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POLISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM FACING CHALLENGES OF NEW SOCIETY. TRAUMA, FUTURE SHOCK OR SOCIAL PROBLEM?¹

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Abstract: The education system on the verge of transformation faced the challenges of a rapidly changing society. On the one hand, the political nature of the changes entails changes in the economic model (adoption of a market model), the transformation in the sphere of ideology (vision of the world, social order, place of the individual in society). On the other, Polish society has entered the global market: economic, educational and cultural; became the subject to the processes taking place on a global scale and have been confronted with the need to adapt to changing conditions. These processes have launched a phenomenon hitherto unknown, such as unemployment, withdrawal of the State from the function of care, which weakened the sense of security at the nation and individual. On the one hand, to the education system the most important challenges were these being the consequence of the global knowledge-based society, where the level of qualification plays an important role in achieving success, on the other, and the emergence of the labour markets, which formulate their expectations at the education system. No less important, there were problems in the educational sphere that occurred as a result of changes: the transformation of value system, vision of the world and its order, but also the risks arising from the impact of the global media culture. Our assumption is that these phenomena could be analysed using different categories such as cultural shock, social and cultural trauma and social problem. Analysis of these phenomena will be the subject of our contribution.

Keywords: system of education, rapid social change, trauma, cultural shock, social problem.

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Introduction

Witold Gadomski, a journalist working for *Gazeta Wyborcza*, an influential and opinion-forming Polish medium (a newspaper and a web portal) made a diagnosis of current changes in politics and society which resulted from the last presidential election and changes in the number of particular parties' seats in the Polish Parliament. He considered an education reform highly significant, as according to him, "the mass production of university degrees, which was painfully verified by the market, was one of the reasons of the young generation's disappointment with capitalism and the so-called Third Republic of Poland" (Gadomski, 2015:No 27). University graduates are not aware how quickly the situation in the market changes and how to fit in it.

Thus, an education reform should be a counter-measure to reduce public tension which resulted from the incompatibility of aspirations with needs of the labour market. Gadomski's thesis is a good example of a discussion that is taking place in contemporary Poland about the problem of education, not only the higher education, but also its lower levels - primary and secondary ones. Its characteristic feature is the criticism of the current state of educational institutions and, above all, social and economic effects of their activity. It can be put into a broader context, both social and economic, relating to the evaluation of the last 26 years since the social and economic system changed. As a consequence of introducing the market economy, positive changes were accompanied by painful experiences: the liquidation of many enterprises (1500), the collapse of heavy industry (metallurgy, ship-building and machinery industry) and extractive industry (coal and sulphur mining) as well as textile industry. Consequently, a necessity appeared to face new phenomena which resulted from the process, namely unemployment, job insecurity, worse employment conditions and the disappearance of social function of companies which all led to the loss of a sense of security.

The economy of scarcity was quickly replaced with the market economy. Everyday items, previously objects of desire whose sale was regulated, became available to everyone who had money. Everything was for sale and attractive displays, full shop shelves and, what was a new, importunate advert in urban space and in mass media encouraged people not only to buy, but also to take loans or credits, offered by banks and other financial institutions, in order to purchase those goods.

A question arises whether it influenced people's living conditions as well as the way of perceiving their social situation and life opportunities. What were (and what are) the reactions on the consequences of changes? Two main attitudes can be distinguished in this respect. The first one, characteristic of the beneficiaries of changes who achieved a material and social success, is acceptance and satisfaction with new conditions. The other attitude is a tendency to concentrate on negative consequences, significant for people who were personally affected, namely who were threatened with unemployment and lost

their sense of security due to the fact that the state withdrew from many areas - a transformation of a socialist welfare state into a neoliberal *laissez-faire* state.

There are a lot of symptoms indicating society's dissatisfaction related to the effects of the transformation that started in the 1990s. On the one hand, they result from numerous opinion polls, where a clear dividing line between the satisfied and the dissatisfied can be noticed. They are usually regionally and socio-demographically correlated. It is also possible to distinguish quite a large group of "the flummoxed", namely people who are not able to evaluate their situation and the reasons for it. Such differences also result from sociological research that deal with the problem of poverty and social exclusion. It should be stressed however that the cyclical research within the "Social Diagnosis" project indicates changes in social awareness as the public opinion evaluates its living conditions more and more positively and people are more and more satisfied with their individual achievements.

On the other hand, a media debate may serve as an important source of knowledge as far as the above mentioned distinction is concerned. Media, however, look for "news", that is information that would attract people's attention. Thus, they are more interested in events confirming negative aspects of the recent years.

There is one more significant aspect, namely a political discourse, where opposition parties concentrate on devaluing achievements, and emphasizing the failures of those in power, usurping the role of "an average Pole's" advocate, with whom the authorities (the representatives of political parties in power) do not wish to talk and whose problems and everyday complaints are unnoticed. Such a trend was particularly evident during the last three elections – local government, presidential and parliamentary ones. Significantly, in the latter two the opposition party was successful.

A question arises whether the sociology created theoretical categories (e.g. of shock, trauma or problem) that may allow to describe and explain reactions, both individual and collective, to rapid changes. How does it treat those ways of reacting, where does it see their reasons and what consequences does it predict? A serious theoretical problem of the quest of such categories occurs here. It is one of the most important purposes of this article, namely to find adequate categories for describing and explaining processes and phenomena happening in Poland after 1989, as well as reactions to unimportant social categories. Another purpose of the article, equally important, is to answer the question what the factors responsible for the appearance of states (areas) of dissatisfaction are.

Therefore, a question arises referring to the subtitle of this article, namely is the educational system a traumatogenic factor or rather a mitigating one (non-traumatogenic)? Can it be the reason for negative consequences in the sphere of evaluation of one's own chances and goals as well as the role of external conditions for their accomplishment both in an individual dimension and

a collective one? In other words, did certain changes in the educational system lead to social trauma, irrespective of their rapid or cumulative character?

We chose four examples to be subjects of the analysis. The first one is the above-mentioned mass character of higher education and the liquidation of vocational education. The second – the so-called “minister Kudrycka’s reform”, which led to the mobilization of the academia and the establishment of a defense committee for the benefit of the humanities in Poland. The third phenomenon is a battle over school starting age and the emergence of a social protest movement. Finally, the fourth one is “a culture war” in Polish schools related to religious symbols and religious education. We are going to answer the above questions in the following part of the article.

In quest for adequate theoretical categories

While we were deliberating on how to define the phenomena that we were interested in, we referred to a set of categories existing in the theoretical framework. They aim at analyzing the state of social insecurity, negative evaluation of one’s own situation, which results in denial and rejection of the existing order. They can be found both in E. Durkheim’s “Suicide” (2011) and in R.K. Merton’s works on reactions of group members on culturally defined goals and ways of their accomplishment or on a phenomenon of deprivation of individuals and groups (Merton 1982: 195-233, 284-429). They were supported, on the one hand, by the mechanisms of atrophy of social bonds and consequently alienation (Durkheim 2011), and, on the other hand, by the approval or the lack of approval of social values and norms (Merton 1982: 195-223). The lack of it leads to the appearance of different attitudes towards those values and norms – innovation, ritualism, withdrawal, and rebellion.

Those categories may serve to describe and explain collective behaviours of large social categories – from the protests of miners against machines and damaging them at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, through great social and political revolutions (questioning aims and means as well as proposing new ones) to the negation of countercultural and political youth movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Modern political movements can be described in such categories as well.

However, not only are the mechanisms that set in motion the processes of tensions and conflicts important for our analyses, but also their effects, in social and collective dimensions. All the processes of deep social changes, such as revolutions based on rebellions, having a violent course of events, but also the slower ones, such as the Industrial Revolution (18th - 19th century), the Scientific Revolution (20th century) or the Information and Communication Revolution (21st century) brought consequences in the form of the ways of experiencing changes and their effects, the evaluation of one’s own situation and the situation of the community we belonged to. A question arises whether sociology is able to

provide categories, apart from the ones mentioned above, that would describe and explain such effects.

Social reactions to deep changes were interesting for sociologists on equal terms with the quest for mechanisms of such changes. The notions of assimilation and acculturation appeared as a consequence of the contact of cultures, e.g. the results of migrations and the necessity to learn new cultural patterns, norms, customs, namely adapting to a new environment, both technical and civilization, as well as a social environment. It referred both to peasants moving to cities in search of work and better living conditions, and those who, for the same reasons, moved to foreign countries where the process of adaptation was hindered by their ignorance of foreign languages. One may refer to this process as the migration of people rooted in local, homogenous communities, based on strong, mostly family and neighbour, bonds, sharing the same culture, behaviour patterns and life style to heterogeneous communities with different types of bonds, more formal, where everyday life was dominated by the cycle of nature (which is characteristic of rural communities) to a lesser extent, while more by the logic of success of industrial production and where regulations had a more formal, institutional character.

In the 1960s and 1970s there was a tendency to reflect on the social effects of scientific and technological revolutions. We are talking here about deliberations of such authors as J. Fourastie (1965), R. Richta (1971) or A. and H. Toffler (1970/2007, 1980/1997, 1990/2003). From the point of view of our analyses the category of “future shock” (Toffler&Toffler 1970/2007) seems important, considered as a kind of culture shock, a reaction to the unknown, something new which has not been experienced so far. It is something that appeared as a result of rapid environmental changes, especially in the area of technology, which had some influence on its social, or cultural, character. In a way, it is the effect of surprise with the rapidity of changes and the necessity to give up something we knew very well in favour of learning new things (sometimes even a new language, at least as far as the vocabulary is concerned). Therefore, Toffler’s “future shock” is, in fact, a culture shock.

Contemporary sociologists such as A. Giddens (2004) and Sztompka (2005) emphasize the rapid pace of recent changes. Something that used to change gradually over centuries, nowadays is an experience of merely one generation. A problem arises here then, namely what are the social reactions on such fast and profound changes? How are they welcomed and what kind of attitudes do they generate?

In the area of sociological theory two descriptive-analytical categories occur which indicate a certain specific property of those reactions. They have a common element taken from medicine and psychology – trauma (shock) which results from a certain experience (a *physical* or a *mental injury*). P. Sztompka (2000) uses the term of socio-cultural trauma, and J. Alexander (2011) refers to it as cultural trauma.

According to him, cultural trauma occurs when members of a community have the impression that they are subject to a horrible experience, that will leave indelible footprints on their collective consciousness and will mark their memories and change their future identity in a fundamental and irrevocable way (Alexander 2010: 195). It is not surprising that examples that he refers to are the Holocaust, slavery in the USA or ethnic cleansings in Bosnia. He points however that those phenomena as such did not invoke collective trauma. "Real or imaginary phenomena are thought to invoke trauma not due to the fact that they are harmful or violent but because they are believed to influence the collective consciousness in a negative way. Individual security is deeply rooted in the structures of emotional and cultural expectations that provide people with the sense of security and possibility. Such expectations and possibilities are embedded in the collective strength that individuals participate in. We are not talking here about the stability of a community in a material or behavioral sense, although it plays an important role. The identity of a community is at stake here and its stability in terms of meaning, not actions" (Alexander 2010:204). Cultural trauma then consists in experiencing significant, violent and very negative phenomena by a community which consequently become elements of its collective memory or even elements of its culture.

Sztompka (2000) refers to cultural trauma in a slightly different way. He perceives it as a reaction to a violent and profound social change. Its results may become dangerous for the whole society and lead to anomic situations. The process of recovering from trauma may last long and create a state of frustration that consequently may lead to the acceptance of a simplified vision of the world and motives as well as to blaming those responsible for the existing situation and one's own situation (e.g. economic), considered unsuccessful, and finally to supporting radical movements and acts of aggression. Another possible way of dealing with it is withdrawal, as well as increased activity or innovative attitudes.

A question appears here whether the above-mentioned categories may be applied to the processes of change called the processes of system transformation, the transition from communism to the market economy and liberal democracy, characteristic of East-Central European countries. Have those processes launched the mechanisms responsible for culture shock (Toffler), cultural trauma (Alexander) or socio-cultural trauma (Sztompka)? It is difficult to state whether, following Alexander's line of reasoning, the processes can be referred to as "horrifying experiences" which are threatening to the collective identity (for certain social categories that lost their sense of security this might be true) and which have the status of a cultural fact, rooted in the cultural system of symbols. Phenomena such as wars, revolutions or acts of terror were most often subjects to sociological analyses. They were "horrifying", overwhelming and paralyzing, and people afflicted by them as well as their families could not deal with them mentally, socially and symbolically. Notions, which at a certain time were attempts to get the situation verbally under control, have been in use ever since, e.g. shell shock (WW1), Holocaust trauma during World War II or September 11 trauma (the terrorist attack in New York City) or political transformation trauma.

The last one was related to the shock therapy aiming at a radical change in proprietary relations and creating new social classes.

The notion of trauma in sociology and cultural studies has become popularized and its meaning has proliferated: apart from structural trauma and strategic trauma, a category of insidious trauma has emerged. Peter Vermeulen (2015) stated that such a form of trauma results from biopolitics and latent forms of oppression. They do not harm life and body directly but they are a form of moral and spiritual violence against the integrity of an entity.

The popularization and extensions of the notion "capital" in sociology may serve as an example. The notion of "social capital" has become a foundation for creating new categories, such as: cultural capital, intellectual capital, human capital, moral capital, erotic capital, etc. We would like to avoid multiplying notions and confront three terms mentioned in the article, namely "shock", "trauma" and finally "social problem". All of them share an origin, namely they are sudden, negative, difficult and hostile. One has to take action to restore the previous state which was favorable and positive. In our opinion, "shock" is a reaction to trauma, e.g. a terrorist attack, hyperinflation, a sudden change of government or a political system. A traumatic experience which results from it appears and reappears during a person's life, and intensifies his or her negative experiences. A social problem is a different situation: a group (a community, a collective) is able to define, consolidate and control negative experiences. Social activists, leaders of social movements and mass media play an important role in it. Such social forces use their resources and procedures of reasonable collective activities in order to find a *modus operandi* that would enable reduction of negative effects of certain events or creation of a new social solution (Miś, 2007).

Research results and reflections on a sudden change, trauma (Długosz 2008, Sztompka 1999, Tarkowska 2000) and its consequences may lead us to a conclusion that people who are capable of recognizing the essence of economic, political and social phenomena deal better with it. They are people who have knowledge and skills allowing them to diagnose their own situation and consequently to find ways of reducing or eliminating traumatic states. They are able to adapt quickly to a changing situation, and to respond to the challenge of shock described by A. and H. Toffler (1970, 2007) as a "future shock", that is a violent psychological disturbance that in stabilized societies may be caused by sudden civilization (cultural) and technological changes. To sum up, previous reflections on trauma show that educated people deal better with it.

A reaction to an overall change is not the subject of our research. We would like to concentrate on a change just in one of the segments, namely in the subsystem of education. Thus, we are not so much interested in the reaction to **social change** (the overall change of the social system) as in the **change in the society**, namely fragmentary changes within the subsystems of society (see Sztompka, 2005). Are they capable of producing the effect of sociocultural trauma? This question will be the subject of our further analysis.

The system of education and changes in it

Gadomski's diagnosis is seemingly simple and so is the recommended solution, namely turning "secondary" qualifications into higher ones and individual resourcefulness of graduates. From a sociological point of view, the observation that expectations of young university graduates are not fulfilled with the employment offers waiting for them in the market is pertinent. The time after 1990 (the beginning of the transformation) was an educational boom, unprecedented in our history. Suffice is to say that from 1990 to 2009 the numbers of students increased fivefold, from 390,409 to 1,953,832 in 2005/2006 (the largest number of students). What is even more important, the gross enrolment index on a tertiary level surpassed 40,6% (Higher Education 2013), which means that 2/5 young adults aged 19-24 were students.

In the old system graduating from a university was tantamount to an employment that was consistent with one's qualifications. The first years of transformation abounded with spectacular examples of careers of young people who graduated from universities (mostly abroad) at courses that were not present in the Polish system of higher education, such as administration (MBA) or advertising. Later they held management positions in newly created successful companies. For young people finishing their secondary education such careers seemed very attractive.

Such a demand was soon satisfied by the education market that appeared after 1990, namely university courses related to administration or marketing developed. It happened both at public universities (full-time courses and external studies), which had the necessary staff, and at non-public, private universities, which hired professors from the public universities to teach at their courses. Obviously, such a situation affected teaching quality and consequently universities degrees did not have a great market value, which, however, does not mean that they did not have any⁴. Thus, the excessive mass production of university degrees started to be criticized.

Such a phenomenon was described in sociological and educational

⁴ In this case there is a clear discrepancy. On the one hand in a public debate on the higher education the problem of overproduction of worthless degrees is often mentioned. On the other hand however, research within the program "Study of Human Capital" and practice show that it is easier to find an employment with a university degree. The results of research on human capital prove this. They show that among people with higher education 7% are unemployed, among people with secondary education – 13%, among people with basic vocational education – 18% and finally among those with lower vocational education – 30%. What is also interesting is the fact that in the category of people aged 25-34 the unemployment rate was 16% (Czarnik, Turek 2015: 12). It means that educated young people do find jobs, against common opinions repeated in mass media and by politicians who claim that the Polish educational system, and especially its higher level, produces the unemployed. It should be also stressed that people who study at public and private universities on extramural basis (*extra muros*) very frequently worked and a university degree serves them simply as a guarantee of further employment. Also, students of top universities do not have any special problems with finding employment. We are writing about it below while referring to the market model of education.

literature before, and it was linked to a distortion of the idea of meritocratic society where a university degree (a certificate) was correlate with a social position, effort and a derivative of intelligence (IQ). Scholars who dealt with those processes coined two terms: credential society and over-educated society. Both categories may be used to describe the Polish society at the beginning of the 21st century as far as education is concerned. The latter category is particularly adequate if one wishes to refer to the situation of the society and to the chances of university degrees' owners. However, it is not a problem of the system of higher education, but of the economy which is not able to absorb all the university graduates and take advantage of their qualifications.

Pressure on universities was also a consequence of another process – the deprofessionalization of secondary education. Before 1989 over a half of primary school leavers went to three-year vocational schools which used to prepare qualified workers, and nearly 30% went to secondary schools (secondary technical school and secondary vocational school) which educated middle-level staff – indispensable for the functioning of economy, administration and services. The majority of vocational schools used to be, under the 1954 Vocational Education Act, financed by manufacturing companies. The process of transition to the market economy changed the functions of companies dramatically – they were supposed to make profit above all, and to achieve such a goal they had to dispose of all unprofitable elements, including schools. The control over them was ceded to the Ministry of National Education. The Ministry in turn did not have enough financial means to maintain them as they were more expensive than general secondary school since they required workshops and laboratory classes. In their place, general secondary schools (grammar schools) were created. They were much cheaper to maintain and they were able to absorb a vast number of primary school leavers.

Two facts were also significant. The first one was the teaching quality in vocational schools. In such schools learning time was divided into two halves. The first one was devoted to general education, which was significantly limited (e.g. there was no history in the curriculum), and the other half was devoted to practical vocational training, for the company that maintained the particular school as a matter of fact. As a consequence, only functional illiterates, people who were able to read and write but had difficulties with understanding texts, not to mention the correct spelling, left such schools. However, they were attractive for students, especially those from peasant and poor families as the costs of learning were minor. Also, they had their own dormitories for non-resident students who were also granted scholarships often in the form of remuneration for work within the training program. As a result, such schools were attractive due to low costs of learning and a short time to achieve financial and professional independence. In the shortage economy their leavers did not have any problems with finding employment as they simply worked in the companies that maintained their schools. The quality of their qualifications was not significant in the labor market, as it did not exist as such at that time. The qualifications were verified later by the market economy and the newly emerged job market where

there was no demand for low-qualified workers finding it difficult to retrain and to adapt to changing expectations of an employer. It was a factor which contributed to the appearance of a large number of frustrated people feeling rejected and suffering trauma.

The other fact that must be taken into consideration here is the education reform (and later also the higher education reform) of 1998 (introduced in 1999) called “Handke’s reform” after the education minister of that time. It changed the structure of the Polish educational system to 6 (years of primary/elementary school) +3 (years of junior high school) +3 (years grammar school – senior high school). Also, specialized secondary schools were created that were supposed to prepare students for different professions, but such schools were not numerous and they offered a limited number of places for students. Emphasis was put mostly on general education preparing students for further levels of education. In fact, secondary professional training was given up in favour of a higher level of education. All in all, young people were forced in a way to go to colleges and universities as only there they had a chance to get qualifications and skills useful in the labor market.

A question arises, then, whether it made sense to create an educational offer, where almost 80% of an adequate age group learned at secondary schools and over half of it at universities. What were and what are its consequences in individual and social dimensions? It is not easy to give answers to these questions, yet Poland was not the only country that experienced such problems. Mass education is not a Polish invention. The term was first used regarding the American education system by Martin Trow at the beginning of the 1970s in contradiction to the European elitist system. At that time “mass education” meant that the gross enrollment index was at the level of 25%. Several years later in California, which in those days was an example of a modern knowledge based society, this index surpassed 50%. One may draw a conclusion that mass education at colleges and universities was considered a correlative of modern, knowledge based societies (Halsey, Nagai, Tabatoni 1989). One should remember that California at that time was associated with the most innovative technological solutions, and it became synonymous with “Silicon Valley” – the cradle of the information technology industry and a place where such products as Mac, iPod or iPhone were born (to name just products of one company). Therefore, the conclusion is that a shift to innovation economics is possible only with the use of a large number of well-educated people. Only such people are able to create (just few) as well as use (a lot) new technologies and devices. So generally, a large number of students and consequently a large number of educated people is beneficial as far as society as a whole is concerned.

Mass education at a higher level fulfills one more function which is important from the point of view of economy and social policy, namely it relieves the pressure on the job market. It postpones entering the market by young people and makes the whole process gentler. It does not mean obviously that those generations of people do not enter the market at all, yet if the process is spread

over time, chances of increasing the demand in the market are higher.

In societies where the model of mass higher education dominates, it is not true that all higher education institutions (colleges and universities) are the same, they educate at the same level and their graduates' degrees are equivalent and have the same market value. In fact, it is quite the opposite. American universities may serve as an example here, e.g. Harvard versus a state university, or English Cambridge, Oxford versus provincial university, or French *grandes écoles* and so called "parking universities" (not guaranteed State degree). The situation in Poland is similar. It is difficult to compare studying at top universities, such as Jagiellonian University or the University of Warsaw, with studying at a provincial private vocational college although the course in both cases may have the same name. The degrees will not be equivalent. The latest amendment of the Act on Higher Education introduced a departure from the principle that each degree is a State degree. At the moment the entity that awards a degree is not the state, but a university, which makes differences in its value (including the market value) even more significantly.

Amendments of legal acts referring to education and the higher education (acts and amendments from 1990 to 2014) created the current system of education and defined its structure (types of schools, methods of financing, establishment and operation). Also, they encouraged profound changes and enabled to create the education market, namely setting up non-public, private in fact, kindergartens or vocational colleges. This year, the first private school officially became "a university" (University of Social Sciences and Humanities).

Previous, sociological research proved that the system of education affected, directly or indirectly, economy and society. One could find numerous examples, especially in the reflections and analyses of Western research scientists who dealt with the problems of education. Even a trend in analyzing, named "economy of education", emerged. On the one hand, it concentrated on public and private costs of the system of education and necessary expenditures that must be borne in order to achieve standards which would meet the requirements of the present time. On the other hand, it focused on the rate of return, that is, how individuals and the whole society benefit from the resources invested in education of citizens. Introduction of the category of "human capital" is a consequence of such an approach. "Human capital" is a significant economic indicator, the higher it is, the better the development opportunities are. Titles of articles and collections of texts where we find the terms "education", "society" or "economy" convince us of this, as it is done by famous education reports (diagnosing the condition of education and making forecasts), e.g. "Learning to be" by E. Faure (1975) or "Szczepański report" (1973). They paid attention to the significance of educational systems for the development of societies, but also to the need for their further improvement, especially the need to adapt them to variable cultural and technological environments.

A lot of countries tried to introduce changes into their systems of education. Some of them were successful and they led to a better use of

economic resources, fostering human capital and social integration. Other attempts were less successful and they had totally different effects from the ones expected. One thing is certain, the effects of education reforms are seen only in the long term. The professionalization of Polish secondary education after World War II, on the one hand, was forced by the industrialization of the country, but, on the other hand, they caused a qualitative change of human resources. One may find numerous examples of reforms that resulted from profound diagnoses of the functioning of educational systems that had positive effects in the long term, e.g. the Swedish reform from the 1960s or the English Margaret Thatcher's reform from the 1980s which introduced market mechanisms to the system of education. It can be noticed that in most cases the reforms that had negative effects were quickly reversed (e.g. Minister Kuberski's reform from the 1970s in Poland).

Education as a social problem in modern Poland

The system of education is one of the foundations of modern developed societies. The condition of schools, the quality of education, the development of students and the position of teachers are of concern to all citizens. Sociologists who deal with social problems note a constant trend towards considering the level of education a public issue. Opinion polls show that citizens point to the condition and the functioning of education as one of the ten most important social issues. It is striking that residents of the European Union during the whole time of conducting the research seemed more concerned about the situation of education in their countries than Polish people. In 2004, 3% of respondents pointed that education was the most significant problem that Poland was facing, which put Poles on the eighth place in Europe in the ranking of problems (*ex equo* with terrorism). For EU countries it was respectively 5% and on the ninth place. The situation was similar in the following years, around 3% of Polish respondents and 5-6% of Europeans indicated education as an issue that required constant reforms.

The latest research showed a relative stability of respondents' opinions in Poland and in the enlarged European Union. For quite a long time, only 2 or 3% of respondents claimed that the system of education is a problematic institution that requires reforms. The increase of the number of respondents occurred twice, in 2007 and 2008 (4% of the respondents), and at the end of 2014 and the beginning of 2015 (5% of the respondents). In the first case, the public opinion became concerned about education due to attempts to introduce certain reforms made by education ministers of the coalition conservative people's government. They suggested changes both in primary and in secondary schools (a return to school uniforms, a traditional list of set books, the improvement of school discipline and strengthening of the position of the Roman Catholic Church in schools, etc.). Mass media publicized those attempts to change the former model of education and upbringing. As a result, we witnessed a certain form of "culture war" for shaping the young generation between the supporters of a secular and liberal

system of education and those of a religious and conservative one. The latest research, conducted in autumn 2014 and at the beginning of 2015, showed an increase in the number of respondents who claimed that the situation of education required public attention and institutional changes. We suppose that the fact that the number of respondents doubled is connected with the accumulation of certain problems and their presence in the public space.

The fight over school starting age of six or or seven was the most spectacular one. The government policy faced resistance which took the form of the so-called "Elbanowski movement", namely resistance on the part of parents against sending younger children (that is six-year-olds) to school. The controversy surrounding this topic turned into a long public debate and political fight, including collecting signatures among citizens (out of whom over one million people were against the amended act) and social activists' appearances before the Parliament. Another issue that drew criticism of the previous system was the higher education reform, which in turn led to the formation of a group of its opponents in the form of "crisis committee of the Polish humanities".

In May 2015, 5% of Poles considered the system of education as the most important problem that the country was facing and, respectively, 11% of European respondents considered a national system of education as a problem (28 EU countries). Education was more significant than crime for Poles (5% and 4% respectively). It is worth mentioning that the functioning of higher education was treated both as education at the national level and individually. 4% of respondents claimed that education was important for them personally, not only at the level of the general situation of the country. Thus, the public in Poland paid attention to the functioning of educational system throughout the period of carrying out the survey (2014-2015) and considered it a difficult phenomenon for the community, both for the whole country and for a family or an individual. Poles' opinions were similar to foreign respondents' opinions on their systems of education. However, a slight decrease in the significance of education occurred compared to other problems (from 9% in 2007 to 8% in 2013). For the sake of completeness however, one should add that although respondents were concerned about the level of education in their countries, they did not express concern about the condition of education in the whole European Union. Respondents from 28 countries of EU were concerned about immigration (38%), unemployment (24%), terrorism (17%) or the environment (5%), but not about education as an issue that needs to be dealt with on an ongoing basis. One may say that EU citizens considered their systems of education autonomous and they cared about the condition of education in their countries, not in the entire European Union.

The specificity of the situation of Poland consists in a discrepancy between the external evaluations of education and the internal ones. The results of evaluation studies prove that preparing secondary school students for their examinations is better and better, and that they occupy higher positions than students from other countries, e.g. a survey on the performance of 15-year-olds (PISA). The educational policy, however, was severely criticized by various

organizations and social groups in the country. The most important protests concerned the school starting age of six instead of seven, as it was before. The opposition movement led to a partial government's withdrawal from their plans, and to civil disobedience of parents to the government's intentions. The activities of the movement were spectacular and resulted in signing letters of protests by over one million citizens. To a certain extent it contributed to the failure of the centre-left government in the elections, and consequently to the inclusion of the leaders of the movement to the newly established Ministry of Education of the new Conservative People's Government⁵.

Recently, decisions of the Ministry of Education have led to another conflict between students and schools over food sold in school shops. The Ministry's decisions were justified and they resulted from its concern over the appropriate development of the youngest generation. Research has shown that the number of overweight and obese children is increasing and also that overweight and obesity-related health problems occur earlier and earlier. For this reason the Ministry decided to introduce the so-called healthy food, namely food without sweeteners and the excess salt, to school shops instead of sweets, chips, fizzy drinks, etc., that used to be available there before. That scientifically justified step triggered strong opposition from students which turned into political disputes and fight. Representatives of different political parties started to make concessions in the original version of the act in order to placate the dissatisfied students who started to fight over school shops and the shop owners whose incomes decreased significantly.

Higher education

As far as higher education in Poland is concerned, a gradual process of its marketization and neoliberal deregulation started at the beginning of the 1990s. In 2000 and later administrative regulations of this process were introduced as a delayed reaction to this process. The process of marketization and deregulation consisted in creating opportunities to create a large number of colleges and universities (over 450), without exercising control over meeting the academic standards by them. The profit of their owners, who correctly interpreted the government's policy and the situation on the market, played the decisive role.

Investments in education on the third level turned successful as a lot of secondary schools' graduates were not able to find job in the market and consequently they became customers of the new public and private universities. The public knew merely about the most spectacular pathologies of the system, e.g. lecturers employed by several different universities, universities opened in very small towns, without or with poor academic infrastructure (libraries, media centres, scientific instruments, etc.), without employees on site. The system of

⁵ In December 2015 the Diet of the Republic of Poland adopted amendments to the Act on the System of Education which restored the school starting age of seven.

accreditation proved ineffective in fighting those pathologies. As a result, the vast majority of the newly established colleges operated according to the principle "Buy your education" that enabled mass education on a higher level without effective control of its quality, sometimes on the verge of legality. A certain "window of opportunities" was opened for ostensible activities in the area of the third level of education. It was all directly related to the 1999 Education Act which eliminated vocational education and created general education in its place. After leaving school, secondary graduates logically went to colleges and universities, not to the job market since their knowledge and competence were insufficient to find any job, apart from simple physical workers which did not require any qualifications. It served to protect people employed at that time and to postpone the competition from secondary school graduates.

The centre-left government at that time did not notice a threat related to mass higher education (a fivefold increase in the number of students) and the lack of vocational education. The deregulation of higher education was followed by changes in certain legal acts, known as "Minister Kudrycka's reform". That reform led to the centralization of administrative control over the largest public universities and to the standardization of curricula at European universities within the "Bologna system"⁶.

According to the government's declarations, the aim of the reform was to bring universities closer to the market. In practice, the documentation served to exercise administrative control over university employees' work. The substantive evaluation of their scientific and teaching work was replaced with formal, legal evaluations. Mediocre institutions received favorable evaluations as the control focused on documentation and on what was written down. What is more, local scientific centers did not pay their employees or they paid just parts of their remuneration, while state authorities were helpless and did not enforce the payments on private school owners. The situation of the higher education could be accurately described by the metaphor: the publicization of costs and the privatization of profits. Private universities were universities in name only. They neither conducted research nor taught students to be enlightened citizens. They enjoyed however all the financial privileges related to their status as a university, and they generated profits for their owners. The profits depended both on the number of students and on obtaining various tax reliefs, subsidies or credits that were later cancelled, after some formal requirements were fulfilled (e.g. a certain number of years of the university's existence). In the situation of a structural mismatch between the labour supply and the market demand as well as between the educational profile and occupational needs, the requirements of "predatory bureaucracy" became a standard practice involving the employees in pursuing fictional goals. After a few years, the absurdity of this practice led to research

⁶ Resistance of academics, especially older ones, was caused by the need to prepare new syllabuses consistent with National Qualifications Framework's rules which became a Polish equivalent of European Qualifications Framework. They were considered a useless bureaucratic activity and a form of control over a university and its employees by civil servants.

workers' resistance and the formation of a movement of the dissatisfied in the form of "a crisis committee of the Polish humanities".

The deregulation of the higher education consisted in its mystification and privatization. It was shocking as almost all secondary school graduates, who otherwise would have become unemployed, were enrolled in universities. The scale of that process was enormous – the number of students increased fourfold. The privatization of universities entailed a change of purposes: previously, universities produced specialists with a particular cultural profile called "intelligentsia", and then they started to provide commercial services and focus on their owners' profits.

Schools as a place of culture war

Primary education and secondary education are not dependent on the model of culture imposed by the government anymore. Also, in some areas, they do not depend on the consensus of political power and parents' aspirations. Schools are now a place of fight between the authorities and parents as well as between parents. The above-mentioned phenomena, such as the school starting age or fast food in school shops, may serve as examples.

Another phenomenon that has been disclosed lately is the role of religion in the life of the school. It is a pan-European phenomenon. In many countries of Western Europe, such as Italy, Germany, France or Great Britain, lawsuits and demonstrations take place against or for the presence of religious symbols in schools. This issue creates deep social divisions and it is often very traumatic for different religious groups, both minority and majority ones. Various solutions to this problem are expedient and particular. In Poland, the main forms of this clash of various arguments, world views and values are the presence of a cross in school buildings and religion lessons. School and local authorities are regularly sued by opponents of religious symbols in schools who demand religiously independent space in schools.

Engaging the administration of justice in resolving disputes between secular, pro-religious or irreligious teachers and local authorities is very attractive as far as mass media are concerned. Apart from the events in the courtroom, disputes, mostly fierce and repetitive, spread both to public debates, involving people interested and different experts, and to political debates with the representatives of political parties and administration. In 2015, the conflict took a different form, namely a request for secular school. The initiative of the left-wing parties gained significant support as almost 150 thousand citizens signed a petition addressed to the Parliament, and demanded a change in the model of education and upbringing to a more secular one and lukewarm towards the Roman Catholic Church.

The examples described above may be included in a category referred to

as “culture wars”. Fight over ideological hegemony took various forms in the past, nowadays however the most violent fight concerns the presence of religious symbols in educational establishments (with or without crosses) and the list of set books (traditional and patriotic versus modern and global). “Culture wars” are not as tragic as real ones when soldiers and civilians are killed and a lot of people lose their health, fitness and they require help from their families or welfare institutions. Even so, culture wars are traumatic experiences although they are not physical, but symbolic. The situation is similar in the case of wars over education. The Catholic Church won the fight over the introduction of religion lessons, religious symbols (a cross) in schools or jobs for religion teachers. At the same time, however, it hurt the feelings of non-believers and believers who considered the previous system of religious education of the socialist era (namely teaching religion in parishes, not in schools) better. The system of teaching ethics and secular traditions (regarding celebrating national and church holidays) was never properly designed.

It is also the case with the list of set books. Education ministers impose their models, depending on their political parties. They impose a traditional and patriotic model of the list or a modern, global one. It happens in the atmosphere of “war” over the superiority of past-oriented or future-oriented culture and it has similar effects, namely suffering on the defeated side.

In our opinion, the episodes of this culture war over education are traumatogenic. Moreover, recurrent discussions, disputes, attacks and defenses cause traumatic reactions and an accumulation of negative, difficult experiences. An individual is not able to free himself or herself from trauma and regularly experiences those dramatic and tragic events in his or her head. Social trauma is similar. It occurs when the same book and film titles or authors’ names appear in conversations in the public space, which we cannot call debates due to their nature that is repeated, ritual and humiliating for the other side. Other issues that appeared in the media were:

- Students’ dress (uniforms or free to choose)
- The aim of education (teaching or upbringing, acquiring knowledge or forming personality)

In our opinion, the culture war over education is traumatic, both in terms of contents (the impossibility of combining perspectives of the supporters of liberal and of Christian education) and, above all, its form (repeated acts of destruction and harm towards the adversary). For this reason, the current culture war and the change from the national and socialist system of education to the pluralist and liberal one in 1990 were placed in the column entitled “trauma” while other educational changes are classified as “shock” or “problem” (see table 1).

Table 1. Main changes in the system of education and explanatory notions

| | Changes of the political system | Reform of 1999 | Deregulation after 2000 | Higher education reform of 2005 | Six-year-olds reform of 2014 | Culture war | Digitalization and social media |
|----------------|---------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------|
| Trauma | X | | | | | X | |
| Shock | | | X | | X | | X |
| Problem | | X | | | | X | |

Source: own elaboration.

The end

According to Tomasz Łysak (2015), the notion of trauma appeared in modern societies as an intellectual reaction to rail accidents that claimed many lives in the 1960s and were a type of mass death. Later the term “trauma” was broadened and included such experiences as wars (trench neurosis), mass murder (the Holocaust, ethnic cleansings) or serial killers. Notions such as insidious trauma, structural trauma or historical trauma emerged.

A question arises if the category of trauma is adequate when we apply it as an interpretative pattern of the states of social consciousness that influence the way people perceive reality and their own situation. We think, agreeing with J. Alexander (2010) and P. Sztompka (2000), that it can be used in relation to social consequences of important events which influenced the fate of societies and were preserved in collective and individual memory. Events connected with violent and profound changes of political systems were traumatic for societies.

However, the question whether consequences in the form of trauma can cause changes within social subsystems such as the system of education is still unanswered. In the analyses above we pointed to possible sources of traumatic experiences of young people that leave the education system and enter the job market and face its expectations. In fact, it is not the system of education, but economy and the job market that are sources of experiences that consist in a crossover between individual or collective aspirations and the reality.

We made an attempt to apply the category of trauma to phenomena referred to as “culture war”, however they also resulted from sources outside the system of education (see table 1). Education in its institutional meaning is a space where we find phenomena which have their sources outside, namely

transformations of cultural patterns caused by globalization and universalization processes and their confrontation with patterns of a traditional culture and the place of religiosity in it.

The consequences of changes in the higher education have also some features of shock. They resulted not only from marketization and deregulation, but later also from adopting regulations related to the Bologna system and entering the European Higher Education Area (a three-tier system of studies, the introduction of ECTS system, National Qualifications Framework), which imposed changes in the way of thinking about studies and curricula and, what is more important, in the way of performing activities related to employment at a university, on academics (and also students). For example, they are obliged to prepare syllabuses consistent with National Qualifications Framework's rules, they are evaluated by students (students choose courses - they "vote with their feet" and they complete questionnaires concerning the lecturers) or finally they are subject to parameterized evaluation of their research activities. It was a novelty, something which do not come within the scope of the relation "mentor-mentee" anymore, which was a part of the liberal university tradition, rooted in the way of understanding the university and the academic staff's mission (especially older staff, grouped at the faculties of humanities of Polish universities). The pattern of an "entrepreneurial university" introduced new elements to universities – accountability, competition and opening to social practice. The necessity to apply for research funds in different contests was a shock for many people.

We can talk about shock in relation to other phenomena as well. The massification of higher education and then the inflation of university degrees as well as the invasion of modern technologies (computers, software, mobile phones, digitalization, and scientific information) all caused a shock. Those phenomena were shocking as people were not prepared for new opportunities which were opened to them and which often increased their freedom, increased their social mobility and opened new intellectual horizons.

In relation to a broader understating of education as a process of socialization and upbringing we might use the notion of trauma, although we do not deal with direct fatalities. It regards a sudden change in values (e.g. individual instead of collective ones), norms of conduct (selfish or pro-social ones) or knowledge (global instead of local and scientific instead of religious) which proved traumatic for people who experienced the change of a political system or culture wars. We stressed that above, while writing about the culture war.

Systematic research shows that for EU citizens the national education is a social problem. They realize that education is an institution which creates the fundamentals of competitive economy and benefits citizens. Therefore, its dysfunctions cause concern and mobilize people to take action, even in countries where the level of education is very high such as the Netherlands or the Scandinavian countries. The situation is similar in Poland and the changes in the

system of education (an attempt of a reform in 2007 or an administrative introduction of the compulsory education at the age of 6) resulted in doubling the number of people concerned about education. Reforms however are regarded as changes that one can put off, question their importance, wait until they are over or just ignore them. Thus, they are a problem that must be solved, not a paralyzing experience over which one lost control. The above-mentioned reforms of 1999 and 2007⁷ that were put into practice in the form of new legal acts were proposed by new governments which came to power under the banner of the re-establishment of the status quo ante (the problems of free clothing, six-year-olds, higher-education).

A new society was born and its most distinctive features are modern digital technology and a clash of civilizations, which takes the form of both real wars and culture wars and migrations. The pace and the depth of changes result in a culture shock (future shock) and the emergence of problems rather than trauma. The sources of the latter lie in profound and deep system changes which influence the way one's situation is perceived, especially when it deteriorated and when the sense of individual and collective security declined.

⁷ Recently, the new government has amended the Act on the Educational System and has restored the previous solution, namely the compulsory education starting at the age of seven.

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ПОЛСКИОТ ОБРАЗОВЕН СИСТЕМ СООЧЕН СО ПРЕДИЗВИЦИТЕ НА НОВОТО ОПШТЕСТВО. ТРАУМА, ИДЕН ШОК ИЛИ ОПШТЕСТВЕН ПРОБЛЕМ?

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Апстракт: Образовниот систем на работ од трансформација се соочи со брзи промени во општеството. Од една страна, политичката природа на промените подразбира промени во економскиот модел (усвојување на пазарен модел), трансформација во сферата на идеологијата (визија на светот, општествен поредок, местото на поединецот во општеството). Од друга страна, полското општество влезе на глобалниот пазар: економски, образовен и културен; стана предмет на процесите што се случуваат на глобален план и се соочи со потребата да се приспособи кон сменетите услови. Овие процеси предизвикаа еден дотогаш непознат феномен, како што е невработеноста, повлекување на државата од негата, што го ослабе чувството на безбедност на нацијата и на поединецот. Од една страна, за образовниот систем, најважните предизвици беа оние што се појавија како последица на глобалното општество засновано врз знаење, каде што нивото на квалификации игра важна улога во постигнување успех, а од друга, појавата на пазарот на труд, кој ги формулира очекувањата од образовниот систем. Што е исто така важно, образовната сфера е поврзана со проблемите што произлегоа од промените: трансформација на системот на вредности, визија на светот и неговиот поредок, но и ризиците од влијанието на глобалната медиумска култура. Нашата претпоставка е дека овие феномени може да се анализираат со употреба на различни категории, како што се културен шок, општествена и културна траума и општествен проблем. Анализата на овие феномени ќе биде предмет на нашиот придонес.

Клучни зборови: образовен систем, брзи општествени промени, траума, културен шок, општествен проблем