec, the interior of the Lewińskis' home, and period clothing were masterfully depicted by the designers. Realistic set design serves as a lynchpin for narrative authenticity, and it deepens the audience's connection with the story and the characters (Przyłipiak 2016: 118–122).

The music score composed by Andrzej Korzyński is one of the greatest strengths of *Zielone lata*. The score is rich in distinctive musical motifs. The composer skilfully transforms the leitmotif to accentuate lyrical, dramatic, or tragic events in the plot. Lyrical and realistic music accompanies the games played by the protagonists before the war; dramatic music in the opening credits underscores Sosnowiec's poverty, and tragic music highlights distressing events, such as the Birnbaums' eviction from their home, the death of Birnbaum, and the scene where Abramek is shot by German soldiers. The harmonica, a musical instrument that is associated with childhood, plays a central role in the leitmotif. Korzyński's score enhances the dramatic narrative and enables the director to guide the viewer's emotions (Przyłipiak 2016: 139–150).

Jędryka effectively leads the child actors through their scenes. Ten-year-old Tomasz Jarosinski who plays Wojtek, and his peers – Jacek Bryniarski (Abramek) and Agnieszka Konopczyńska (Erna) – deliver highly realistic performances. Dramatic and tragic scenes are not overly exaggerated or sentimental. When interviewed by Anna Wróblewska, Jędryka noted that in films about Upper Silesia

and Dąbrowa Basin, he was able to give child actors effective cues because the screenplays contained autobiographical elements (Wróblewska, Jędryka 2014: 55). Adult actors, including Krzysztof Kiersznowski and Małgorzata Pritulak (Wojtek's parents), Janusz Paluszkiwicz (their neighbour Matuszczak), Henryk Bista (doctor Turowski), Anna Chodakowska and Zygmunt Hobot (Abramek's parents), are equally convincing in conveying a sense of despair in dramatic and tragic events. Bista effectively portrays doctor Turowski's kindness and tolerance. Despite the criticism expressed by Dipoint in *Życie Warszawy* daily, the artistic value of *Zielone lata* significantly emphasises its educational message, even though the film is replete with historical facts (Dipont 1980: 7). The director skillfully combines historical, patriotic, and regional themes with the need for intercultural tolerance and aesthetic education (Pilawska 2021: 213–215).

Zielone lata should be also compared with Przeździecki's original novel *Troje znad czarnej rzeki*. The novelist also wrote the screenplay, where the original plot was synthesised and somewhat modified. In the screenplay, the story about three children was abridged and dramatized. The book's lengthy introduction, in which the Lewiński family moves from the countryside to Sosnowiec in search of work, was omitted in the screenplay. The film opens with a dramatic scene, where Wojtek's father is beaten for being a strike-breaker and returns home from work. The Lewińskis' peasant roots are clearly emphasised in the plot, including in the dialogues between Wojtek's parents, or in the scene where the family dances to folk music played on the radio. The screenplay highlights social issues to reinforce the educational message, namely that social sensitivity is as important as education in the spirit of intercultural tolerance. In the film adaptation of the book, little attention is given to Wojtek's quest for knowledge before he attains the compulsory school age of seven years. The war breaks out on 1 September 1939, just as the boy is about to begin his education in an independent Polish school. In the novel, Wojtek visits a school in Sosnowiec, where he meets a teacher with the same surname. The teacher contacts Wojtek's parents, and the boy accompanies Lewiński's class on a field trip. However, the fact that the boy had taught himself to read before starting school is highlighted in the film. In this way, Przeździecki and Jędryka emphasised the need for equality in access to education and the fact that the right to education as one of the most important civil rights.

Not all of the book's secondary characters are portrayed in the film. This includes Wojtek's aunt (his father's sister) who also lives in Sosnowiec and is criticised by the family for her self-indulgent lifestyle. However, the main difference between the novel and the film adaptation is the end of the story. The film ends with a goodbye scene between Wojtek and Erna. In turn, in the last scene in the

book, Wojtek and Abramek meet in a country manor. Abramek is sheltered by the manor's owner, heiress Śniatycka, who is not portrayed in the film. Śniatycka also helps another Jew, Professor Elman, who teaches German to the boys. Przeździecki aptly notes that despite painful war experiences, German culture and language are valuable and should not invite prejudice. Very few Poles were motivated to learn German during the war. The novelist's intention was to discourage prejudice based on negative historical experiences. The final scene of the film carries a less idealistic and a more explicit message. A Polish boy and a German girl, both of whom have negative attitudes towards Nazism and xenophobia, say goodbye to each other. Wojtek and Erna identify with their Jewish friend. The final scene is realistic because the film's educational message is conveyed through the relationship between two characters, rather than through vacuous platitudes about the importance of German culture.

In both the novel and the film adaptation, Abramek has a chance to survive the war and be rescued from the Holocaust. *Troje znad czarnej rzeki* is not the only book for young readers of the post-war generation to deal with this difficult subject. Maria Zarębińska-Broniewska's *Dzieci Warszawy* (Children of Warsaw), published as early as 1945, is yet another children's novel that deals with the Holocaust. Szymek, a Jewish boy who escapes from the ghetto, finds shelter in a hideout near Warsaw. Similarly to Wojtek Lewiński, Broniek Pieniążek, the main character in *Dzieci Warszawy*, is raised by a working-class family. Wojtek's father finds work in a coal mine, and his family moves from a rural homestead to a working-class environment. Just like Wojtek and Erna, Broniek decides to help his Jewish friend. Zarębińska-Broniewska manages to build a highly realistic setting for the story. Broniek receives help from adults who find new hiding places for the Jewish boy. Przeździecki's novel features a similar plotline. *Dzieci Warszawy* is set in Warsaw and the surrounding areas during the German occupation (Przeździecki 1975; Zarębińska 1973; Uljasz 2014: 116–119). It can be concluded that Przeździecki regionalised and developed the theme of Zarębińska's novel, although he was not necessarily inspired by her work.

Tolerance towards different cultures is also a recurring theme in the series of books about Pan Samochodzik (Mister Automobile) written by Zbigniew Nienacki who had strong links with the Polish region of Mazury. Nienacki's books about Mr. Tomasz, the titular character, are addressed to children and adolescents. In *Pan Samochodzik i złota rękawica* (Mister Automobile and the golden gauntlet) (first published in 1979 in Warsaw), Nienacki observed that most folk poets from Mazury, including Michał Kajka, were Lutherans and members of the Polish Evangelical Church. This knowledge was imparted to young readers to promote

religious tolerance (Nienacki 2012; Uljasz 2020: 140). Another book in the series, *Pan Samochodzik i tajemnica tajemnic* (Mister Automobile and the secret of secrets), is set in the Czech capital of Prague and in Poland. The author introduces his readers to a historic Jewish cemetery in Lesko (Podkarpacie region) to emphasise the importance of tolerance towards other nationalities and religions (Nienacki 1983; Uljasz 2020: 141–142). Descriptions of historic monuments and Jewish memorial sites in Prague serve a similar purpose. Nienacki devotes considerable attention to a Jewish cemetery and the former Jewish district of Jozefov. He notes that Jewish cultural sites, in particular cemeteries and shrines, were destroyed by the Nazi invaders during World War II (Uljasz 2022: 3–4). Both novels were adapted into films. *Latające maszyny kontra Pan Samochodzik* (Flying machines and Mister Automobile), the cinematic adaptation of *Pan Samochodzik i złota rękawica*, was directed by Janusz Kidawa in 1991. In 1988, Kazimierz Taras directed *Pan Samochodzik i praskie tajemnice* (Mister Automobile and the secrets of Prague) based on *Pan Samochodzik i tajemnica tajemnic*. Both film adaptations were rightly criticised by the reviewers and the audience for straying too far from the source material. The directors made a great mistake by disregarding the educational content of the novels, which is one of the most important values of the Pan Samochodzik series (Uljasz 2020: 140–141; Uljasz 2022: 4–5).

As previously noted, both Abramek (*Zielone lata*) and Szymek (*Dzieci Warszawy*) were given the chance to survive the Holocaust. *Polskie drogi* (Polish roads), a popular TV series (1976–1977) directed by Janusz Morgenstein and written by Jerzy Janicki, does not offer such hope. The series was produced shortly before *Zielone lata*. Noemi Sommer, a Jewish girl who is adopted by one of the main protagonists, Leon Kuraś (played by Kazimierz Kaczor), in Zamość region is deported to Germany with other children living in the region. Similarly to Ewa Lewińska in *Zielone lata*, Naom is to be Germanized (*Polskie drogi* 2023, screenplay by Jerzy Janicki, directed by Janusz Morgenstern, Filmpolski.pl; Janicki 1985: 130 ff, Hendrykowski 2012: 279–282). Janicki and Morgenstern teach a lesson in tolerance by comparing the fate of the children rescued from the Holocaust with the story of Polish children from Zamość region. *Polskie drogi* is addressed to an adult audience, but the series was also popular among children and adolescents because the presented topics are comprehensible for viewers as young as eight or nine years.

Świadectwo urodzenia (Birth certificate), a film written and directed by brothers Stanisław and Tadeusz Różewicz in 1961, also presents the German occupation from a child's perspective. The film is divided into three short stories entitled *Na drodze* (On the way), *List z obozu* (A letter from the camp), and *Kropła*

krwi (A drop of blood). The protagonist is a Jewish girl who, towards the end of the film, finds shelter in a Polish orphanage under the assumed name of Marysia Malinowska. The girl is played by Grażyna Barszczewska who went on to become a professional actor. The Gestapo officer visiting the facility recognises Aryan features in the girl's face and concludes that she is a representative of the "supreme" German race (Film Polski.pl – synopsis of *Świadectwo urodzenia*). The director skilfully captures the girl's fear as she repeats her assumed Polish name to a suspicious Gestapo officer. The film has an ambiguous ending. Marysia Malinowska could face the same fate as Ewa Lewińska and Noemi Sommer. Alternatively, the girl could be identified as a Jew by the German officer. The potential ambiguity of the last scene in *Świadectwo urodzenia* follows from the interpretation proposed by the author of this article. Similarly to *Polskie drogi*, *Świadectwo urodzenia* is not addressed to young viewers. However, the film can be watched by both adult and child audiences.

The significance of *Zielone lata* for intercultural education has been underscored by many academic papers, articles in film journals, and publications targeting a general audience. The importance of Przeździecki's and Jędryka's work was aptly recognised by Agnieszka Czechowska in the following commentary: "The occupation separated children who grew up and played together. It made them aware of national and racial differences. However, there are some people who never acknowledge these differences" (Czechowska 2001: 978). The educational message of *Zielone lata* was also recognised by Małgorzata Hendrykowska. Similarly to Czechowska, Hendrykowska argued that the protagonists of *Zielone lata* became familiar with the concept of "national differences" only after the outbreak of the war (Hendrykowska 2011: 106). Both authors emphasised the film's anti-xenophobic message. However, they wrongly concluded that the war was solely responsible for raising the children's awareness national differences. If this were the case, the realistic plot and the historical truth of *Zielone lata* would have been compromised. In an earlier part of this article, a reference was made to the arguments that broke out between Wojtek and Erna's brother Rudi before September 1939. At that time, Wojtek had already had some knowledge of Hitler and German politics. Wojtek had learned to read before he began school, and he was able to acquire some knowledge about Germany by reading Polish newspapers and listening to adult conversations.

User comments on the Filmweb.pl website clearly indicate that *Zielone lata* stirred strong emotions in viewers. Fourteen users had commented on Jędryka's film by July 2023. The oldest entry was made twenty-one years ago, whereas the most recent entry appeared in 2019. The number of posts is relatively small, but

the expressed opinions can be regarded as representative of the target audience. Commentaries were posted by viewers living in Sosnowiec and other Polish regions. As regards the residents of Sosnowiec, *Zielone lata* strengthened their sense of local and regional identity. One user wrote: “I watched the film yesterday. It’s fun to watch a movie that was shot in your hometown and to identify places that you know from old postcards”. Another user admitted that he/she watched the film twice because he/she was fascinated with the town’s appearance before the war. A user with the nickname *Zagłębiak* wrote that he lived in Dąbrowa Basin where the film was set and was keen on watching *Zielone lata* for the second time. The commentators praised the storyline for being beautiful, authentic, and historically accurate. These observations indicate that the message conveyed by *Zielone lata* had a powerful impact on the viewers. One user argued that the film is worth recommending to both child and adult viewers, which indicates that the need for intercultural tolerance resonates deeply with the Polish audience. Another user argued that differences between nations are created by adults, not children (Filmweb.pl – online discussion about *Zielone lata*). This observation is undoubtedly true. Children acquire xenophobic or tolerant attitudes towards other nationalities from their educators, mostly in their family environment.

Zielone lata deserves widespread recognition due to its educational value as well as considerable artistic merit. In 2005, the film was released on DVD as part of the “Platinum collection of the Polish cinema” series produced by Media Way (*Zielone lata*, 2005, directed by Stanisław Jędryka). New DVD releases are needed, and the film should be also available on streaming services. *Zielone lata* can capture the interest of young and adult viewers who have close ties with Upper Silesia and Dąbrowa Basin, as well as audiences from other Polish regions. The film can play an important role in regional education about Dąbrowa Basin and in nationwide historical and patriotic education. Przeździecki’s and Jędryka’s timeless message about the need for intercultural tolerance is relevant because it is portrayed in a realistic, rather than an idealised manner.

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