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## *On the modernisation of poverty. Evolution of the phenomenon<sup>2</sup>*

### *Abstract*

This original article is based on author's lecture about the evolution of poverty in Poland which was presented at the Congress of Sociologists in Wrocław (09/2019). The generalized description of this complex social phenomenon presented herein is based upon the numerous studies presented in author's book, "About Polish poverty" (O polskiej biedzie, Wydawnictwo Scholar 2018). It was based on multidisciplinary research, both quantitative and qualitative conducted by many researchers over more than 3 decades, with references to past studies, mostly from postwar period.

In the article it is proposed to distinguish between three periods in the evolution of poverty. The first period (post-war late industrialization) was characterized by the great investments of the communist autocratic state to provide full employment which visibly improved the living condition of the working class. However, with time, negative effects of intense industrialization emerged; namely an inefficient centrally planned economy with shortages (queues and rationing, felt to be very onerous) and a devastated natural

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environment. The second period — transformation of the centrally planned economy into a democratic market economy — initially caused an increase in income poverty and later slowly resulted in growing inequality and social exclusion related to precarious employment and circular labour migration. The third period, its features currently still under development — is a period of both increased prosperity and European integration as well as inequalities related to the diversified benefits of a developed market economy. Poverty in this period is associated with mass consumption and reductions in access to equal and high-quality education, health care, and cultural services.

**Key words:** evolution of poverty in Poland, modern poverty, transition, working poor, inequalities, consumerism, sharing economy

## *Introduction*

Dealing with poverty in scientific research on social policy has a strong practical aspect. It not only requires seeking out the reasons of the phenomenon but also, or even first of all, indicating efficient actions to combat, or at least mitigate, the most overwhelming social problem of human development. This presents a very intellectually demanding challenge to social policy experts and policy makers, who are aware of their responsibility to recommend relevant actions to politicians.

Moreover, a practical aspect of dealing with poverty through social policy requires treating poverty not as the individual fate of poor people but as a social problem; a structural phenomenon for a specific place and time, leading to understanding a wider socio-economic context.

Contemporary explanations of the formation and perpetuation of poverty as a structural social problem are mainly related to theories of development (1998). Underdevelopment and delays of the industrialization processes and then post-industrial modernization lead to inequalities in living conditions between countries around the world and between regions in a single state (Polanyi, 1944; Myrdal, 1957). Development theories assume several various models of changes. It is assumed that changes occur in an evolutionary manner from a traditional society, through an industrial society (Durkheim, 1893), to a post-industrial society and mass consumption (Bauman, 1989; Baudrillard, 2006; Cohen, 2009; Rostow, 1952). Another model assumes that inequalities in development lead to a vicious circle of underdevelopment and poverty (Nurkse, 1953), and getting out of it requires state intervention into the distribution range and directions of allocations. This is linked to a *poverty trap* that indicates how powerful self-strengthening mechanisms are, causing poverty to persist (Azariadis, 2006). Achieving a “natural” economic balance in more complex economic systems fixes, or at least delays levelling up of, living conditions. This trend of explanation of development inequalities is called a *path dependency*.

In the real process of modern development, more different changes influenced by state intervention take place (Leisering & Walker, 1998). Economic development in some countries (wealthier ones) is accompanied by strong *welfare state* solutions; in

others (poorer countries) social standards are accepted in a limited scope with difficulties including democratization and development of values and institutions, and often under the influence of development assistance donors (e.g., US Aid as bilateral development assistance) and international organizations (e.g., OECD–ODA; Official Development Assistance and UN development programmes) that require respect of human rights and meeting minimum social standards to be a recipient of development funds.

In recent years, a path to sustainable development (Rogall, 2012) is evident when a need to maintain resources for future generations is respected. This approach negates the trends of neoclassical economics wherein economic balance does not include natural resources and a need for long-term investments of human capital.

New Millennium Development Goals have been defined for the 21st century. They combine tasks of sustainable economic development with human development, valuing people's health and respect under living conditions that are favourable for this to be achieved. Combination of the sustainable development concept with combating poverty (Sachs, 2005, 2006) raises a question of whether meeting widespread human needs now will not deprive future generations.

In this text presented I refer to development theory, but in current conditions, presenting the complication of contemporary paths of progress as a result of globalisation and availability of new technological products, regardless of social limitations and dramatic changes of the natural environment. This reference concerns a specific period and place, the period of transformation from the socialistic, centrally planned, command-control system into a market economy with a democratic system in Poland.

### ***Poverty in old Poland — the country of late industrialisation and limited modernisation***

For two centuries, the Polish society was very poor, relatively to richer Western European countries. The majority of families worked in agriculture and until the second half of the 20th century most lived in the countryside.

The poverty of peasants and workers in many regions was severe. In 19th-century Galicia, people were starving to death (Szczepanowski, 1888). People were fleeing and emigrating abroad. We have a general picture of living conditions and social relations in the rural areas from the sociological papers by Józef Chałasiński (1984) and documentation collected later and presented in historical papers (Pilch, 1984). The first Polish economist, Fryderyk Skarbek, wrote that Poland would not free itself from underdevelopment if life on the Polish soil were defined by the peasants' poverty (cit. Szubert, 1954).

In the cities which were slowly developing on the Polish land, poverty had a different nature than in the countryside, but its image was also dramatic. Demanding work, poor living conditions, no hygiene, diseases, and disability made the lives of workers and their families miserable.

After Poland regained independence in 1918, young Poland faced a large scope of social challenges: no work in the towns or in the countryside, the poor health of the

people, illiteracy, workers' low level of qualification, and as a consequence, a great degree of poverty, including children that had been abandoned, and were starving and being exploited for hard physical work.

Industrialisation came much later; actually, it was after the Second World War. Industrial economic investments had indeed been initiated in the inter-war period but only a few years before the outbreak of the war. Actually, the industrialisation process took place as late as in the 50s. It was an accelerated process and was carried out under the system conditions of a communist country and as a part of a central planning system. Industrialisation was accompanied by basic social programmes: introducing obligatory seven-grade elementary schools and comprehensive vocational education, organising public health protection with the priority of combating infectious diseases, and commencing a mass housing program (although it was still insufficient in comparison to the high population growth and migration from rural areas to cities). Great investments of the state socialistic economy provided full employment which visibly improved living conditions of the working class. However, with time, negative effects of intensive industrialisation emerged; namely, an inefficient centrally planned economy with shortages (queues and rationing, felt to be very onerous) and a devastated natural environment.

Poverty was manifested mainly in the oppressive lack of basic consumption goods and considerably worse indices of population health status than western countries; as a result, there was a rising trend of workers leaving the labour market due to chronic disease and disability. However, in the official governmental propaganda, poverty did not exist.

### *Poverty of transition*

Poverty in Poland, during the period of transition which began in the early 90s, was strongly related to two overlapping processes: transformation of the centrally planned economy into a market economy and globalisation.

The poverty of this period resulted mainly from unemployment due to the liquidation of the work establishments which were the main sources of employment in many cities, towns, and rural areas. Industrial enterprises were collapsing, and the state agricultural farms (PGR) were being liquidated. This process was determined by opening a considerably unbalanced and low-efficiency economy to the world, which was accompanied by capital privatisation. These phenomena were documented and described: the collapse of the state enterprises (e.g., Karpinski et al., 2013) and the State-owned farms (PGR) (Niedzielski, 2017). At the same time sociological research was carried out in places where industrial enterprises and PGR were being liquidated (Dunn, 2008; Giza-Poleszczuk & Kościeszka-Jaworski 2008; Karwacki, 2006; Tarkowska, 2000; Warzywoda-Kruszyńska i Grotowska-Leder, 1996). Numerous journalistic reports have also been published on the difficulties, absurdities, and drama of the transformation period (e.g., those collected in the book by Lipiński & Matys, 2018).

In addition to the loss of jobs, liquidation of the transport infrastructure (in particular liquidation of railway connections) and social facilities (kindergartens, the

social infrastructure of schools, local community centres, and social assistance), which led to social exclusion of entire areas of the country, was taking place. People were not only losing jobs. Their living places were also losing infrastructure. Unemployment was becoming an experience of not only individuals, but also entire areas and families. The rate of households without any employed people was rising drastically.

Unemployment was mitigated with new social benefits: introduction of unemployment benefits, pre-pension benefits (to a high scale) and execution of international (bilateral) contracts for performance of seasonal work, mainly in Germany (Golinowska, 1999).

Capitalism brought a steady supply of consumption goods imported from around the world. In comparison to the shortage economy of the PRL, shops full of goods seemed like a “road to paradise”. While attractive and desired goods in new shops and malls were available for people with suitable incomes, the unemployed lacked the income to satisfy a basic but dynamically improved standard of consumption needs brought on by innovative technologies, new products, and the increase of consumer freedom and rights.

When new workplaces were being created in restructured and new companies (Rutkowski, 2002), it was revealed that the unemployed did not have sufficient resources for employment (Bednarski & Morecka, 2000). Many times, candidates for work did not have abilities or features which would favour employability. Low employability included such features as low or irrelevant qualifications, not living near the work place, incapacity related to a disease or disability, many family obligations (many children, caring for disabled or dependent relatives) and feeling helplessness in the face of the newly more individualized reality.

The desire to obtain consumption goods motivated the workforce to be more resourceful. Those lacking sufficient capital to found their own business, operated in the grey market or left for seasonal work abroad. A feature of the poor’s behaviour in the 90s was so-called “poverty-resourcefulness”, minor trade, and garage production and services, as well as collection of scrap metal, wastepaper, and antiques (Gandziarowska & Pielniński, 2007; Kozek et al., 2005; Rakowski, 2009).

In the period of transformation from the former socialistic economy into a market economy, the attitude of the state power towards entrepreneurship was widely approving. Moreover, unregistered economic initiatives and employment in the grey market was condoned. The conviction that the powerful force of entrepreneurship, through foundation and development of a company, could improve the living circumstances of many people was then quite common.

The feeling of freedom, the freedom of economic and social activity, and market mechanisms freed human energy to an unbelievable scale and coinciding with the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a permanent period of economic growth began in Poland. At the same time, the social structure was changing. On the income distribution curve, the numbers increased at both ends — for the richest and for the poorest. The extremely poor (Golinowska et al., 2005) and homeless (Przymeński, 2001) were becoming increasingly visible;). A societal assessment of the reasons for poverty was gradually changing. If, in the beginning, a fundamental cause was identified in individual features of the poor,

such as helplessness, unwillingness to make an effort and work hard, carelessness and addictions (so-called culpable poverty), then in the second decade of transformation, the assessment of individual failings diminished and the role of systemic roots of economic success and failure increased<sup>3</sup>.

### *The poor working class*

Eliminating the poverty of the transformation period was carried out through intensive work in the individual dimension enabled with proper employment regulations and through creation of new workplaces, with a considerable scale of small business and self-employment.

What is known as a flexible labour market developed in Poland at a large scale. The trend was global but in Poland, it manifested with great force. The range of non-standard employment contracts and self-employment was relatively high and despite criticism (standard workers have a lower risk of material deprivation and poverty than non-standard workers — European Commission 2018), it became established.

The concept of *flexicurity* was promoted in the European Union, the policy of combining flexible employment with social security system for dismissed people, and was also recommended for use specifically in Poland. As written by Elżbieta Kryńska (2009), flexible labour market policy was neither *flexi* nor *security* in practice.

Flexible employment created a new class of modern working poor, mainly young people, who were employed based on short-term contracts without complete social security as independent contractors, often under the insistence of a former employer. The term, “insufficient” or “partial” employment (*underemployment*) or in general of “precariat” was used — not fully adequately — to describe this group (Standing, 2011). The increasing number of the working poor was particularly dynamic in the first decade of the 21st century. This insufficient employment, in the formal sense, was becoming more often a pursuit for a job, for another job, or for commissioned work. Consequently, the number of working hours was dynamically increasing on the Polish labour market (1.8–2 thousand every year) and the Poles were becoming the hardest working society in Europe (OECD, 2020).

Excessive work is most often motivated by costs related to housing (housing loans) and family, in particular, children; on one hand, led by aspirations and on the other, by the pressure to keep up with others.

Can we say that those who work too much<sup>4</sup> and earn a level of income exceeding the social minimum are poor? In my opinion, they are a type of modern working poor. People who work too much mainly satisfy other people’s needs, primarily their families’. They do not have time and energy for their own consumption; they cannot care for themselves.

<sup>3</sup> According to the data by the General Social Survey analysed by Albert Izdebski (2019) in his doctoral thesis at the Faculty of Philosophy and Sociology of the Warsaw University.

<sup>4</sup> “The Knackered” (overworked) as termed by Marek Szymaniak (2018), the author of collected reports on excessive work during the last twenty years in Poland.

Their poverty, on the other hand, has individual consequences, such as overworking, worsening health condition, and the occurrence of catastrophic expenses related mainly to health.

Another feature of precariat employment and excessive work is limitation of social bonds; not only is there no time for family, but neither is there time to undertake any social activity. Bonds built in the workplace, which existed during the PRL (Polish People's Republic) (described, e.g., by Winicjusz Narojek, 1991) are not developing under the conditions of changing and precariat employment. Members of the precariat, weakly identifying with their workplaces and professions, do not belong to trade unions, which are not popular at this moment and have lost their influence in institutionalised labour relations (Gardawski et al., 2012).

Popularisation of the precariat phenomenon triggered increased inequality, which in turn, initiated changes of the political order in the social scale.

### *The poor in a consumerist society*

Systematic economic growth based on market progress and development of social infrastructure, possible due to European regional and cohesion policy, led to Poland quickly becoming a wealthier country in the 21st century. Under UN classification, taking into account all countries, Poland is a high-income country. It is not yet at the average level of western Europe countries, but material progress is easily visible, despite limitations and disturbances of its social distribution in the transformation period. This means that in Poland we are also dealing with the modernisation of poverty, a feature of a richer country (Seabrook, 2013).

In wealthier countries with a developed post-industrial market economy, the poor still do not participate sufficiently in the labour market and have relatively low incomes. However, they participate in the market economy as consumers.

Mass consumption on the global development stage stimulates economies and changes societies. Its beginning dates back to the 60s of the previous century in the USA (Iwasiński, 2015), when producers' capitalism started to be replaced by consumers' capitalism. Consumers are at the heart of capitalism, and market forces influence their life goals and behaviour (Miles, 1998; Baudrillard, 2006; Bauman, 1998; Romaniszyn, 2011). Owning newer and more modern goods dominated the formation of motivation mechanisms. Studies on demand and advertisement have become indispensable in influencing people's choices and not only those involving consumption. Marketing and other forms of presenting goods, e.g., brand creation, have become indispensable for producers. The relation to quality has changed. Goods do not have to be long-lasting because products must constantly be replaced.

In sociological discussion, the role of consumerism in determining social status is emphasised when some goods are desired, not only due to their functional usefulness, but mainly due to prestige. The significance of references, comparison, imitation, and formation of social structures indicated by common consumption is also emphasised.

Even people's identity is built through social consumption of the meaning of objects. Modern trade is a consumerism tool. Shopping malls have become not only "a cataclysm of shopping"<sup>5</sup> but also represent a lifestyle. People spend time there influenced by advertisements and demonstrating their consumption community-feeling.

Many studies and psychological discussions deal with modern consumerism<sup>6</sup>. Purchasing goods has become, on one hand, a way to reduce frustrations and fears and to seek happiness, and on the other hand, a way to legitimate strengthening the "I" (*de facto* of egoism) and hedonism (Cieciuch & Schwartz, 2012; Schwartz, 1964). Traditional psychological studies on the phenomenon of consumerism are backed up by economic psychological studies (e.g., Mróz, 2009, 2015).

Mass consumption infuses entire societies, including the poor. Exclusion from the market of products and their consumption stands in contradiction to the goals of modern capitalism. The poor are needed in it and, thus, join this process. Zygmunt Bauman (1998), in particular, wrote about mechanisms of involving the lowest strata of society in the process of development of modern capitalism. A desire to purchase and own goods triggers inventiveness and getting money; on the margin of the labour market or/and in the search for relatively cheap products in growing chain stores. Simultaneously, redistributing income instead of developing public services has advantages in social policy.

Financial institutions developed an abundance of forms of making cash available for the poorest. In addition to quick bank loans, extended repayment periods are also newly available. The poor become victims of financial pyramids and high-interest consumer loans, and the phenomenon of permanent borrowing grows larger in society, mainly among elderly and solitary people.

Trade institutions also target poor people with their offer to make owning products possible. Department stores use systematic discounts and sales, accept payments in instalments, rent equipment, and utilise many other tools to improve consumption. In the centres of cities and towns, there are many second-hand shops (selling items mainly from abroad), and low cost food bar.

The social assistance system has started providing suitable benefits to the poorest instead of developing social work; as a result of which, their power as consumers increases. Universal benefits for children (500+), introduced in Poland in 2016 and extended two years later, have been significant in the degree to which they have increased the purchase power of the poorest members of society (Golinowska & Sowa-Kofta, 2017).

The current image of poverty in the growing Polish welfare epoch (the second decade of the 21st century) has come out of serial studies and documentaries<sup>7</sup>. It has only been

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<sup>5</sup> The studies carried out by the Polish Opinion Research Centre [CBOS] on shopping of the Polish society carried out systematically since 1997 indicate that mainly young people succumb to the shopping mania.

<sup>6</sup> Studies on the culture of consumerism are carried out extensively at Gdansk University (Zawadzka, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> For the second decade of the 21st century, no such complex studies on poverty were performed as previously had been done on the cycle of Polish poverty I, II and III (Golinowska, 2018).

sketched out and is, so far, neither complete, nor explicit. It constitutes a hypothesis which should be verified by studies in the near future.

- Poor consumers seemingly do not differ from richer consumers. They and their children wear similar clothes, use similar electric and electronic devices and buy cars. A considerable portion of these goods were used earlier by richer societies or are cheaply produced in poorer countries with a low standard of quality and even safety.
- Despite a permanent lack of sufficient income, poor consumers do not keep their finances in check and, therefore, manage their funds irrationally; do not space out expenses over a period of time, buying products emotionally; often borrow money regardless of high interest rates; very rarely save money, even for set, designated purposes (Matul, 2008).
- Presently, poor consumers are not active in the household, as was characteristic three decades ago.
- The modern poor have no memories of hunger and have no skills to produce food on their own. No preserves for winter are made at home; cooking from scratch is rare, and people rather use ready made products or half-products. Food is often poorly stored, and is often wasted.
- The poor eat fast food more often. They drink a lot. The food they eat is unhealthy<sup>8</sup>.
- Home production or services are also rare in households. Only seniors cultivate traditional vegetable gardens and allotments. DIY is done very rarely; small houses or other buildings for equipment or house products are not constructed. All can be bought. Only money is needed.
- Housing conditions of poorer people are bad, neighbourhoods are run-down, and the environment is dirty. An increasing segregation of urban space is a new phenomenon of the last decade in Poland. The poor live in different districts and housing estates than other citizens. Richer residents slowly left socialistic high-rises and newly built municipal apartments were concentrated in separate places. However, the current housing allowances given to poor people are considered efficient in mitigating the biggest hardships (Przyemeński & Oliwia-Ciesielska, 2014)<sup>9</sup>.
- Children from poor families are losing access to good education. The quality of public schooling in Poland, affected by further reforms, is deteriorating and richer parents enrol their children in private and so-called social schools. Extra-curriculum classes and physical activity is reduced. Participation in culture is not developed.
- Even access to health care, as a result of deficits in financial and staff resources and the commercialisation of health services, is increasingly limited, which is becoming

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<sup>8</sup> A study on food customs in Poland is worthy of attention (Domański et al., 2015). It shows a relation of the health quality of food to the social structure.

<sup>9</sup> Contemporary housing policy does not include completely integrated spatial policy which would prevent formation of new poverty enclaves. Revitalisation of city centres, which have often been a home for the poor, would provide an opportunity for that. Modernization of real properties attracts people from other social levels (gentrification). Richer and poorer, living next to each other, would gain chances to integrate as a part of friendly and functional common spaces.

a threat to future quality of health and life. The living circumstance of the modern poor is undergoing long-term accumulated deterioration. The poor live shorter on average than people from the middle class and in worse health conditions<sup>10</sup>.

- Relationships of poor people have a specific character. The poor spend their free time at mass sport and entertainment events. They go together to holiday centres at the seaside or in the mountains. Drinking alcohol is quite common then as well as, increasingly often, narcotics use. They have informal and often physically violent relationships. Children in such relationships are neglected and often physically abused. Their future life is marked with disability, mental disorders and “returned” aggression.

The image of poverty in the consumption stage of development in Poland is not yet as presented in descriptions of the underclass in the USA or the United Kingdom<sup>11</sup>. However, the threat that it will develop in a similar way is considerable. Social mechanisms and the social policy that has been carried out in Poland in recent years may lead to comparable results. This is due to the fact that cash benefits are commonly recognised in the market system to result in increased individual consumption and the increased likelihood to live a non-demanding lifestyle.

The common acceptance of redistributing income to the contemporary poor also has a frightening political dimension since the youth from these environments supply radical movements and fascistic parties. This is a way to gain power and take power from others (elites, immigrants, etc.). They do not know any alternative for achieving satisfying independence; they have no earning skills on the contemporary labour market, and do not save, share their resources, or take responsibility in relationships. Contemporary information technologies help communicate and popularise radical ideas and incite potentially violent actions.

### ***How to limit the poverty of the contemporary development phase?***

Presently two trends dominate the debate about social problems. The first one opposes the mass consumption which leads to consumerism (Miles, 1998; Rojek & Bauman, 2004; Smart, 2010), which Zygmunt Bauman decried as being based on the “economy of fraud, lack of moderation, and waste” (Bauman, 2006, p. 129). The second trend attempts to reduce inequalities which in the global economy are excessive and constitute a threat to the social order.

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<sup>10</sup> The health inequality phenomenon in Poland has been confirmed by systematic studies on population health status provided by the National Hygiene Institute-National Public Health Institute (PZH-NIZP) (Wojtyniak & Goryński, 2018). This research has included a focus on health inequalities in recent years. Results of self-assessments of health condition indicate a strong relationship between a good health assessment, good education, and the good financial situation of respondents.

<sup>11</sup> Classical studies on the *underclass* in the USA and the United Kingdom by Charles Murray (1984 and 1990) supplement later studies. We can find a particularly heart-breaking description of “market poverty” in a book by the English psychiatrist Theodore Dalrymple (2003).

Contrary to consumption capitalism, a concept of a *sharing economy* is developing. The range of sharing described in the literature is quite extensive, although limitations have been suggested (Curtis & Lehner, 2019). In the wide scope the sharing economy includes both business models of common use of production means (equipment, space, transport), renting and borrowing utility goods by households, especially apartments, and transferring consumption goods to others when the owner does not need them anymore, as well as an exchange of services (cooperation) concerning care, supervision, education and more.

The sharing economy is significantly useful in developing a new concept of consumption wherein ownership does not precondition access to use. But the experience with common use is not inspiring. People's conduct, when something is a common good, at least in people's awareness, is sometimes irrational. The epoch of real socialism, confirms the experience: vandalism, neglect, and stealing common goods and resources. This was reflected by Garrett Hardin in the 60s in his "tragedy of the commons", describing the degradation of common pastures. In essence it served as affirmation of the importance of private property, which changes the relation of the owner to the owned objects. The owner cares for them more, uses them and sees to appropriate maintenance in an efficient manner. It is therefore not shocking then that capitalism in Poland, which enabled and legitimised private ownership also brought protection of property and care for it: fencing off properties, closing residential areas and entrances to residential buildings, and individual payments for security and controlled access to property<sup>12</sup>.

However, we now see a generation coming into their own (millennials) who have a different attitude towards ownership. As ownership requires devoting time to maintain the utility of the owned good and time is presently of a particular value, then maybe it is better to purchase only a function of the particular good and rent it, paying the owner of the good a favourable price. He will care for maintenance of the good, treating it as business. The use of the product by many consumers saves resources which favours environmental protection. Therefore, the *sharing economy* is a partial answer to the ecological challenges of contemporary times.

Modern technologies favour development of the sharing economy. Renting, exchange of goods, and transferring ownership is becoming simpler, and participation in social media yields both information about the possibility of purchasing goods and customer opinions about the quality of these purchased goods.

Does the *sharing economy* limit the social exclusion of people with low incomes? The described experiences are positive in particular when we take into consideration the aspect of cooperation (*collaborative economy*) both in terms of products, e.g., sharing food, as well as cooperation in terms of organising the services needed by any group of the interested parties, e.g. parents who bring their children to school, taking care of a neighbour, founding community vegetable gardens, running a kitchen or small bars with

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<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that care for owned goods is not obvious; it has a strong cultural aspect. This was described by philosopher and priest — Jozef Tischner — in his example of Polish peasants' behaviour, who excessively exploited farm animals and used economic violence towards their families.

fresh food, organising regular events etc. However, some described experiences (e.g., in Belgium — the King Baudouin Foundation, 2016) are rather those of middle class people, although they attract others. In poor families where other dysfunctions and problems usually occur, social work that enables more effective participation in activities and (using) the sharing economy is especially needed.

The second trend of the debate on contemporary social problems — inequalities — mainly concerns income-related differences. Globalization and work division in the world (relocation of “dirty” production to the countries of the so-called South) lead to rising income-related inequalities and, as a result, capital-related inequalities (Piketty, 2014), both in the global and individual dimension of particular countries, especially those which have not developed a *welfare state*.

The debate on inequalities more often focuses on the problem of differentiated access to public goods, such as health care, education, and housing. The possibility to fully use good quality public services from the earliest period of life enables the equal development of people. Creation of such conditions gives people equal chances, basically regardless of income and family history. Amartya Sen writes that this is about creating capabilities, the use of which builds the ability to fight a difficult fate.

Equal opportunities for development determine both the political and economic stability of societies, as well as the possibilities of individuals at various economic levels achieving a satisfying life, thus reducing the poverty phenomenon and social exclusion.

Polish limitations in the development of public services: no public pre-school education or early education, deficiencies in school functioning (programme impoverishment and a limited range of social, health, and cultural services in public schools), and also increasing limitations in access to health care threaten development of an equalized society and thus — of a stable one.

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