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***From guest editors: Introduction to thematic issue
— Social Poland of the postcommunist transformation***

In the latter half of the 1990s, inspired by the European Union's expansion with the newly democratic states of Central Eastern Europe, Peter Townsend was particularly engaged in developing a new set of measurements for poverty. Yet it was earlier that this British scholar — the author of relative deprivation theory (among others) — put forward that social policy is a project for the management of society. In order to ensure the continuance and development of society on a (covertly and overtly) rational foundation, social institutions and groups are established whose aims include institutionalized control of services, agendas, and organizations. That control, in turn, serves to maintain or alter the social structure and social values which naturally vary in different places at different times.

The typology of social policies which is most frequently commented upon in the literature of our field — alongside the propositions of Richard Titmuss and Harold L. Wilensky — is that of the Danish sociologist Gøsta Esping-Andersen. The latter analyzed

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the differences dividing European states with reference to their systems of social rights and inequalities as shaped by the governmental institutions of the welfare state. Esping-Andersen advocated the application of various solutions for the networks connecting the basic systems which secure individual and group needs — the state, market, and family. His classic conceptualization distinguishes three spheres of the welfare capitalist state — the liberal, conservative, and social democratic — respectively subject to the three principles of liberty, equality, and solidarity. Each of the three systems of government arose under distinct historical circumstances and thus possesses its own logic; each is constructed around different organizational tenets, shapes its process of social stratification and/or integration, and develops along a prescribed trajectory (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

Nonetheless, in addition to those welfare state systems, two additional “worlds” have emerged in the 21st century: the Southern European one typical of the Mediterranean basin countries and the Central Eastern European one typical of the postcommunist states. Herein we will focus on the last of these with its evolution prompted by the political and economic transformations initiated in the early 1990s in the region of Europe which includes Poland.

Generally speaking, the political and economic transformation, which also encompassed changes in management of the social sphere, constituted a state retreat from offering social benefits while introducing institutional pluralism (Zgliczyński, 2017b, p. 4). Among other things, it broke down types of benefits, mixing the private with the public, and expanded the involvement of regional and local authorities. Comprising the framework channeling decisions and solutions have been complex external and internal determinants (including global socioeconomic processes). Key are Poland’s relations with European neighbors near and far, the socioeconomic condition of Poles, and their interests, expectations, and willingness to support or contest the solutions introduced in the area of social policy.

The dynamics, scope, and complexity of the sweeping changes in Poland during the 1990s, in conjunction with those taking place on the European and global scale, have been the subject of numerous interdisciplinary studies. The crux of the matter has not, however, been clearly pinpointed. Debates concern the causes, the course, and the consequences of the complex processes at hand. Engaged in this are political leaders and social activists at various levels as well as with various ideas on how to shape the new social reality. The analyses have been shaped by discussions about the role of the state in economics and the appropriate model it should take on to satisfy the needs of its citizens.

Questioned, above all, is the model to be chosen for Poland and to what extent it should be followed. Should it be a (neo)liberal model in which the state assumes limited responsibility for the meeting of its citizens’ needs? Or should it be strictly a welfare state model in which the government redistributes income and guarantees social security? In other words, discussed are the limits of a state’s involvement in the lives of its citizens: which affairs should be regulated by the government and which should remain beyond its purview?

By the turn of the century, schemes for social management in Poland had become derivative of neoliberalism adopted in the form of a “shock therapy” approach to the economic restructuring and the initiation of fundamental changes. In the initial stage of

the postcommunist transformation, the scope and structure of Poland's welfare state were subordinated to goals of development, focused primarily on intensely dynamic economic growth as a means by which to build capital.

Nevertheless, it is worth recalling that thinking about social policy was present from the start of the construction of a new world order. One of the three negotiation teams of 1989's "Round Table" between the party and the opposition focused precisely on market problems in connection with social policy. Yet the emphasis was on economic outcomes: restructuration of the market meant, for example, the privatization of businesses and the reduction of their social functions. Reorganization of the support system was led by a new law passed on 29 November 1990, regulating the labor market as well as social benefits (including insurance designated for the agricultural sector). This, however, had been preceded by a less than complete diagnosis of the consequences for society of such a radical shift internally against the backdrop of external conditions.

Expenses on behalf of society began to be treated as a "necessary evil" (Golinowska, 2018). The new government, in fact, abandoned an entire range of social services: various subsidies for goods and services were abolished; healthcare services were partially privatized; and social activism was allocated to the volunteer and charity sector. Furthermore, social security funds were separated from the state budget just as pension funds were separated from health insurance.

Four key reforms were introduced in 1999: the country was re-divided into new administrative provinces and segregation of the education, pension, and healthcare systems. These reforms were accompanied by a shift in responsibility for the implementation of social welfare tasks down to the regional and local governments (see Zgliczyński, 2017a, pp. 54-55). The social consequences of these changes were high unemployment, especially among younger people just entering the labor market; the value of higher education depreciated while other career paths were considered. Looking back from the perspective of time and knowing what consequences actually transpired, the reforms introduced then are assessed differently today.

The welfare state is evolving in Poland, yet increasingly more hybrid a version. The share of social expenditures in the national GDP is growing, but the new, higher cash payouts are not accompanied by tax increases. Taking place is a redistribution of income from the employed to the unemployed. Not much attention is being paid to labor supply issues — something illustrated, for example, by the lowered retirement age or the "Family 500+" program which tends to deactivate a cohort of women in the prime of their life.

The state of the public budget is worsening — something inconducive to development (Golinowska, 2018, p. 140). Discussions about the solutions introduced (some questioned, others rejected outright) are ongoing. For instance, the just mentioned "500+" program, which remunerates families with children, has entailed a surge in what had been relatively low social benefits paid out by the government. The liberal-conservative welfare state model which had been taking shape in the first decades of the transformation has been — in the last few years — turning towards a conservative-clientelist model (Golinowska, 2018, p. 147).

The volume at hand, dealing with the management of the social sphere in Poland over the past three decades, is the fruit of interdisciplinary discourse. The primary forum was a symposium — “Social Poland: Successes, crises, and failures of the transformation” — organized by the Social Work Section of the Polish Sociological Association under the auspices of the 17th National Sociological Conference which took place in Wrocław in September 2019. The topic of discussion was focused on diagnosis and assessment of the expectations of the state held by various social groups and categories in terms of satisfying their needs, the possibilities and methods by which solutions could be implemented through professional and civic action, and the consequences of such actions for the shaping of the social structure. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the phenomena and processes under analysis, representatives of sociology, social policy, and economics were invited to exchange knowledge as well as to discuss the tensions which accompany ideas and the subsequent introduction of programs and other solutions aimed at improving the conditions and quality of life of Poles. The crux of the matter is ensuring everyone full-fledged functioning in society.

The four chapters comprising the first part of the volume were prepared on the basis of papers delivered during the conference, enriched by the discussions moderated by professors Krzysztof Frysztacki and Jolanta Grotowska-Leder and in which many of the interested listeners participated. The contemplations found in the texts herein pertain, respectively, to: 1) the evolution of impoverishment whose scale and traits point to crucial areas of intervention for effective impact; 2) societal expectations of the welfare state vis-à-vis the obstacles and opportunities faced in fulfillment of those hopes; 3) the processes by which social work and associated caretaking occupations are professionalized in the transformed Polish society; and 4) analysis of a significant, but contentious governmental program (the aforementioned “Family 500+”) with reference to its effects on social divisions and inequalities. The chapters are as follows:

1. Stanisława Golinowska, On the modernization of poverty: Evolution of the phenomenon;
2. Marcjanna Nózka, Social expectations towards the welfare state — opportunities and risks;
3. Marek Rymśa, Social work and other helping professions in the process of professionalization: The specificity of Poland after 1989 from the perspective of the sociology of profession;
4. Tomasz Szlendak, Arkadiusz Karwacki, Fulfilled promise or a tool of political rhetoric? Analysis of the consequences of the Polish “500+ Family” Program.

The articles listed above have been extended by additional work, which was not presented during the conference: “Between empowerment and self-discipline. Money management training in the practice of social work in Poland” by Mateusz Trochymiak.

The discourse undertaken requires continuation. After all, social policy — as a field of purposeful action — necessitates constant redefinition in both subjective and objective

categories. Social policy should always be responding to the (very dynamically) changing needs of individuals, groups, and social communities; it should always be identifying wherein lie deficiencies and what possibilities exist for overcoming them.

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