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On local communities and human societies in times of globalisation – a paedagogical perspective

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ABSTRACT

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Contemporary researchers of local communities and human societies face a new and difficult task today. It is, on the one hand, related to the great interest in this topic and the difficulty of creating a new concept that would fully exhaust the scope of phenomena observed presently in local communities and human societies. On the other hand, the character of changes that have gained momentum in the first decade of the 21st century, and the description of their sources, become particularly difficult to describe and name. The present article is an attempt at an indication of the need of an evolution of perception on societal reality and the emerging new social issues. Contemporary paedagogy attempts to write about the necessity of awareness/education related to the needs of establishment of local communities and the creation of bonds as a response to processes related to social life in times of globalisation. It is a fact that we are presently dealing with a change in the forms and character of local communities.

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Introduction, or on globalisation, local communities and human societies

Multi-perspective considerations of local communities and human societies should be related to globalisation, which, as a specific theory of civilisational development of the world gives rise to further changes and threats concerning the society of human life and education. Within the context of conditions and dependencies, three fundamental components and fields of significance between them must be discerned; these are: globalisation (its fundamental properties) ↔ localness (as a spatial and social category) ↔ life and education environment (as a socio-paedagogical category). Globalisation is both a determining factor and a challenge for the category of localness, its understanding and fundamental properties. New properties of locality, in turn, generated by the phenomenon of globalisation, cause – as indicated by numerous authors – significant changes in the life and education environment as seen on the local scale (Winiarski, 2010: 8–9).

In the context of numerous discussions on an attempt to answer the question as to what a local community is, we find out that it is characterised by a limited number of actors, and that the relations between them are direct. These insignificant actors of a local scene are bound by common goals and means as stemming from the community of daily living. More often than not it awakens latent development potential, and sometimes encourages pro-social behaviour. The long duration of such communities allows one to assign to them symbolic universal values as once described by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1983). We mean a set of values and norms greatly opposed to historic change and governing daily and extraordinary behaviour, determining their rhythms or cycles. Finally, due to the relatively complete institutional framework, local communities are characterised by unique independence and the fact that almost all the lives of the people making it up will pass within them (quoted from: Szczepański, Ślęzak-Tazbir, 2010; Jałowiecki, Szczepański, Gorzelak, 2007: 22).

Terminology concerning local communities exhibits three separate, repeating components: territory, social interaction and psychological (social) bond expressed in the feeling of community with the people inhabiting this territory perceived as “our place” (Szacka, 2003: 229).

Presently, the three properties of a local community are amended by the capacity “to undertake joint action for the purpose of resolution of own issues” (Starosta, 1995: 95). Włodzimierz Mirowski stresses this in his definition, when he writes that

(...) local communities are among the most fundamental and widespread organisational units within a society. Their functioning is expressed by the joint activity of people inhabiting a specific territory making up the basis of the community. This activity is subject to certain institutional and organisational rules, on which the economy, the socio-political system and the social structure of the broader community of the nation and state are based. Local communities used to be referred to as the microcosmos of the broader society. (Mirowski, 1998: 297)

A local community perceived as such becomes what Ferdinand Tönnies referred to as the *Gemeinschaft*, a German term stressing togetherness and bond within a community, the main constituent components of which are family, neighbourhood and the personal character of the relations between them (Szacka, 2003: 229). This is the way Jan Szczepański characterises a local community, when he writes that it describes the “sum total of families, neighbourhoods and other groups within a specific territory, as a part of which the individuals making up this community satisfy their basic living needs and are joint by the bond of collective relation with the territory they live on” (Szczepański, 1964: 45). This author further defines the social bond, writing that the “social bond is an organised system of relations, institutions, social control resources – grouping together individuals, subgroups and other constituent components of a community into a whole capable of survival and development” (Szczepański, 1979: 238). A local community may thus be characterised and studied as a small community or treat it as a *Gemeinschaft*, a kind of tightly-bound society (Woźniak, 1997: 55).

Contemporary researchers of local communities and human societies face a difficult task. It is on the one hand related to the great interest in this topic and the difficulty of developing a new concept that would fully exhaust the phenomena observed contemporaneously in local communities and societies. On the other hand, the character of changes that have gained momentum in the first decade of the 21st century, and the description of their sources, become particularly difficult to describe and name. A change is needed in the perception of the social reality, and an analysis of the new societal issues.

In the reflections on local communities we read about many unsettling threats of phenomena. The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman develops a pessimistic vision, saying that the community describes the world, in which we “are regrettably not found, in which we would, however, very much like to settle or to which we would like to return” (Bauman, 2008: 8). A different example may be the sign that the industrial civilisation, and, along its side, the development of the Internet and of the information society transforms local systems and threatens the existence of their communities. Contemporary local communities

are losing their values, atomise internally and are less and less inclined to act for the common good of the environments they exist in. One can notice in Poland the tendency to live within a thoughtless crowd, to function separately. In these emerging situations, local communities seem to have less and less influence on the development of our social personalities, or the solidification of the feeling of identity. This is illustrated by large metropolises that have liberated people from their local bonds, and their diversity allows one to choose social relations not based on spatial proximity but common interest or values (e.g. Wirth, 1938; Sennett, 1977; Welmann, 1979; Fisher, 1982).

The thoughts on the forms of human interaction in the contemporary city allow Danish sociologist Henning Bech to state that "if cities, in which the majority of humanity now resides, are areas of circulation of numerous, dense and permanent heterogeneous swarms of people, colourful, ever-changing and mobile crowds of pedestrians that are alien to each other, then we in fact become surfaces to each other – this is the sole aspect that we see in each other" (quoted from: Bauman, 2001). There is even talk of a "society of individuals" (Elias, 2008). This is because territory is or need not be an element uniting the people living in it any more. Hence, geographic proximity loses significance in contemporary globalisation processes and the intense development of new possibilities of electronic communication. This also has its consequences for activity related to managing/developing local communities.

At the same time, a group of authors exists who believe that talk about the disappearance of local communities or societies is still premature. For instance, Barbara Szacka believes that the cause of the issues at hand is the failure to use the potential of local communities both in financial as well as personal terms. The subjectification of local communities, the development of associations, strengthening of civic initiatives all give rise to chances of their development and the solution of social issues. The local government community is open, and locals participate in various areas of collective life, facilitating their identification with their place of residence (Szacka, 2003: 235).

The transformations of local societies are the result of many factors. It is frequently difficult to clearly point out a single cause of specific changes that local communities experience. I believe that beside global factors, there also occur transformations due to economic and political changes of recent time. Education on the perception of such issues as liberty, community, rule of law, local governance or local patriotism is also important, but this takes time. All of the mentioned components must be treated jointly, and one can frequently note how they interact.

Significance of activity and local work in the solution of local problems – outline of the problem

In the reflections on living within a community, the determination of the local issues at hand, their understanding and the development of further solution options, significant is the knowledge of core terms related to the issue at hand. These include human activity¹ and social activity.

According to Andrzej Olubiński, activity should be perceived as

(...) diverse work shining through both in externally perceptible behaviour as well as less visible mental processes. Such active behaviour stems from the natural relationship of the individual with its environment. Regulation activity perceived as such is related to the introduction of relevant changes in the environment and the specific variability of personal properties. Hence, transforming one's environment, one transforms themselves. (Olubiński, 2018: 21)

The present work is driven by the concept of activation with respect to local communities. According to sociologist Zbigniew Wierzbicki, activation and development in a community describes a process and at the same time voluntary work towards the common good, the common well-being of locals through the effort of the members of that environment themselves, by encouraging specific attitudes (activation, awakening) and orientations in them (Wierzbicki, 1973). It is not difficult to notice within this definition the relation to social paedagogy of Helena Radlińska, continued by Ryszard Wroczyński, Aleksander Kamiński, and subsequently by e.g. Wiesław Theiss, Tadeusz Pilch, Stanisław Kawula, Ewa Marynowicz-Hetka, Andrzej Radziewicz-Winnicki or Mikołaj Winiarski. Social paedagogy perceived the main objective in the transformation of the social community through the effort of the community itself. Olubiński believes this is the idea of development of the civic society, the core of which is the struggle to satisfy specific personal needs of the participating individuals, as well as specific social needs, with the simultaneous solution of accrued e. g. local issues (Olubiński, 2018: 23).

¹ The concepts key for thinking about human activity and their professional work can be found in: J.-M. Barbier (2016), *Leksykon analizy aktywności*, Łódź. On the significance of activity of the individual see such scholars as e. g.: Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Erik H. Erikson, Stefan Szuman, also Florian Znaniński, Helena Radlińska, T. Pilch, W. Theiss, Zbigniew T. Wierzbicki, Andrzej Radziewicz-Winnicki, M. Winiarski, Jerzy Modrzewski, Elżbieta Górnikowska-Zwolak, M. Cichosz and others.

Intentional activity aimed at development, change or profit, working towards the improvement of one's living situation is referred to as social activity, which takes various forms. One can speak of: charity activity, local activity, collective activity or participation in cultural life (Nowosielski, Nowak, 2006: 118). Social activity is accompanied by processes of cooperation, joint work, help. They thus create bonds. Activity undertaken by some includes the influences of others, creating the foundation for social bonds (Marody, Giza-Poleszczuk, 2004: 141). Within social activity, the group or community striving towards certain goals and performing certain tasks within a specific institution or association are the most important. E. Marynowicz-Hetka believes that in the process of functioning of a social institution, "social imagination", being the source of social activity, plays a key role (Marynowicz-Hetka, 2006: 77).

Within social pedagogy, an important area of activity is activity aimed towards aid and support that is linked to the concepts of education and support for the living environment of an individual. This issue is of significance not only in paedagogical diagnosis of an environment and its constituent components, but also in the planning of aid, compensation, education or cultural activity. Educational resources are potentials, capacities found within an environment and within its components that should be used for the purpose of its activation. Helena Radlińska saw educational resources from the perspective of social, physical and spiritual forces. They are a kind of dynamism resting within the living environment of every person and human communities, especially local ones (Kawula, 2012: 79). And hence, according to material criteria, educational resources are both conditions facilitating as well as hindering, found within a specific environment and within its constituent components.

- Within the first group, one can list the physiological properties of one's environment, the types of structures, of the settlement, locality, the level of urbanisation, infrastructure in terms of e.g. education, culture or the social aid network.
- The second group of resources includes the type of interpersonal and social relations, including neighbourhood relations and relations with independent institutions and associations within the local and cultural community.
- The third area describes potentials, rules in terms of culture that are composed of. e.g. traditions, the cultural identity and the feeling of belonging, customs, acknowledged and actually utilised behaviour patterns within daily life. The educational resources thus make up advantages potentials of support for the development e. g. of the family and of children (Kawula, 2012). Educational and cultural resources may apply to specific places where the

child feels best and where it remains. Maria Mendel referred to these places within the context of location paedagogy (Mendel, 2006).

According to Danuta Urbaniak-Zajac, the fundamental source of advantageous socio-educational changes should be a creatively active individual or group aware of itself and of the conditions, in which it lives. In the author's opinion, this relationship is most clearly seen with respect to the "lifeworld" (*Lebenswelt*) (Urbaniak-Zajac, 2003: 236). For Husserl this is the sole perceived and true reality (Judycki, 2018: 125–163). Within the context of his theory, stressed is hence the significance of the embedding of the individual in the reality that surrounds them, hence, the strong emotional bond, mutual ties and mutual influences. Social paedagogies follow the thesis of Florian Znaniecki that environment conditions themselves do not give rise to direct educational effects nor do they even determine the content of the educational process, but solely determine the possibilities of their course and fulfilment. It is also not possible to presently see the important aspect that participation in social life is related to certain responsibility, helping one another, development of social capital, establishment of positive social bonds that facilitate joint activity, at the same time countering social pathologies.

The concept of the "paedagogy of co-being" as the proposition of a cooperating society. A contribution

As social activity and functioning is the core of social life, taking up a significant place in daily life, it is worthwhile to remind at this point of a particular type of paedagogy by Bronisława Dymara – the paedagogy of co-being, referred to as the theory of innovative education (Dymara, 2009). Its core is expressed in the entirety of positive interpersonal relations based on the acknowledgement of common values as well as tolerance and respect for the otherness of others (Dymara, 2014).

Interpersonal contact and bonds in the course of various activities of inhabitants of local communities may constitute a diversely humanised space of co-being and dialogue, and become the inspiration to be active (together) within the local space. The physical presence of others is the (...) fate [of city dwellers], hence they have to experiment, try out and check diverse modes of living, believing that they will finally arrive at such a *modus vivendi* that will make their coexistence with others bearable (Bauman, 2003); hence, Bauman says that we are all interdependent in our quickly globalising world, and because of this interdependency nobody can master their fate alone, individually. One is faced with

tasks that one cannot individually master, and with which they cannot come by themselves. We all need control over the conditions, under which we are to handle the challenges of life – but the majority may only arrive at such control within a collective (Bauman, 2003).

Irrespective of the local community, Polish sociological literature frequently teaches us that true human stories always take place locally; that one needs to be rooted and assigned to a specific place, even if they are always on the road. The life of the local community is aligned with the common trajectory of fate of the individual. Alas, man is born, taught, works, rests, becomes ill and eventually dies. To use a metaphor, every necropolis is the point of collection of those who have left the local community, those who remain in it, and finally those who are yet to come to it (Szczepeński, Ślęzak-Tazbir, 2010).

Postmodernity or “liquid” or “alternative modernity” as Zygmunt Bauman and Anthony Giddens call it, and the properties that characterise it (such as individualism, differentiation, rationality, the related economisation of social life, expansiveness), additionally taking into account the phenomena forming a part of narcissist culture (Lasch, 2015) that have emerged as a result of the process of globalisation, whereby I mean the “community crisis” or the “fall of the public man” (following Richard Sennett) remind social paedagogues, animators, of important duties related to the awakening of social sensitivity to the emerging problems and the dangers that emerge from these.

As proper for caring practitioners, contemporary social paedagogy attempts to frequently write about the necessity of teaching/education related to the need to create local communities and build bonds as a response to processes related to social life in time of globalisation. One thing is certain: nowadays we are dealing with a change of forms and of the character of local communities.

In Zygmunt Bauman’s book *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* we read – “contemporary community scholars are forced to live Tantalus’ fate (...). Tantalus’ torture will be amended and exacerbated by the trouble of Sisyphus. The actual community will turn out to be entirely unlike that from the dreams (...)” – this can give rise to unwillingness to search, to create community. However, Bauman writes further on “thanks to the stubbornness, defiance (...) one can retain and protect from fleeting the feeling of community, of being in the community” (Bauman, 2013: 27–28). The attitudes of the people will determine whether social values will be protected, cultivated or lost. The activities of an individual, their work, are the factor determining belonging, and the base for the development of identity. Locality, community requires continuous activity supporting the durability of the members of the group that make it up. Contemporaneously, with the fast

pace of life, the race and high spatial mobility, every person should have several places and one “most important one” – their little homeland, a friendly place to live. These are indeed potential places that give rise to favourable conditions of development, active rest, recreation and participation in culture, as well as co-being, cooperation, co-activity, being a citizen. However, the strength to function within a community – as Bronisława Dymara states, comes

(...) from *ordo naturalis*, the basis of human life, the longing for Another who solidifies in something, aids, accepts and notices; before that which threatens, guards and warns. Hence, there occurs care for common values, sharing of successes, losses and cares. In one word, they are together in a synergistic space of mutual needness. (Dymara, 2014)

This fragment encourages education in co-being. The establishment of local bonds, communities, networks of people, carefully noticing the education process as an additional effect of organisation and activation of institutions, facilities bringing together the young generation are grand contemporary tasks of the paedagogy of co-being and social paedagogy.

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