

## EDITORIAL

Tadeusz Janicki (*Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland*)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7009-6181>

[wyki@amu.edu.pl](mailto:wyki@amu.edu.pl)

### POVERTY: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS AND CONSEQUENCES

**Abstract:** The current volume of *Studia Historiae Oeconomicae* focuses on analysing poverty as a widespread and multidimensional phenomenon, rooted in long-term socio-economic processes. It varies greatly depending on location, era, and political system. The volume offers a range of research approaches, from theoretical and methodological discussions on the categories of destitution and poverty, to case studies on Central and Eastern European countries and Nigeria, as well as the issue of poverty among Polish émigrés in France during the 19th century. The contributions are united by a shift away from a purely descriptive view of poverty towards explaining its causes, mechanisms and consequences, drawing on insights from sociology, economics, anthropology and political science. Consequently, the volume monstrates the potential of interdisciplinary research to deepen understanding of economic diversity, including poverty as a key element of both historical and current social challenges.

**Keywords:** poverty, destitution, misery, Poland, Slovenia, Ukraine, Nigeria, Galicia, Great Emigration

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Throughout history, regardless of the era, political system or type of economy, wealth inequality has been persistent and common feature of socio-economic reality. Typically, it has resulted in the rise of wealthy elites and larger groups struggling to meet basic needs or living in deprivation, poverty or destitution. Despite centuries of research into 'the nature and causes of the wealth of nations' and indirectly into the roots of poverty, many questions about this phenomenon remain unanswered, and the

problem itself, persists at economic, social and political levels, despite numerous efforts.

The questions start with defining concepts and distinguishing between poverty and prosperity, then examine the causes, manifestations and types of poverty, as well as strategies to cope with and escape from it. They also explore the social, economic and political consequences of poverty, which vary depending on location, time and socio-economic system. Research on poverty aimed at answering these questions is highly important for both knowledge and practical purposes, as it can help develop more effective strategies to address this issue.

The articles in the latest volume of the *Studia Historiae Oeconomicae* journal analyse this problem using selected examples dating back to the 18th century. Subsequent articles explore the issue of poverty as a theoretical and methodological category in historical research, poverty as a phenomenon affecting political emigrants, and various aspects of poverty in rural Ukraine, Galicia and Slovenia from the 18th to the 20th century. The next two articles examine the history of Poland in the 20th century, specifically comparing social welfare systems in Poland after World War I and World War II, as well as the housing policies of the People's Republic of Poland. The volume concludes with an article analysing the origins and political and economic factors behind banditry in Nigerian history. In addition to seven historical articles, this volume includes two reviews and three notices.

The volume begins with an article titled *On the Need and Methods of Researching Various Aspects of Poverty in the Light of the Reflections of Jerzy Topolski*, written by Małgorzata Słodowa-Helpa (2025). The author examines the issue of poverty as a theoretical and methodological category in historical research. Her analysis starts with the perspectives of sociologists and economists and their attempts to define the concepts of 'misery', 'poverty', and 'lack of prosperity' (Tarkowska, 2000; Bauman, 2006; Spicker, 2007; Golinowska, 2012), which she then contrasts with Jerzy Topolski's views on the matter (Topolski, 1992). Besides, defining key concepts, J. Topolski contends that misery, poverty or wealth characterise the circumstances of individuals and societies, thus becoming factors in the historical process, particularly in the economic sphere. Consequently, in studying poverty and destitution, one should not merely describe these conditions but consider them as theoretical or theoretical-historical categories with explanatory power, enabling a deeper understanding of the course of history.

M. Ślodowa-Helpa also highlights the significance of the so-called integral explanation directive, which is based on Jerzy Topolski's methodology. The process involves recognising the need to simultaneously consider the objective aspects of the historical process (such as economic, demographic and political structures) and its subjective aspects (including human actions, value systems, and mental attitudes). As a result, she concludes that in poverty research, alongside analysing material indicators, it is equally important to understand individual's experience, survival strategies, interpretations of their own situations and cultural responses to poverty. Therefore, poverty studies must extend beyond the confines of a single discipline and incorporate history, sociology, economics, anthropology and psychology, blending a structural perspective with personal experiences.

In conclusion, the author emphasises J. Topolski's importance for the development of Polish and global historiography and argues that his work remains relevant today and can serve as a point of reference for contemporary research on poverty as a complex phenomenon requiring in-depth theoretical interpretation.

The next article by Jerzy Kuzicki (2025), titled *Poverty of Poles Working in France in the Light of the Minutes of the Meetings of the Ladies Benevolent Society of Poland (1834–1863)*, provides a positive example of analysing the issue of poverty in the manner proposed in the article by M. Ślodowa-Helpa. J. Kuzicki does not directly quote J. Topolski, but in his analysis, he combines quantitative data on the financial situation of participants in the Great Emigration with their personal accounts and information about the French attitude towards newcomers from Poland. This approach fulfils the assumptions of an integrated explanation, considering both the objective and subjective aspects of the historical process.

Based primarily on the minutes of meetings of the Polish Ladies' Charitable Society, the author examines the structure of employment, wage levels, living costs and crises such as illness, job loss, and family responsibilities to identify the real causes of poverty among emigrants. The primary reasons include low qualifications, language barriers, frequent job interruptions, illness, and the need to support family members. He emphasises that even professionals like doctors, engineers, and teachers often earned less than their French counterparts and were clients of the Charitable Society. The Society played a vital role in mitigating the effects of poverty in the short term by providing finance, food and

material aid. Still, its activities were of an interventionist nature and did not address the structural causes of poverty. Meanwhile, according to Kuzicki, Polish emigrants made a noteworthy contribution to France's economic and scientific life, which contrasts sharply with their challenging social and economic circumstances.

An important part of this volume includes of articles by Ivan Terlyuk, Viktoria Voloshenko, and Žarko Lazarevic, which examine various aspects of poverty and related political, fiscal, and social phenomena in rural Galicia, Ukraine, and Slovenia from the 18th to the 20th century. In the first of these, titled *Josephine Metrics of Austrian Galicia: an Attempt to Legalize Peasant Land Ownership and Influence Socio-Economic Relations at the End of the 18th Century (A Case Study of the Village of Vivosia)*, Ivan Terlyuk (2025) explores the role of the Josephine Metrics as a key legal and administrative tool of the Habsburg monarchy. Its aim was to regulate property and fiscal relations in rural Galicia at the end of the 18th century. The Josephine Metric was designed to organise relations between the manor and the peasants and represented an attempt to legalise peasant land ownership while laying the groundwork for a uniform land tax based on land profitability. This study provides a microhistorical analysis utilizing cadastral materials from 1787–1788, to demonstrate the course and consequences of the reform through the example of the village of Vivosia. Terluk argues that the cadastre was significant step towards the legalisation of peasant land and the formalisation of the legal subjectivity of rural inhabitants, as well as a tool for rationalising the tax system. At the same time, it points to the limited effectiveness of the reform, resulting from the local interests of landowners and the departure from reformist principles after the death of Joseph II. The article confirms that Josephine metrics are a valuable source for studying socio-legal changes in Galicia, and the fate of the reform presented in the article is an example of the tension between the modernisation efforts of the absolutist state and the realities of local power structures, in particular, the resistance of the noble elites to actions aimed at changing the status quo.

Viktoriia Voloshenko (2025), in her article *Stereotype of Poor Peasants of Dnieper Ukraine in the Second Half of the 19th and Early 20th Centuries: Between Ideas and Reality* analyses the development and functioning of the stereotype of the 'poor peasant' in the Dnieper region during the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The author investi-

gates its origins (journalistic discourse, literature, ideologies) and the connection between this image and rural life realities, as well as how it was reproduced in historiography, especially during the Soviet era. She demonstrates that the image of extreme peasant poverty was not only a reflection of economic hardship but also a tool for social and political mobilisation, used to highlight social issues, justify specific reform programmes, and shape collective identity. In the USSR, however, the problem of peasant poverty in the Dnieper region was exploited politically, primarily as a means of legitimising Soviet authority and justifying radical socio-economic reforms. In contemporary Ukrainian historiography, however, the Soviet portrayal of poverty is being challenged by moving away from a one-dimensional view of the Ukrainian countryside as a space of universal misery. Voloshenko emphasises the importance of analysing the structural factors of poverty, local and family diversity, and strategies to overcome poverty. He also stresses the relativity of the concept of poverty and the difficulty in establishing objective criteria for its assessment, advocating for a combination of systemic analyses with microhistory.

The final article on rural areas addresses the issue of poverty in the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, which was part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1991. Žarko Lazarević (2025) in his article *Facing Inequalities in a Communist Country: The Case of Peasant Poverty in the Socialist Republic of Slovenia*, examines peasant poverty in a socialist state, confronting the official ideology of egalitarianism with the actual social and economic inequalities in rural Slovenia between 1945 and 1990. Using party documents, statistical data, sociological research, press publications, and relevant literature, the author demonstrates that the authorities long denied the existence of poverty, instead using euphemisms like 'material deprivation' and portraying inequalities as a temporary phenomenon. Peasants in Slovenia were among the poorest social groups because the socialist development model systematically favoured cities and industry over the countryside, and agricultural policies focused on the growth of state-owned farms at the expense of small farms, ultimately leading to deagrarianisation and structural marginalisation of rural areas. In response, peasants' defensive reactions – aimed at preserving their farms – were pragmatic, such as engaging in multiple occupations outside agriculture and gradually joining social security systems. Lazarević argues that despite the expansion of

social benefits, regional and class inequalities persisted. Even with official egalitarianism rhetoric, peasants in Slovenia remained the most vulnerable social group to poverty.

Among the two articles on Polish history, the first discusses the fight against poverty immediately after the end of the First and Second World Wars, while the second addresses the housing shortage in the real socialist economy, specifically how crises of authority and social protests influenced the housing policy of the communist authorities in the People's Republic of Poland.

Paweł Grata (2025) in his article *Counteracting Poverty on Polish Lands after Both World Wars: A Comparative Analysis* undertakes a comparative analysis of measures to combat poverty in Poland after the First and Second World Wars (1918–1921 and 1944/45–1948, respectively). He examines the extent of post-war poverty and the institutional foundations, methods and instruments of 'social rescue', highlighting the role of the state, local governments, and social organisations in alleviating the effects of war damage and widespread deprivation.

Based on archival materials, normative acts and statistical data, the author argues that, despite different political contexts, both periods were marked by similar social challenges caused by war damage, population migration, unemployment, and food shortages. These challenges led to similar forms of intervention, such as food aid, child and refugee care, and the organisation of shelters. The differences stemmed from varying political conditions and the structure of aid beneficiaries, especially regarding support for Holocaust victims and the migrant and displaced populations after 1945. After World War II, aid campaigns faced pressure from communist authorities, who aimed to control the charitable sector. However, for pragmatic reasons they tolerated the extensive activities of church organisations in this area until the end of the 1940s. Grata concludes that in both periods, aid efforts remained insufficient relative to the scale of needs, due to financial constraints, organisational issues, and decisions that did not always reflect to the actual hierarchy of social needs.

Jakub Kujawa (2025) in his article *Crises of Power and Social Unrest in the People's Republic of Poland and State Housing Policy* and his analysis of state housing policy examines the impact of power crises and social protests in the People's Republic of Poland on housing policy from 1956 to 1989. He is mainly interested in how political upheavals (1956, 1970, 1976, 1980–1981, 1989) and social pressure influenced the authorities'



approach to housing development and the management of the still limited housing stock. Using party and government documents, legal acts, statistics from the Central Statistical Office, documents from Solidarity circles, and transcripts of the Round Table talks, the author demonstrates that each crisis brought only temporary adjustments to housing policy. These did not alter its centralised structure or address its inherent shortcomings. The most notable changes occurred after 1956 and 1970 but were primarily tactical rather than systemic as housing was viewed mainly as an instrument – a means to legitimise the system and maintaining social stability. Though housing issues rarely directly caused protests, the increasing housing shortage heightened social tensions and a sense of despair, fostering fertile ground for conflict and discontent, particularly in the 1980s. Kujawa also notes that the reform projects developed during the first period of Solidarity (1980–1981) were not realised before 1989. Furthermore, during the political transition, the potential of the suggestions made at the Round Table was not fully utilised, and the housing policy of the Third Republic of Poland largely adopted a market-oriented approach, restricting access to housing for the economically disadvantaged.

Unlike previous articles that primarily discussed Central and Eastern Europe, Paul Akere Irabor (2025) focusses on historical origins of banditry in Nigeria and its occurrence during the Fourth Republic (1999–2023). His article, titled *Economic Marginalisation and Political Struggles of Historical Antecedents of Banditry in Nigeria and Their Reflection in the Fourth Republic*, from 1999 to 2023, examines how economic marginalisation and political conflicts among elites serve as significant factors fostering organised violence across various parts of the country. Using secondary data such as scholarly literature, government reports, international organisations, publications, archival records, and media articles, Irabor asserts that banditry in Nigeria is neither a recent nor an isolated issue but has deep historical roots that extend back to the pre-colonial and colonial eras. He contends that its current manifestations in the Fourth Republic are a continuation of long-standing processes rooted in economic marginalisation and political conflicts among elites.

He emphasises that successive governments have failed to address the root causes of violence, such as poverty, unemployment, regional inequalities, corruption and the weakness of state institutions, which has led to banditry manifesting in various regional forms (the Niger Delta, the north-east, the central belt of the country, the south-east), yet its

mechanism has remained consistent. As a result, the author concludes that effectively tackling banditry cannot rely solely on military and repressive measures, but requires long-term socio-economic policies, including a genuine reduction in inequality, economic development of peripheral regions, and strengthening the rule of law.

The latest volume of SHO also includes reviews of Falk Flade's work, *Innovation und Planwirtschaft? Technologischer Wandel in zentral geplanten Ökonomien am Beispiel der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik und der Volksrepublik Polen* (Flade, 2024), written by T. Janicki (2025) and Wojciech Mielewczyk's work titled *Changes in the Structure of Agriculture in Greater Poland in 1919–1939* (Mielewczyk, 2025) prepared by M. Machalek (2025).

This volume concludes with announcements about the participation of Polish economic historians in this year's World Congress of Economic History in Lund (Bębnowski, 2025) and the conference entitled 'Franciszek Bujak. Pioneer of economic history research in Poland: On the 120th anniversary of his memorable lecture "History of Economic Relations"' (Synowiec, 2025). We also invite you to read the announcement regarding the European REFRESH project carried out at the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of Ostrava, prepared by Csaba Lakócai (2025).

**Tadeusz Janicki**, b. in 1964 in Krotoszyn, associate professor, habilitated doctor of humanities, head of the Department of Economic History of the Faculty of History of the Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań and President of the Polish Association of Economic History. Editor-in-Chief of the academic journal *Studia Historiae Oeconomicae*. Author of many works on the socio-economic history of Poland and Germany in the 19th and 20th centuries, with particular emphasis on the history of the country-side, agriculture and agricultural policy, the Nazi occupation of Polish lands, the political thought of the Polish peasant movement and the regional history of Wielkopolska. organizer, together with Professor Dariusz Gwiazdowicz from the Poznań University of Life Sciences, of the session at the international congress of historical Sciences entitled: 'Man and nature: Between destruction and creation', which took place as part of the 23rd International Congress of Historical Sciences in Poznań 2022 and Co-organizer (together with P. Franaszek, C. Leszczyńska, and D. Bębnowski) of the session entitled "Equalities and Sustainability Challenges in Transition Economies in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989" at the World Economic History Congress (WEHC) in Lund, Sweden, 2025.



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