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## THE CONSTRUCTION OF CIVIL LOCAL COMMUNITIES – THE CHALLENGE OF THE XXI CENTURY

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The modern world is very complex and complicated matter. New communication technologies have changed perception of time and space, the states and their governments are no longer the main actors on a public life stage<sup>1</sup>. Unimaginably rapid progress of science and technology has been the main reason for which more and more people do not understand or have clear difficulties in assimilating and using the achievements of civilization. Economy based on knowledge and development of innovative society forced modern *homo sapiens* to faster absorption of changes, flexibility in action and much greater mobility than ever before.

Globalization has become a unique, all-encompassing phenomenon and a hallmark of late twentieth and twenty-first century. It turned out to be a challenge for all actors of world politics: states, and transnational structures, international organizations. It forced people to search new ways of acting, thinking and creating ways for development. It showed, at the same time, that space, time and place are no longer obstacles to self-organization and self-development. It also unveiled its second, different,

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<sup>1</sup> E. Pietrzyk, R. Szczepanik, Ł. Zaorski-Sikora, *Aksjologia życia publicznego*, Łódź 2011, p. 153.

dark side: fluctuation, instability, lack of order and organization of public space. These phenomena, matched with globalization, has contributed to deepening the dichotomy between “mobile tourists” and group of “excluded”, globalized. Indeed, not all operators of public life use the achievements of globalization equally and joy the opportunities they bring. These entities form a group of excluded for which time, space and place are the biggest limits of their development and self-realization<sup>2</sup>.

Changes in today’s world, strengthened by the energy of globalization, penetrate all spheres of social life. Their effects can be seen also, and perhaps mainly, in the life of local communities and the specifics of the bonds that they bind. These bonds have become an important subject of analysis and research of sociological thought and representatives of other disciplines. This resulted in a very extensive literature on the subject. The social bond connects the unit with other units, social group and finally the whole society. The important factor is consciousness of belonging, values unity, goals, interests, identification of group activities<sup>3</sup>. The complexity of the nature and form of social links makes it difficult to notice, in the modern globalized world, that changes in the economic and political are connected with other spheres of human activity. The issue of social ties is strictly connected with other issue – local communities.

The term “local community” belongs to this group of concepts that give rise to many con-controversies especially in terms of trying to define it unambiguously. The concept of community is derived from two different streams of social thought.

The first, represented by such eminent sociology researchers as E. Durkheim, G. Simmel, F. Tonnies, defined communities as human groups and analyzed them in terms of features, strength and direction of transformation of relationships which link these groups. For F. Tonnies social ties build up two types of communities: the community and association. Community (*Gemeinschaft*) meant a kind of bond based mainly on the “organic will” – understood as emotional closeness of individuals lives.

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<sup>2</sup> Z. Bauman, *Globalizacja*, Warszawa 2000, p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> *Socjologia. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny*, Warszawa 2008, p. 238.

The community understood this way was treated as unity which was not necessarily related to particular territory. Features of such unity were:

1. experiencing and sharing the same symbols and values which were the source of cultural group identity;
2. objective relations which were constructed between people;
3. respecting the principles of consensus and cooperation<sup>4</sup>.

The essence of such perceived community was the fact of simultaneous presence and mutual infiltration of these elements which were to form indivisible whole adopted and accepted by everyone.

The second type of social collectivity was the association (*Gesellschaft*). This type of human group was characterized by formal and factual form of social relations based on the so called arbitrary will. In the association particular individuals played social roles which were assigned to them before. The roles were the result of rational calculation of association individuals.

The second stream of local societies research represented, among others, by R.E. Park, R.M. MacIver, focused on element of place (territory) as a factor or even rather the principle of organizing social life. Representatives of the concept introduced the definition of community as group located in a clearly defined geographical space. The territory was the basis of economic, political and cultural organization of society. It also became a place of civic and political self-realization of individuals or a group and, in individual consciousness, the place of residence became one's "small" – "local homeland"<sup>5</sup>. Despite the differences between the two streams one may identify some common elements taking into account the following community features:

1. common territory as the basis of social life,
2. social interactions between residents of the territory,
3. common public interest resulting from use of a specific territory,
4. local sentiment<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> P. Starosta, *Spolecznosc lokalna*, [in:] *Encyklopedia socjologii*, Vol. IV, Warszawa 2002, p. 97–98.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 98.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*. See also: J. Turowski, *Socjologia, Wielkie struktury spoleczne*, Lublin 2000, p. 216.

The local community appears then as a fundamental element of society and the basis of the socialization processes<sup>7</sup>. The use of the adjective “local” indicates additionally that the factor distinguishing them is assigning them to a particular place. In this way it highlights the special importance of a common territory as the basis of social life. The concept of local community has three functions:

1. cognitive – allowing for an empirical characterization of the basic features of the local community in a particular time,
2. methodological – as a tool for measuring changes in systems of spatial relations,
3. ideological – postulating the desired characteristics of the local system<sup>8</sup>.

However, it is common that local communities are known as local unities which can be clearly seen, among others, in Polish local government legislation but also in the lack of unified statement of researchers in this field. This raises the question of whether the “local community” might be identified with the “local unity” and if exchange of these terms is justified?

The local community is, from the point of view of sociology, a certain group living in a defined territory. Members of the group share certain bond (objectives, activities, norms). There is so called direct contact between members of the community. Each of them is assigned to a specific position and role so they can shape the internal organization to better develop their social and economic activity. These elements contribute to the socio-cultural separation of so understood collectivity<sup>9</sup>.

The community – from a sociological point of view – is a collectivity characterized by specific features such as: unity of goods, values and

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<sup>7</sup> A. Lutrzykowski, M. Legiędź-Gałuszka, *Wspólnota samorządowa czy społeczność lokalna (regionalna)? Spór nie tylko semantyczny*, [in:] *Samorząd terytorialny w Polsce i w Europie. Doświadczenia i nowe wyzwania*, eds. J. Marszałek-Kawy, A. Lutrzykowskiego, Toruń 2008, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> P. Starosta, op.cit., p. 98.

<sup>9</sup> See J. Sikora, *Lokalne układy społeczne*, [in:] *Samorząd w Polsce. Istota, formy, zadania*, eds. S. Wykrętowicza, Poznań 2004, p. 87. The term „direct contact” is defined as the social contact which is an important element of social relationships and influences the nature of the relationship. J. Szczepański, *Elementarne pojęcia socjologii*, Warszawa 1970, p. 170–171.

behavior patterns. Being one of the many particles cooperating in the community one works for others without expecting any reciprocation. The ideal situation for the community is full “growing into” it by its members so that all the members form unity, a whole – just the community (eg, a communities of early Christians)<sup>10</sup>.

According to L. Habuda interchangeable use of the term local community – the local unity is not entirely legitimate. The members of the community are required to share their faith, values, patterns of behavior, standards. There is no place for individualism, diversity, manifesting one’s independence. In social non-unity systems, indeed, there are common goals, similar values, authorities, patterns of behavior, norms, but also, and perhaps above all, there is a clear acceptance of diversity (e.g. objectives, views) still maintaining mutual respect<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, “axiological superiority of community over unities lies mainly in their pluralism [...]. Communities compared with unities create higher, more advanced level of social development<sup>12</sup>”. The use of different terminology and the resulting discrepancy is the effect of multi-ambiguity of concepts and not always accurate and consistent with the nature of matter translations from foreign languages to Polish (from English, German, French)<sup>13</sup>. Thus, the proposal of L. Habuda seems to be correct. The author says that from the point of view of territorial self-government, but not only these, one should use the term “territorial communities” which are intermediate beings between the communities and associations. Modern territorial collectivities not only have ties of community nature but also these of the association<sup>14</sup>.

In today’s globalized world there is little chance of building communities in their original meaning. The phenomenon of “shrinkage” of the world

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<sup>10</sup> L. Habuda, *Decentralizacja vs centralizacja administracji w strukturze zasadniczego terytorialnego podziału kraju*, Toruń 2009, p. 178, 180.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 180.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 181.

<sup>13</sup> W języku angielskim na określenie wspólnoty, społeczności bądź zbiorowości używa się pojęcia *community*. We Francji badacze problematyki społeczności lokalnych posługują się określeniem *collectivite territoriales*, w Niemczech zaś pojęcie *Gesellschaft* oznacza zarówno społeczność, jak i stowarzyszenie i wspólnotę.

<sup>14</sup> L. Habuda, op.cit., p. 179. See also: F. Tönnies, *Wspólnota i stowarzyszenie*, Warszawa 2008.

from one side and its polarization on the other hand leads to disengagement of social ties as well as local ones. The differences between individuals blur, there is a loss of group identity and, as a consequence, it leads to the collapse of traditional unity<sup>15</sup>. As Z. Bauman writes: “[...] in a globalized world “being local” is a sign of social humiliation and degradation and the inconvenience of existence in local conditions is a result mainly from the fact that public space in which people create and negotiate meanings is beyond the reach of local existence [...]”<sup>16</sup>.

The empirical studies on contemporary transformations of locally based relationships have resulted in different hypotheses and concepts which explain the reasons for these changes and predict their consequences. The literature most often refers to three hypotheses: – *community-change hypothesis* indicates that specialization and the instrumentalization of the human actions which are typical for industrial society result in loss of ties based on intimacy and mutual obligations. Territory loses the function of the community integrating factor, there is destruction of cooperative groups and the increase of social pathology. As a result local communities disappear;

- *transformation hypothesis* – implies change of the form of local communities; this hypothesis provides a range of various and often different statements, it is generally believed that changes are subject to the territorial framework of the community; according to some approaches this framework would be limited to the closest neighborhood, according to others – the borders will extend taking into account – the multiplicity of human habitats. Some sociologists believe that despite the pressure of industrialization, local solidarity will survive in its traditional form, still others are convinced that this form has undergone substantial changes which may be observed in formal links relating to social roles; this hypothesis emphasizes the positive role of social associations but also indicates that they are too focused on the implementation of particular interests;

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<sup>15</sup> See: A. Lipska-Sondecka, *Wyzwania globalizacji a samorząd terytorialny. Wybrane kwestie*, [in:] *Państwa – regiony – świat w kształtującej się rzeczywistości globalnej*, eds. K. Kamińskiej, S. Mrozowskiej, G. Piwnickiego, Gdańsk 2009, p. 302.

<sup>16</sup> Z. Bauman, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

- *hypothesis of release from the territorial base* – assumes that the local community will become the personal community; contacts will be specialized, neighborhood ties<sup>17</sup> will weaken. Is in a globalized world an opportunity for the construction and existence of civil local communities that are the foundation of local government?

L. Habuda believes such opportunities do not exist because it does not correspond with conditions of the modern world<sup>18</sup>.

Shrinking 'space-time' (Z. Bauman), a kind of openness and accessibility of the world, building a knowledge economy, development of innovative society do not give a chance to build communities (in sociological terms). Thus, any attempts, from a statutory (legal) articulation of perceiving habitants of a defined territory as a "local self-governing community" to the scientific tests that prove the need for construction of this unity, appear to be futile. However, it is indisputable that local communities are the essence of territorial government which is the most important principle of modern democratic states system. The disintegration of relationships, and certainly their transformation, may lead to disintegration of local government. Even the best law can not prevent it. The only chance is in active structures of society which are the core of ties linking civic community. Conscious participation in public life was the focus of many ancient thinkers and philosophers. For Aristotle, the most perfect form of society was *polis*, the only place in which it might be possible for human to realize his or her social nature. Cicero believed that through conscious participation of individuals in life of political community they give birth to *societas civitas* (political society) that is synonymous with civil society. The achievements of the ancient artists were inspiration to creators of Enlightenment. The permanent place in the construction and dissemination of ideas of civil society belongs to J.J. Rousseau and J. Locke. The first of them based a thought of a modern civil society on the idea of social contract between citizens. This agreement was universal and collective. In his discussion Rousseau invoked the concept of Socrates – ethical intel-

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<sup>17</sup> See: A. Lipska-Sondecka, *op.cit.*, p. 303. More on the subject of transition of neighborhood ties can be found in: P. Starosta, *op.cit.*, p. 105–106.

<sup>18</sup> L. Habuda, *op.cit.*, p. 180.

lectualism – according to which, until we do not know what is good, we are not able to choose it<sup>19</sup>. J. Locke defined civil society as the community appointed by citizens under the social contract to protect the economy<sup>20</sup>. Enlightenment thinkers identified civil society as the state institution which became a synonym of political arena of civil education. Increasing public awareness of natural, inalienable rights belonging to human (regardless of one's social status) resulted in . revolution of socio-political character in France and in the U.S. Its most important, measurable and long-range effect was the adoption of documents confirming the principle of natural rights of man and citizen<sup>21</sup>. The state, guaranteeing civil privileges, built a special bond of mutual relations of political character. By giving citizens the constitutionally provided right to participate in the collective life of the civic political unity the state became a synonym of civil society. In the second half of the nineteenth century Alexis de Tocqueville, one of the greatest political writers and thinkers of modern times, distinguished the civil society from state institutions. According to the concept proposed by him the state was the institution of political power and the mechanisms of carrying it out. Civil society was the sphere of mutual relations between citizens. The citizens, for the common good and common interest, took actions in the sphere of public life through participation in political decision making process<sup>22</sup>. A. de Tocqueville contributed to the sociological concept of civil society according to which people can realize their needs and expectations regardless of the state power. The concept of civil society proposed by A. de Tocqueville was the inspiration for next generations of sociologists to undertake deeper research which concerned mainly finding answers to the question about the essence of civil society.

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<sup>19</sup> S. Filipowicz, *O demokracji*, Warszawa 1992, p. 17–20.

<sup>20</sup> E. Pietrzyk, R. Szczepanik, Ł. Zaorski-Sikora, *Aksjologia życia publicznego*, Łódź 2011, p. 124.

<sup>21</sup> In the United States the Constitution was adopted in 1787. France has adopted the Declaration of human and civil rights in 1789. In Poland, the first constitution in the spirit of the Enlightenment ideas was the Constitution of May 3, adopted in 1791.

<sup>22</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *O demokracji w Ameryce*, Kraków 1996, p. 193.



In science there is a dispute about the place of civil society in modern political systems, the common element linking two sides of the discourse is the belief that there are no ideal entities. Both states and societies are not free from certain defects and imperfections that may affect the way they are organized. A necessary condition for the existence of civil society is conscious, responsible and active participation of the individual (citizen) in public life. One of the most prominent Polish sociologists, P. Sztompka, believes that active social structures are important from the point of view of common good because they represent the most important moral bonds connecting citizens<sup>23</sup>.

“The existence of community based on civic moral ties – trust, loyalty, solidarity – is the key to the prosperity of society. In economy it causes people to start companies, they also invest, save, take loans, introduce innovations [...]. In politics moral ties make people go to elections, participate in local activities, establish non-governmental organizations, associations, foundations [...], they are interested in public affairs”<sup>24</sup>.

The local (regional) development is not possible in isolation from the external world. How then should ones bring together intensive and progressive process of civil and cultural development with the values and characteristics that constitute a civil unity? The answer to that question is not simple. Building civic communities is a basic, hard, strenuous and even positivist work for the social (civil) responsibility for the actions, choices, attitudes. The process should include not only state power but also (and perhaps especially) the society. The state should give as much power as possible and leave itself as much as it is necessary concerning elementary features of the state.

The society must be aware of the fact that by “taking” part of the power it also takes responsibility for how this power will be governed.

Transferring the power from the state to “lower” level is not only a task for such institutions as local government but also various non-governmental organizations – foundations, associations. It is also releasing other

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<sup>23</sup> P. Sztompka, *O potrzebie wspólnoty obywatelskiej*, „Europa. Tygodnik idei”, in addition to „Dziennik”, 24.05.2006, nr 21(112), p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 12–13.

social initiatives making solving problems better, more efficient, more effective. In this way a new, multi-subjective (multilevel) governance model is being built.

Construction of civil community of the XXI century is common action, creation, management. It is work with others for others, it is the use of worked out practices and experiences of other communities. There is also room for compromise, tolerance, mutual respect for difference in the civic community. "Learning" how to unite takes time, consistency in action and thinking and the task is not only for school but also for all of us.

Processes carried by the globalization do not necessarily mean the disappearance of elementary relationships which are the basis of various, dichotomously changing communities. These processes bring many unknown positive impulses: deepening these ties as well as making new types of them. This means that globalization do not threaten larger and more diverse civil societies including local ones. It is similar to the European integration processes which carry a range of new possibilities of constructing community ties and collectivities necessary in cooperation of uniting nations of Europe. Many of the documents of the European Union and the Council of Europe clearly indicates the need, but also ways, of construction local civil communities. Indeed, they are becoming increasingly entities of direct relationships of cooperating territorial groups – habitants of Poland, Germany, France or Czech cities and municipalities.