

## **Social economy, social work and the problem of poverty among children in Poland**

### **Abstract:**

A contemporary debate on the issue of social work in Poland is focused on a search for new forms of help and support for the people functioning out of the mainstream. Change occurring both within the way of thinking and professional actions taken by social workers, comes from the assumptions of so called active social policy and from the complex series of social law regulations established in recent years. But this is also a result of defining and testing innovative ways of organizing socio-vocational life, mainly on a basis of civil organizations activeness. The Authors underline the necessity of combining activities in the area of labour market and the family policy, focusing on the poverty of children in particular. The lack of inter-sector approach to the problem is one of the most fundamental threats to the planned legally-institutional solutions concerning social economy in Poland.

**Key terms:** social economy, the policy of family, children in poverty, social work.

### **Introduction**

A contemporary debate on the issue of social work in Poland is focused on a search for new forms of help and support for the people functioning out of the mainstream. Change occurring both within the way of thinking and professional actions taken by social workers, comes from the assumptions of so called active social policy and from the complex series of social law regulations established in recent years. But this is also a result of defining and testing innovative ways of organizing socio-vocational life, mainly on a basis of civil organizations activeness. Partnership and cooperation with those who because of their problems require widely understood therapeutic presence of social work, sociology and social pedagogy adepts, is also significant in search for new paradigm.

Some of the questions being in the center of interest are those of individual's responsibility for the shape of ones life and therapeutic ways of setting ones motivation free to change unfavorable situations that he or she's been put through. But also ways of rebuilding social ties broken off in concrete local communities and last but not least questions of those methods of activation which are thought to increase chances of the heavily dependant on social security for achieving optimal independency through the help of work provision and employment.

These issues being key and fundamental for the social work are discussed and described also by the followers of social economy, whose theoretical assumptions and

model organizational solutions can and should be included in contemporary social work both theory and practice.

Thus it is worth laying stress here on the fact that social economy understood as an action initiated and conducted by widely understood civil organizations, action whose goal is all about increasing social coherence, is basically related to social work as applied scientific discipline giving answers to questions about social structure, political-institutional mechanisms, general economic patterns and social provision redistribution methods.

In recent years, these questions suggest that passive forms of help being in use up to now, result in an increased level of dependence and helplessness of those who lost their ability to actively participate in social life as a result of the series of individual and environmental fates. In the face of growing poverty in Poland it is necessary to search for such methods of social work and its instruments that require active participation of the excluded in planned actions. There is a focus on search for such programs of socio-vocational activation and employment for which „work” constitutes a basic value as a measure of individual dignity of a human. A community message of social economy described also as a „local economy of solidarity” or „strengthening social ties economy” is closed to social work being moderator and mediator between political system, social sphere and other economical and cultural subjects as well as individual, group and environmental members of society.

A care for „social space” understood as a certain value for its inhabitants among whom there is a sense of membership, „unity”, solidarity, common, purposeful action- has attracted social work and economy representatives’ attention. What appear more and more often in their field of interest is the issue of poverty among children and what is related with that: consequences in the form of social exclusion internalized in the process of socialization along with widely understood labour market. We take (special) note of the necessity of combining reflection over social work and social economy with the issues of child poverty counteractions.

It is worth underlining that despite growing researchers’ interest in this issue, what dominates in liberal- oriented political debate is basically so called „world of adults” and a stress is put on people’s individual responsibility for the situation they have been put through.

In this light making poverty analysis more detailed and therefore focusing attention on poverty among children undermine „individual responsibility for ones fate” dominance and exclusiveness. It can be even assumed that this is a clear-cut questioning of this belief as it is impossible to imagine that the youngest representatives of our society could be blamed for their own poverty. For that reason, poverty analysis concerning directly this category of individuals direct our attention toward structural determinants of poverty, which in the language of social work and applied sociology are called simply social injustice.

## Work - lack of work

According to contemporary environmental approach in social work (Niesporek, Wódz 2003) we assume that socio-vocational activeness is the most desirable outcome of the sociotherapeutic influences as work is synonymous with mental health. Among those devoid of it, social motoric strength disappear. People doomed to inactivity fall out of life track. They lose not only a chance to keep up with the transformations following in society but also ability to make life decisions, to learn and improve qualifications what brings them sense of humiliation and harm. The future of so called highly developed societies and vision of deinstitutionalisation deal with gradual decrease of human labour demand in its 'industrial' meaning that it has had so far. But also with the necessity of searching, in the situation of constant unemployment rate, for the ways of keeping and restoring individual sense of authorship and social cohesion. Everyday world of routines as M. Marody (Marody, Giza-Poleszczuk 2004:249) writes, world related to work has begun to crumble in the 80's. Individual biography, determined by career path giving sense to it, starts to resemble roller coaster drive in the funfair. It is full of sudden turns, unpredictable events and constant presence of risk. One of the reasons of this change was and still is related to the new technologies and methods of management. As a result of computerization, automation and increased work productivity, 20 per cent of vocationally active population is enough to keep economy in motion- there is no demand for more workforce (Risfin 2001). These transformations are crucial source of social exclusion, so called „social injuries”- areas of urban misery, disappearance of life motivation, identity disorders, liquidation of social places (so called ecological niches), lack of mutual trust and responsibility, lack of mutual help instinct and finally local communities cohesion. „Social injuries” come into being as a result of transformations that have become part of „human work” since the Industrial Revolution until contemporary conceptions of market deregulations. These changes consist in making „work”, being basis for social participation, undergo mechanisms of capital market. Dictatorship of a market fundamentalism creates „useless people” category, experiencing in an extreme way social inequalities. M. Jahoda<sup>1</sup> wishes we never had to conduct a new Marienthal research. Unfortunately this research has to be constantly continued and what is more this research is our commitment and obligation. May be we will not be able to learn new work organization from it as well as new socio-economic life and politics, which at the same time should be social and economic too.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Lazarsfeld and Marie Jahoda, two Austrian sociologists of the Jewish descent, who emigrated to the United States and to England, carried out some research in the country called Marienthal, placed in the vicinity of Vienna in 1929. As a result of bankruptcy made by only employer and owner of cotton yarn factory, 476 families living there became unemployed. In the 1980's the results of the research were so significant for Marie Jahoda due to the growing unemployment rate at that time that she published her second book entitled How much work does a man need? (Ile pracy potrzebuje człowiek?) and prefaced it with the remarks of Willy Brandt in Germany in 1983. That time Marie Jahoda worked as a consultant of Science Policy Research Unit at the University of Sussex. She died in London in 2001 at the age of 95.

Developed social processes of the postmodern world, which we used to call globalization, have weakened significantly buffer function of the welfare state. We defined so called crisis of the provision state whose function consisting in keeping social balance was compared with dominant tendencies of the global economy. These tendencies are first and foremost constant limitations of the labour costs and labour market policy based on so called flexible employment system. The core of changes which „work” was put through were key thesis of neoliberalism which can be enclosed in the following statements: „More market, Less state”, „more individual responsibility”, „reorganization of the social services”, „reduction of the number of law regulations”, „privatisation and making social services sector more flexible”. Liberal policy of deregulations led to the process of dying out of loyalty, engagement, goal oriented actions among working people. And stable, long term relations for which there is no place in constantly changing work environment are important for achieving the latter.

A contemporary worker had to resign him/herself to fragmentarisation and chaos making any planning of ones life impossible and he/she became a man ready to take every task. He/she joined (enmassed) gradually army of workers and nowadays became useless element in society. Whereas „work” itself as a value has been replaced by „consumption” pretending to the name of the key socialization factor. Critics of this ascertainment maintain that being a consumer is impossible in the situation of remaining unemployed as work is the only way to gain access to the world of resources and finally to the already mentioned consumption. This kind of contradiction can lead to undefined fire hotspots (triggers of conflict) (Marody, Giza-Poleszczuk 2004:255-257).

The analysis of the social dimension of european integration is linked with the necessity of reflection not only over complexity of „co-participation” in social life but also, and maybe foremost, over the process of social exclusion. That is because the above-mentioned process is written, as it were, into dynamism of development of our civilization.

Z. Bauman (2004) believes that there were no ways of return to the full membership in society planned for those excluded and written off. It is also in vain to search for alternative, formally open routes that would be plot on map and by which it could be possible for one to head toward alternative form of membership. Contemporary human mutual presence is in fact game of survival. Formerly, functional rule of social organization was to keep everyone under lock and key, integrate and line up people. Nowadays it is about eliminating-detecting people who are „improper” for place they find themselves in. Our social development will undergo degeneration unless this state of affairs changes. J.Lipiec (2001:218-220) claims that what should be expected is a multi-direction expansion of work ethics because work as a foundation of civilization values and sign of man’s creative power should not be field of unsolvable moral contradictions .And that can fill us with optimism. In other word, this is a harbinger of the end of market fundamentalism dictatorship which has been incessantly striving to broaden its ambit on many of the most important affairs of human life from moral values, family connections to aesthetic and artistic achievements.

Work is not only access to the „world of resources” but also source of an individual sense of authorship and power. In industrial societies work was a value forming identity of an individual. Nowadays its role in this respect is much more limited. New social policy (called active) defines equality as an inclusion and inequality as an exclusion. According to A. Giddens’s (1999) beliefs inclusion refers to a factual participation in social space. Talking about society in which work is crucial for man’s self –esteem and living standard, access to work is one of the main conditions of these chances. If we want to stimulate development of civil society and organizational subjects of the third sector there is no way we can ignore this problem. Because only work at the same time enables people, groups and local communities to take control over ones life, supports understanding of the processes taking place in the world and encourages aspirations for eliminating sources of social inequality and privilege. The problem of our individual identity is still combined with the possibility of spending workforce, transforming it into a concrete product and being proud of ones work. Giving people rights and power (*empowerment*) without solving the problem of access to work seems to be quite improbable.

Those capable of work in the nearest future can find themselves in the situation of being „socially useless”. Making professional attempts to take precautionary measures and rebuild local communities, it should be taken into consideration to what extent this category of „people being (nothing but) economic progress waste” (Bauman 2004) should be for the mutual benefits included in common action.

„Corrosion of character” analysed by R.Sennetta (2006), being the effect of changes that work underwent over the last years, linked with the corroding of social tie seems to be important cause of occurrence and development of such social initiatives which we define within theoretical confines of „social economy”. Accepting wide understanding of a social tie as an autonomous being, existing in macro scale, being combination of basic types of social structures I refer to processes having impact on changes that „work” is today undergoing. They are covering a complex series of signs of 1) global economic life, 2) a new function of national states which is focused on citizens activation with the use of different work offers and employment and of 3) our group and community life defined as „social economy”.

The last from specified groups of transformations which nowadays affect „work” is based on ascertainment that no matter how high level of given society’s well-being is and how advanced its socio-cultural development would be there will be always group of people who due to their increased vulnerability to harm and individual socio-demographic profile and what is related to it: less favorable position in social structure, won’t be capable of work in competitive system. Solutions promoted by social economy are precisely directed at this group of citizens. From social work perspective a crux of these solutions can be described as searching for an alternative for any passive, causing dependence, destructing social co-responsibility forms of social security.

## Social work with a person requiring help

Practically-oriented sociologists and social workers, basing on a assumption that social structure affects individuals but at the same time actions taken by them can form it, found that the aim of the process described as *empowerment* is to provide clients with such type of awareness<sup>2</sup> and discretions which enables them to modify certain unfavorable social structures. This process is thought to restore individuals and social groups ability to fully participate in social life. But also to mitigate effects of social exclusion, marginalization and alienation (Wódz 1996:96). Psycho-social activity of individuals and groups that require our help can be described with reference to learned helplessness (see also: Seligman 1993). This is individual or group state of loss of control over life combined with lack of understanding of the reasons of such state in which past failures and defeats are a basis for pessimistic anticipations concerning life in the future. The indications of learned helplessness are: relatively permanent conviction about lack of ability to achieve success and atrophy of motivation. Referring learned helplessness syndrome to the issue of social work it should be stressed that this is individual, group or environmental state- non-culpable, relatively fixed as a result of long-term experience of poverty and use of social services together with lack of therapeutic and activating actions that would be adequate for needs.

Effectiveness of environmental actions aiming at increasing social participation of those touched by marginalization is closely related to professional capacity for creating in individuals conviction that they do have internal strength which enables them to have influence on the course of events and to change unfavorable social conditions. This kind of approach to practice is characterized by the above-mentioned term *empowerment* („giving strength” „strengthening”, „strengthening competences and development abilities”, „giving powers (discretion) to people”), which means attempts to form in people permanently dependent on help and support system (welfare program) potential competences and capacities needed for implementing planned changes into the world around them. Rule of „*empowerment*” obliging in modernly understood social work, justify only those practical actions that result from attentive listening (active listening) to the clients signaling their individual needs, development plans as well as causes of being in unfavorable social position- most often combined with poverty.

In defined interpretation the aim of social work is to make it possible for individuals, groups and communities to take control over their own lives by helping them to understand processes taking place in the world. This course of action in a clear-cut way

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<sup>2</sup> According to the coherence theory by A. Antonovsky (see also : A.Antonovsky, *Rozwikłanie tajemnicy zdrowia*, Fundacja IPN, Warszawa, 1995; G. Dolińska-Zygmunt, *Orientacja salutogenetyczna w problematyce zdrowotnej. Model Antonovsky'ego*, G. Dolińska-Zygmunt (ed.) *Podstawy psychologii zdrowia*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław, 2001.) the consciousness can be defined as an individual sense of understanding - life is comprehensible, reality is possible to study and explain; reasonableness – life is worth emotional investment and resourcefulness – conviction that an individual has resources that enable him/her to influence their lives.

refers to the knowledge of local environment sociology and environmental method in social work. Social workers identifying with sociological perspective promote these definitions of profession which include: (1) helping individuals, groups and communities in balanced development, (2) actions for changing environment in the name of optimization of the above mentioned development conditions, (3) integrating direct work and indirect one, and (4) widely understood activation of local communities (Dominelli 1997). The above-mentioned way of defining social work corresponds with basic assumption, indispensable to this profession. According to this assumption every individual has a right to self-realization and is responsible toward oneself and society for searching for ways leading to it. On the other hand, society is believed to create conditions and chances for everyone who make such effort (Frysztański 2000).

Process of regaining by an individual both influence on one's life and control over surrounding world can be characterized with reference to theoretical assumptions of a postmodern school in sociology and social work (Parton, Marshall 1998).

They concentrate on the category of relativism, uncertainty and unpredictability of reality as well as on defining truth as derivative phenomenon of linguistic games, interpretations, truth constructing and constituting within the language. According to postmodern paradigm, practitioners should elaborate critical, reflexive awareness indispensable for talking to „other”. A Dialogue whose essence is to release person searching for help from the influence of socially defined, adopted and internalized by an individual descriptions of a problem situation. A specific process of deconstruction – referring to the truth redefinition, using technique of interpretation and concentration on listening, talking to interlocutor, narration, fragmentary fantasies and histories is aimed at search for alternative ways of defining by an individual his/her unfavorable situation.

Such understanding of the problem situation makes it vulnerable to changes. It can be used to mobilize individual potential and competences as well as give strength so that individual could re-search for the answers to questions about who he/she is and how she/he want to act. Interactions between social worker and his/her partner are directed at creating changes in social identity of an individual. A relation of help is closed to the relation of psychotherapy. Not only does talk help people to understand their experiences but it also enables them to control and transform them. Social workers use specific method of „making problem situation relative” already mentioned deconstruction, nevertheless they should have required basis to act for reality constructing. In postmodern approach this imperative is called affirmative postmodernism and makes it possible to pass to the clinical orientation in social work and sociology as well as to the process of social didactics and engagement in the process of social change. The first stage of the process called empowerment (Gawęcka 2004) can be reduced to forming during the relation between social worker and a person searching for help a framework of discourse (Czyżewski 2005). That is a structure of assertions which would enable us to put it into specified practices directed at a change of given, negatively assessed problem situation. Because discourse is a linguistic prism through which we understand, explain and decide on everything. It enables us to verify whether given statement is true or false. Discourse is potential that makes certain actions possible, probable and excludes other. People

provided with power can affect language and discourse but at the same time the essence of „validation” in social work is to gain power thanks to ability to describe reality and to impose this description on others. In the final analysis consequently used method of *empowerment* creates a new germ of the centers of power thanks to which a voice of the excluded can be heard as a so called expert voice. In this way, there is a hope that formulated social security programs will be at least co-created by their potential clients. The stability of phenomenon is temporally destabilized. „Other” man, excluded and „useless” can become our „master”, if on forming therapeutic relation we stay open to uncertainty (which is) conducive to the attempts at understanding specific experiences of our interlocutors. An important postulate for professionals is to get rid of assumption that they can anticipate results of the taken interventions; they should approach problem situation having regard to the „existing differences”, „complexity” and „ambiguity”, which are included in every individual, group and environmental fate.

A contemporary approach in social work is about taking by practitioners’ sequence of actions on many dimensions of functioning of a person requiring help. This actions catalog can be enclosed within three main groups. The first one embraces clinical work over forming in individual adaptive abilities understood as ability to influence reality or anticipate dynamics of the future changes. The second focuses on activity consisting in social didactics whose goal is to provide individuals with knowledge about social processes being basis for discrimination and social exclusion. And the last one is series of actions from domain of social work which can be described as political activeness for the local community. First of all, the problem is about forming social awareness of the marginalized but also about work over the local community as a whole whose potential is enclosed within existing differences.

These activities are believed to restore one whom we help status of a subject which means individual who is not only able to face requirements and keep up with permanent changes but also able to anticipate them, initiate becoming an author of ones life and contemporary world conception.

### **Active forms of social policy**

In recent years, in Poland there has been created a completely new system of law regulations concerning widely understood support of the socially excluded. It is related to the main directions of the social security reform, which embraces setting up institutions of the „active social policy”, promotion of the „new social deal”<sup>3</sup> and forming „welfare society” by strengthening civil organizations - partners to the local self-government authorities.

Growing problem of unemployment and lack of work which economists call jobless growth as well as intensification of social polarization was a reason for defining in 2004 in the Act regarding promotion of employment and labour market institutions new

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<sup>3</sup> It is reflected in contract used in social work, which is consistent with The Social Welfare Act (2004).



instruments of social policy. Among others: socially useful works and public works. The Act is an expression of „taking care for work”, an attempt to increase chances of vocational activeness for those searching for job who tackle long-term work deprivation. What should be underlined while discussing issues of socio - vocational activation is significance of already existing solutions on the field of employment as well as social and vocational rehabilitation of disabled people such as occupational therapy workshops, institutions of vocational activity, institutions of protected work and many other actions which nongovernmental organizations undertake in cooperation with social work.

Methods used in their activeness refer to „work” as a fundamental value penetrating every action that is aimed at increasing social integration and improvement of a subjective sense of life quality of those threatened by exclusion. Legacies of the Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work (2003) being emanation of the principle of subsidiarity<sup>4</sup>, as well as legacies of the Social Employment Act (2003) defining functioning of social integration clubs and the conception of supported employment along with Act on Social Cooperatives (2006) legacies have special significance for formulating innovative solutions on this field.

Acts introduced in Poland in years 2003-2006, along with already existing law regulations dealing with widely understood socio-vocational activation of the groups threatened by exclusion, create basis for active social policy. They promote help instruments and indicate significance of civil organizations in actions taken for the social cohesion. Specified issues are closely related to the modern vision of activation with such forms of help and support, whose goal is to include individual into the current of local community life by work rendering. There is no doubt that this version of social policy will make social work development more dynamic in coming years. Patterns of action which answer needs of the socially excluded are created within the environmental self-help houses, already mentioned occupational therapy workshops and institutions of vocational activity. These needs are combined with work and employment, social and vocational rehabilitation, but also with flat, support and self-help.

The first place on the institutional map of vocational activation of the excluded is given to civil organizations. Their role consists in taking two parallel types of action. The first type includes local political engagement whose goal is to win support for comprehensive district and voivodship plans of employment promotion. The second one refers to practical activeness directed at creating in local community concrete programs whose functions can be reduced to: 1) increase level of qualifications to pursue gainful

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<sup>4</sup> „Helping (Pomocniczość) refers to the process of „assistance in aid of self-help“. This means that a bigger community provides the smaller one with motivation and short-term help, instead of helping it out or substituting for it. This form of help requires the distinction of tasks and responsibilities so that bigger communities in relation to the smaller ones do not exceed their competencies but respect their autonomy (...) it does not mean the country that „sets the rules and controls everything“. It means, though, the country that (...) generously accepts and supports, inwardly helping, initiatives taken by various social forces, combining spontaneity and close relations with people in need” (see: S. Dziwisz, *Miłością mocni*, Wydawnictwo św. Stanisława BM Archidiecezji Krakowskiej, Kraków, 2006:108-109.)

activity and employ disabled as well as those suffering from psycho-social consequences of discrimination on a labour market, 2) employ this category of people in so called „supported” conditions, created within different models of social enterprises managed by civil organizations or searching for supported employment opportunities on a free labour market and public administration sector (see 1).

**Figure 1**  
**Instruments and subjects of social economy**



*Source: Authors' study.*

Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work has defined among other things a concept of a payable statutory activity being activity of the civil organizations acting on the border of business activity which is not a subject of public help interest. According to C. Miżejewski (2006) opinion, this potential chance for a further development of identity and socio-economic potential of the nongovernmental organizations in Poland, is still underestimated.

Some of new and widely discussed within practitioners community forms of socio-vocational activation (see also: Baron-Wiaterek 2007) are mainly: social integration

clubs<sup>5</sup>, social integration centers<sup>6</sup> and social cooperatives directed at carrying out enterprise on a basis of work of its members. Social cooperative work for 1) social reintegration its members, which means restoring and supporting abilities to participate in local community and playing social roles in a place of work, living or stay, 2) vocational reintegration of its members defined as regaining abilities to render work independently. Social cooperative can carry out business and educational and cultural activity for its members and their local community as well as socially useful works in public duties area of a state. Public<sup>7</sup> and socially useful works<sup>8</sup>, highly assessed by environmental workers, also deserve underlining.

We would like to point out that using specified forms by social workers requires skills such as: building partnership relation with those requiring help, stimulating self-help, promoting and formulating real solutions, as well as and basic competences on the field of psycho-social therapy, vocational education, initiating social entrepreneurship and work in accordance with – inter sector approach promoted by contemporary social policy. It is hard to imagine how new solutions introduced in Poland, can be favorable to the integration of the excluded without such canon of key competences.

### **The crux of social economy**

Social economy means usually activity taken on the border of private and public sector, carried out by a group of organizations consisting of widely understood associations (incl. unregistered), foundations, enterprises in which individual and social

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<sup>5</sup> Social integration club can organize and run particularly: 1) programs of temporal employment, the aim of which is to help find a job specified with time or form of work, full time or part time job; to provide services based on defined contracts and to prepare for work; 2) legal counselling, 3) self-help activity in the field of employment; housing and social welfare.

<sup>6</sup> Social integration centre is an organizational unit responsible for social and vocational reintegration providing the following services: 1) education in the field of skills that enable to play social roles and achieve social positions available for people who do not subordinate to social exclusion; 2) achieving vocational skills and training necessary to do certain jobs, retraining or increasing in vocational qualifications; 3) education in the field of life planning and need satisfying without external assistance, especially through employment and the possibility of earning money (...).

<sup>7</sup> Public works – means to employ a person in the period of no more than 12 months at the post responsible for vocational and social reintegration defined by the act on social employment, organized by social welfare centres or non profit organizations that are statutory involved in problems of environment protection, culture, education, sport and tourism, health care, unemployment and social welfare, as well as joint companies, if these works are financed or co-financed by the local government, state, non profit organizations or other companies.

<sup>8</sup> Socially useful works – means works done by the unemployed with no right for the unemployment benefit (such right do not have about 87 per cent unemployed people); works are organized by communes within the organizational units of the social welfare, organizations or institutions statutory responsible for charity work or for local community; these works are necessary to support local communities, not to maximise profit.

goals stand before capital. They are aimed at satisfying needs that cannot be satisfied by sector of free market enterprises and public administration institutions (see also: Roelants 2002, CECOP 2002, [www.cecop.org/praha2002](http://www.cecop.org/praha2002)). These needs are: social cohesion (incl. workplace creation, stimulating entrepreneurship, maintaining markets stability), and those linked with the conception of participating, democratic and based on social solidarity society (Maćzyńska, Pysz 2003). This specific social movement co-created by civil organizations, having potential to create communities and being locally enrooted, rediscovers such values like „mutuality” or „voluntariness”. There are three main functions (Miżejewski 2006:1-5) of the social economy: 1) building participating democracy by a new quality of connection between social and economic ties, possible within the confines of one institution; 2) supporting employment growth policy: that is employment of the specially threatened groups acting on market, mostly by offering them new, flexible, hard to achieve in other sectors forms of entrepreneurship and types of work, allowing to activate those who are the most difficult group of clients for public services, 3) building communities based on solidarity instead of dependency.

The crux of the social economy is a specific way of organizing economy which constitutes two basic dimensions of social tie- dimension of awareness and structural one. In this sense social economy is a general, theoretical framework for all these initiatives that 1) lead to a constant strengthening of a social, associational tie as well as 2) search for new ways classifying local symptoms of economic life. We maintain that social economy practice is a natural reaction to the consequences of deregulation processes and what is more, it is a symptom of fundamental for each human individual driving for cooperation and co-responsibility, being a condition of a human development.

Actions on the field of social economy - also known as a „third way”- are a natural reaction to state withdrawal from the protective actions. Civil society becomes a space of mediation between free market and state. In E. Leś's opinion „Development of institutions and new social economy and entrepreneurship programs create in Poland a real chance of overcoming myth of a free market economy being the only mechanism of development, but also a chance of leaving not-solidaristic vision of a social order and move toward more participative and democratic market economy and a model of polish social policy based on public-socio-private partnership” (Leś 2005:44).

Generally speaking, searching for a model of social economy means following so called „third way”, on which there are no social privileges without individual's simultaneous obligations. The aim of social work is to co-create such social spaces that would satisfy actual abilities and life needs of the people requiring help and answer accepted in given community notion of how local communities function. Contemporary social policy create this notion assuming, that employment is its focus point and a subject of social workers' interest is almost only relation combining individual with labour market. Nevertheless, it should be strongly underlined that responsibility for both community and far-reaching labour market policy includes as well reflection over development possibilities and restraints of the children and adolescents experiencing poverty. Since this state is a fundamental equivalent for a future lack of basic socio-

vocational competences, making it impossible for them to search for ones place on a dynamically changing labour market.

## Child poverty

As numerous research studies, on poverty and social exclusion relation, carried out in Poland over the last decade, have shown, defining state described as poverty: at least on general conception level if not on a level of operational definitions, is extremely important. As early as in the 70's of the twentieth century, P. Townsend (1979:31) in his poverty description focuses not as much on income poverty but on poverty understood as shortage of resources limiting possibilities of social participation. It is worth stressing that it was an attempt to go beyond income criterion and referring to resources which are preliminary condition of individuals' participation in collective life. Similar aspects many times appeared in literature. However, in polish works researchers focused mainly on calculating so called social minimum according to which, income making social participation<sup>9</sup> possible was established.

It is therefore well known<sup>10</sup> that poverty is not only and necessarily low income and every lack of widely understood resources. Poverty is such deprivation that makes social participation and then functioning on a basis of accepted pattern difficult or impossible. According to K. Frieske (2004) such understanding of poverty resembles description of those who found themselves *out of the mainstream*, and is closed to the social exclusion term - if it is understood as lack of access to key social institutions. This term indicates as well multidimensional and procesual character of social exclusion that is among other things: cumulating exclusion from different areas of social life. But specific, basic elements of the conception of social exclusion are the same as poverty description, regardless of these possible senses. These elements are: a) state of individual or group resources; b) low, socially not accepted level of social participation.

Other thing that should be pointed out is awareness that at least several reasons make poverty, especially among children- a complex phenomenon. Firstly, because in developed, democratic countries where young generation have the biggest share in market economy and widely understood social resources, liquidation of poverty and misery is one of the main civilization challenges as well as one of the most important assumptions of democracy. Detecting indicated state of affairs, that is: growing pauperization of society's phenomenon and experiencing poverty by younger and younger children, it can be

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<sup>9</sup> M. Barnes, *Social Exclusion and the Life Course*, [w:] M. Barnes i in. (red.), *Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, U.K., Northampton, USA, 2002, 4; K. Frieske, *Utopie inkluzji. Sukcesy i porażki programów reintegracji społecznej*, Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych, Warszawa, 2004; J. Grotowska-Leder, *Fenomen wielkomięskiej biedy*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2002.

<sup>10</sup> We pay our attention to some research carried out and documents prepared by the European Commission in 1975, in which poverty is defined not by income but resources, and in 1981 where resources are specified as financial, cultural and social goods (Frieske 2004).

assumed that until now no system and long-term solutions have been found in discussed area.

Secondly, what dominates in discussions on poverty is familicentrism, which results in subordinating status of a child to status of the family. Until now, children were not taken into account as an independent, autonomous, separated from the family of origin subject, but rather analyzed in family –household context, best reflected by different statistical data. It is worth being underlined that what is most often specified as most threatened by poverty factor are households run by single mothers with children, numerous families, old or unemployed people but not categories of these households members such as: children, women, elderly people.

Thirdly, trying to understand poverty phenomenon, researchers concentrate on incomes characteristics, underestimating or completely ignoring any attempts of theoretical description of poverty. To some extent we can call it inversion of the basic research process in social sciences, which tells us that construction of theoretical concepts should be done before searching for visible indicators. However, in case of social exclusion concept, specification of indicators leads to finding sense of the term itself. It appears that as many as 9 out of 12 basic and 6 secondary social exclusion indicators accepted in Eurostat and being fundamental for formulating important EU documents, have been built on a basis of income parameters. 5 of them refers to unemployment description, 4 includes other areas of social exclusion such as: health state self-assessment, average life expectancy, level of educational achievements and indicator of the number of young people remaining out of educational system.

Fourthly, poverty experienced in childhood as negligence in different areas of everyday life situation of children has a typical impact and long-term consequences for a further bio-psycho-social development of an individual. Any type of money, abilities, intelligence, aspirations, skills deficiency gives nothing but a relative description of a situation which individuals find themselves in. Nevertheless, they all reduce individuals' abilities to participate in collective life. What seems to be crucial for social politicians dealing with labour market, is a new trend of thinking about mechanisms of social exclusion, which directs attention not toward individual deficiencies but reasons for which lack of given skills, knowledge becomes a deficiency starting exclusion processes. At the same time it is worth paying attention to structural premises of social exclusion and additionally assumes that it is hard to accept thesis according to which individuals, who undergo deprivation should constantly adapt to institutional infrastructure of their societies and that growing complexity of this infrastructure is durably fixed in the way modern, open, market society's function. Social exclusion seems to be more or less rational way of adaptation to the new realities which accompany structural change. If we cannot control it, than we should be prepared for different consequences which are not easy to accept.

Problem remains actual from social policy point of view, in which deciding whether chances for development of a child are described mainly on a basis of lack of sufficient incomes or by indicating other characteristics of the poor families. In case, thesis indicating income criteria as something that determines development and achievements of individual, appears to be right than income distribution enabling families to secure

adequate living standard for their children will be a key factor for the future of these children. If, however, optimal child development is disturbed by family dysfunctionality than social policy goal should be to concentrate more on parental skills and neighbourhood conditions improvement than on economic poverty liquidation.

Modern market economy based on knowledge as well as demanding labour market (constant improvement of ones qualifications and adaptation to the changing forms of work) are a serious challenge for children - future representatives of a young generation. There is no doubt that poverty among children creates fewer chances for an optimal development of the individuals and has a negative effect on level and quality of their achievements. In societies in which education determines success of the children, poor children have no chance to attend good schools and often give up education. They do not realize „pedagogical contract” - referring to P. Bourdieu, and thus they are deprived of opportunity to participate collectively in social life.

Children as a category threatened by poverty and - when they reach adulthood - by social exclusion constitute a challenge for social work and social policy. Proportions this phenomenon has taken on are hard to estimate in country - scale because of lack of statistical data referring to living standard (social security), in which individual categories of households members (children, adolescents, adults, old, women, men and so on.) would be treated as individual units of analysis. Family budget studies led by the Main Statistical Office provide us with information on what part low incomes families are in couples with children category (with the only child, two, three and so on.), childless couples, single person households, worker households, retirement households category and etc. However they do not inform of poverty rate among children, women in post-productive age, men staying in single-person households and so on.

A few research carried out in Poland, concerning area being our subject of interest suggest that poverty among children is correlated with the type of family in which child grow up. What research carried out by W. Warzywoda-Kruszyńska<sup>11</sup> show is that poverty rate in single-parent families is higher (14,7%) than in single-child families (4,9%) and in two-child families (6,7%) with both parents, but is lower than in three-child families with both parents (22,7%). It means that probability of getting into poverty is 30 per cent higher for children coming from single-child families than for children growing up in other types of family. Additionally, research confirmed „infantilization of poverty” “occurrence reflected by significantly higher poverty rate among children in comparison with adults category, overrepresentation of children in poor people population and poverty enclaves occurrence largely represented by children. Calculations concerning pauperization index (poverty rate) for smaller than city quarter territorial units (blocks) showed ghettoization of the poor children occurrence, which means that poor population concentrate in specified places of the city. There were 57 per cent of a total number of

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<sup>11</sup> W. Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, „Kwestia biedy dzieci (in the example of Łódź)”, *Problemy Polityki Społecznej. Studia i dyskusje*, 1999, Vol. 1, p. 139-153; W. Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, *Zjawisko biedy dzieci a zagrożenie wykluczeniem społecznym w przyszłości. Mapa biedy - rozmieszczenie i zakres biedy wśród dzieci na terenie województwa łódzkiego*, see at the webpage of the Children Counsellor Office, 2006.

children and 72 per cent of poor children living in the most pauperized quarter of Łódź. The least pauperized quarter counted -28 per cent of the total number of children and 43 per cent coming from poor families.

Other research carried out in 2005 in Cracow entitled „Poor children of Małopolska: living standard and threat of poverty and social exclusion in adulthood” (ROPS 2005) confirmed current suppositions that problem of child poverty becomes more severe and covers larger and larger group of social service beneficiaries. It should be underlined that basic goal of research was to describe living standard of the children growing up in the poorest families of Małopolska and to estimate the level of risk of staying in the circle of poverty - also in their adult life. There was a random sample of 900 families from Małopolska, which except for social security support, had at least 1 child at the age between 12-19 years.

Results of research confirmed unambiguously a high level of poverty among children from families with the lowest incomes: 7% suffers from serious undernourishment, 66%-from malnutrition, 44% do not have adequate clothes, 55% is not provided with basic textbooks or with books for their own use. There is alarming percentage of children (88%) who due to lack of financial sources are deprived of chances to participate in widely understood collective life: that is in so called cultural events, holiday journeys, school trips, family ceremonies, meetings with friends. It is worth paying attention to the factors co-occurring with poverty among children and determining that state, which are: great number of children- the greater number of children the higher level of deprivation; prolonged, chronic state of poverty-the longer time of remaining in poverty the greater deprivation; and socio- pathological phenomena such as alcoholism and violence in family- the more pathological family, the higher level of deprivation.

Cumulating lack of satisfying needs both basic, combined with biological sphere of life and higher-level needs related to psycho-social sphere, enabling individuals to participate in social life. An extra factor observed among research subjects is frequent occurrence of low educational achievements, skipping classes, psychoactive substance abuse and contact with people who abuse such substances, breaking law.

The above-mentioned results of research carried out in Poland confirm unambiguously that there are negative phenomena both in individual and social sphere, whose extent and forms cover larger and larger number of children. There should not be indifference to poverty and children because today's passivity of adults will lead to ineffectiveness of acts taken in future and huge social costs, incomparably larger than those which could be beared on preventive actions.

Paradoxically, this situation creates chances and possibilities for social security institutions as well as for professionals of social work. There is no doubt that any actions taken in this area of interest should be directed at children and adolescents because of the biggest negative impact that poverty has on this age group. In addition, it should be noted that social interventions and changes seem to be most effective and efficient in this development period.

So, it is worth paying attention to the necessity of working out local, intersectoral and long-term strategies of counteracting poverty inheritance and



consolidating misery among youngest. From creating adequate system of public institutions at different administrative stages that would cooperate and coordinate actions, through the rules of registration the poor, trainings for widely understood rescue services on diagnosing social problems and formulating strategies of overcoming them, to direct actions with families and children aimed at guaranteeing children adequate protective and educational conditions and providing parents with possibilities of gaining and improving parental and social skills. Regardless of changes direction, we should not forget about temporary help, aimed at satisfying basic needs of the individuals and improving their social functioning. Level of deprivation among children is determined by socio-pathological behaviors performed by their parents and as a result long-term dependence on social security. It means that direct and highly intensified actions should be also directed at parents, whose life resourcelessness and helplessness make it impossible for their children to get out of „enchanted circle of misery”.

Socio-vocational activation of parents and preparing young generation for joining radically changing labour market, which demands from its workers increasingly valuable qualifications and constant adaptation to changing forms of work are challenges for currently existing institutions and used instruments of social policy. Any shortcomings in these areas will probably result in lack of possibilities of participating in collective life, dropping out of the labour market and social exclusion. According to signaled problems, there is a need to conclude a new social contract and, what is of even greater importance, to take a detailed look at multidimensional process of early socialization and widely understood preventive actions.

### **Critique of the „third way”**

Social work engagement in third sector activity and supporting their activeness within the framework of polish model of social economy will be an important factor forming future development of this profession. At the same time it should be underlined that for professional social work any actions, taken without reflection over their background and distant consequences, can be threatening. The above-described vision of social work development with reference to social economy and activating model of state carries threat to functioning of these help institutions which are situated on a margin of social policy mainstream. Rights of those who use them are threatened.<sup>12</sup> It should be

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<sup>12</sup> The German example: as a result of reforms initiated by P. Hartz in Germany the traditional forms of employment were limited. Their main purpose was vocational activation and increase in individual self-responsibility for their life. It was expected to observe higher level of activation and readiness to take any kind of work. There were also some consequences of those reforms, like privatization of employment agencies, expansion of a sector in which lower income and limited social welfare services for the unemployed were dominant. The implementation of flexible employment forms of work did not cause, as expected, radical reduction of unemployment; the appearance of private agencies did not turn out to be more effective way of

stressed that professional responsibility of social workers consists in taking care also of those who „are not, not yet, or again not capable of work”. However, the crux of their actions is combined with maintaining integration of society by stimulating development and supporting any signs of interpersonal help.

We would like to stress at the conclusion that, remaining high demand for social work is related to the fact that in its history social work acted not only by providing individuals, families and communities with concrete help but also by promoting dominating political ideas and socio-economic solutions. Not only did it solve social problems, but also co-participated in their interpretation and giving their definitions in a way which was legitimizing existing conception of social help and dominating social order. But today social work can be also interpreted as „applied social policy”. A negative impact of activating state policy on social work in Great Britain (Ferguson 2004:1-9) constitutes a valuable example. Liberal mechanisms influenced social services, but it also resulted in quasi-business culture in the area of social work, in accepting financial discipline in social services sector and intensifying rivalry between professionals, in searching for cheaper services even at the expense of worsening work conditions, in questioning effectiveness of individual and environmental method, in rebirth of behavioral orientation according to which personality and social change was just a matter of sociotechnics and is not combined with system of values or ideology dominating in society. At the same time, critical perspective got „repressed” from educational programs and social workers lost their abilities to take ethical reflection.

The following critical comments should be added to those of approval on social economy and work state. One of the serious objections is the one which points out that work state policy concentrating mainly on people capable of work, ignore those remaining out of the market and being durably incapable of performing gainful activity. What is more, it should be considered whether our actions within a new paradigm consist in caring activation or detection of those who refuse to work and because of that- do not deserve help and support. And whether we help excluded to get out of the state of dependency or rather use new coercive and control measures toward them.

It is important to remember that resistance toward work programs appears when social policy imposes responsibilities and at the same time keep people out of co-responsible society. Social work should take a look at methods being in use and find the answer to the question whether it really contributes to giving a new sense to social tie . Definitions of social tie usually concentrate on what makes people come together and what they have in common, that is on elements that we take for granted. Nevertheless, according to L. Dominelli (2004:201-229), there are some attributes of social tie which we must realize. They refer to dependency, mutuality, solidarity and demand appreciation of creative difference between people. It requires constant encouraging members of a given community to mitigate fears by interaction and dialogue with „others”, strengthen sense of security and what is fundamental, to accept that their future success depends on mutual

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activating people searching for work. Instead, the sector of low-paid employment developed, which led to the rise of poverty and the lack of social security.

responsibility for one another. Social work can without reflection adapt to dominating conditions and become totally instrumental to social policy or work out, on a basis of sociological knowledge, such practices that would enable it to keep critical distance and make autonomous analysis of the processes occurring in society. A reflection over this threats may save us, especially in Poland where philosophy and practice of work state becomes more and more popular, from using „work” as a mechanism of control and social selection. Because first and foremost work is a question of human dignity and not only factor influencing economic development.

Polish social policy of the transformation period consists mainly in mitigating its effects. Nowadays we are facing necessity of a basic change of its paradigm which should be favorable to the development of social capital within the confines of work state. Presence of the processes of deregulation and deformalization in social policy, which nowadays cannot be stopped, can lead at the same time to „privatizing” social relations. As a result, people may understand their actions in purely individualistic terms and regard their goal as a constant heading for becoming „little entrepreneurs”. And then, they can loose opportunity to define their humanity as a confirmation of an overriding status of social solidarity which is basis for human existence. Our task is to consider constantly whether strategies of moving from welfare to work state and combining pensions with incomes, is really contributing to defining human relations as significant.

Once again, we would like to notice that in social exclusion analysis attention is focused mainly on these social categories which are actually being threatened by social exclusion. Subject of interest refers almost exclusively to adults, even if unemployment among graduates is discussed. Reason for such state of affairs is both lack of national and local actions that would consist in collecting data enabling us to say (in a different way than by reference to labour market) that there are social groups and categories threatened by exclusion (today and in future). For example we cannot find out from statistical data concerning unemployment what family situation of the unemployed is. So there is no such information like percentage of children growing up in the unemployed families and therefore experiencing indirectly unemployment effects. As a result, problem of future threats for widely understood social security, caused by intergenerational transmission of social exclusion, remains unnoticed.

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