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## Reflections on the future of social pedagogy

### Summary

This article will present some forecasts and postulates regarding the development of social pedagogy in the near future. Social pedagogy is both a theoretical and practical discipline, so if we reflect on its future, then we should discuss these two aspects separately. Obviously, working on the development of theories in disciplines such as social pedagogy makes sense only on the condition that these theories can be then implemented in practice, but it must be also borne in mind that the possibility of influencing the practice by the theory (e.g. social policy or social work) depends on a number of factors on which social pedagogy has no factual impact. Hence, in the context of a discussion on the future of social pedagogy, the distinction between theory and practical needs as well as possibilities of its implementation seems very much justified, because there is always the possibility that an intense development of theory might not be accompanied by equally intense activities in the area of practice.

**Key words:** social pedagogy, pedagogy, social sciences, social work.

This article will present some forecasts and postulates regarding the development of social pedagogy in the near future. Social pedagogy is both a theoretical and practical discipline, so if we reflect on its future, then we should discuss these two aspects separately. Obviously, working on the development of theories in disciplines such as social pedagogy makes sense only on the condition that these theories can be then implemented in practice, but it must be also borne in mind that the possibility of influencing the practice by the theory (e.g. social policy or social work) depends on a number of factors on which social pedagogy has no factual impact. Hence, in the context of a discussion on the future of social pedagogy, the distinction between theory and practical needs as well as possibilities of its implementation seems very much justified, because

there is always the possibility that an intense development of theory might not be accompanied by equally intense activities in the area of practice.

In turn, to make a distinction between social pedagogy in Poland and other countries seems justified due to certain significant differences existing at least in two areas - the factual possibilities of implementing in practice the very theoretical solutions of social pedagogy and the scale and type of social problems occurring in Poland and in more developed economies. For example, one can observe that, while the most important problem that Western European countries will face in the near future might be the problem of immigration, when it comes to Poland, the most pressing issue will undoubtedly be the phenomenon of an aging population. One can, therefore, risk putting forward a thesis that social pedagogy in Poland (and other post-communist countries) and social pedagogy in the so-called old European Union will develop to a large extent as two independent areas in the near future.

It should also be pointed out that all the forecasts regarding the future of social pedagogy can be formulated from two points of view, namely from the normative point of view and from the point of view of a non-engaged observer. In the first case, we tend to ask what should be done, what goals should be set and what methods implemented for their achievement - in other words, what the future of social pedagogy should be like. In the second case, based on the observations of current phenomena and changes taking place in the society, we try to predict what the future of social pedagogy might look like regardless of our opinion in this respect.

When attempting to evaluate the development of social pedagogy from the perspective of a non-engaged observer, unfortunately, one might assume that its future in Poland does not look much optimistic. Although social pedagogy as a theoretical discipline is being developed in many academic centres in Poland, its basic purpose and sense of existence is not, however, the development of theoretical research on the society, but rather the initiation of certain social changes, hence exerting practical impact on this society. Meanwhile, the very possibilities of initiating such changes in a targeted manner are relatively minute as compared to such countries as the USA, Germany, Great Britain or the Scandinavian countries.

The reasons for this have already been discussed in the previous chapters, so I will not analyse them again here. It should be mentioned, however, that to exert any meaningful influence on the very functioning of individual social environments, one should also cater for the conditions of a consistent, long-term and coherent social policy. Meanwhile, in Poland, such a policy still does not really exist. Since the beginning of the nineties, there have been a number of *ad hoc* measures in our country aimed at alleviating the existing social problems, yet there has never been introduced a policy that could be carried out in a comprehensive manner, covering simultaneously various fields and pursuing clearly defined goals. Perhaps this trepidatory state of affairs persists, to a certain extent, due to the treatment of social policy only as an anti-crisis remedy or as a tool to ensure social peace for the future governments. However, one must point out that, even if that is the case,

social educators cannot accept this kind of social policy as an acceptable activity in a developed democratic state of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

On the other hand, the answer to the question about the trends currently taking place both in the society and in the area of social pedagogy itself is always burdened with a smaller or greater degree of uncertainty. Hence, there is always a certain degree of risk that some problems cannot be noticed early enough so as to be effectively prevented, while others can be exaggerated. Social pedagogy, like other social sciences, has not achieved, and will probably never achieve, that degree of precision of results and predictions as in the case of natural sciences.

This lack of precision is in turn the result of the very extrapolation method used in social sciences in order to diagnose future phenomena. This method assumes that such phenomena will develop in a manner similar to those that can be observed currently. Both the quantitative aspects of the forecasted phenomena and the conditions in which they form are taken into account, while trying to determine whether and to what extent these conditions will persist in the future.

Another way of forecasting the future of education is the comparative method. This technique is based on comparing different changes occurring in particular areas of life in various countries (often also in terms of various social sciences) in order to detect those factors that make similar phenomena lead to diverse effects in different countries.

In this chapter, therefore, I will focus primarily on presenting these opportunities for the development of social pedagogy which not only should, but - under certain conditions (e.g. legislative, organizational, political) - could be implemented. Regardless of how this discipline might really develop, it is quite possible to at least outline a certain ideal state and evaluate what are the chances that this state of things will be implemented.

Hence, while making any such predictions, one should be aware that not all those problems are possible to be diagnosed early enough. In particular, certain objective events (e.g. political, economic, etc.) that involve negative social phenomena are rather unpredictable. For example, back in the first half of the 1980s, one could not expect that the political system would be changed in our country and that social problems typical for capitalist countries would then emerge. Another example is the economic emigration of Poles after Poland's accession to the European Union, the scale of which turned out to be much greater than primarily expected<sup>1</sup>, with social effects becoming visible only now<sup>2</sup>.

1 According to the CEED Institute report, in 2014, almost 2 million Poles were living in emigration in the EU countries. The report shows that the scale of emigration is much larger than it was expected before Poland and other Central European countries joined the EU, with the scale of returns being much smaller. *Compare with 2014 CEED Report: Migration in the 21st century from the perspective of the CEE countries - an opportunity or a threat?* <http://ceedinstitute.org/report/1798>.

2 The problem of changes occurring in the family due to women's emigration is discussed by I. Szczygielska. *Compare with* I. Szczygielska, *Migracje zarobkowe kobiet oraz ich wpływ na funkcjonowanie rodzin*, Warszawa 2013.

More often than not, the formulation of forecasts regarding any possible development of negative social phenomena in Poland turns out to be fairly conceivable based on the experience of more developed countries. An example of such a problem is drug addiction. Although the phenomenon of drug addiction occurred in our country already in the period of the Polish People's Republic, yet, after 1989<sup>3</sup>, a significant increase in the amount of psychoactive substances used was noticed. In addition, what also changed was their type and also the attitude to drugs as exposed by some social groups (including the young people)<sup>4</sup>. As a result of these changes, the addiction to psychoactive substances has become a significant problem covering much wider sections of the society than in the previous years. This, of course, meant that the authorities were faced with the need to implement new preventive and support measures. The very reason for these changes was in this case the transformation of the political system and the opening of borders, as a result of which both the import of drugs and trade in them became much easier. These changes were for obvious reasons rather difficult to predict<sup>5</sup>, however, because the problem of drug addiction in Poland took similar forms as in other countries, it might be assumed that certain lessons from the experience of other countries with relation to drug addiction could have been learnt.

It is also worth emphasizing that the forecast regarding the situation of social pedagogy (both when it comes to the theory and practice) is not only a form of futurological predictions exerting not much impact on the field itself, but it is also its integral part (or at least should constitute it). In other words, one of the tasks of social pedagogy should be to formulate predictions about the future social problems and to search for methods of action that might solve these problems in the future. The answer to the question about the future of social pedagogy is important for practical reasons. If we want to effectively counteract the increasing social problems, then it becomes obvious that these problems should be diagnosed and understood early enough. For this reason, it seems justified to claim that the diagnosis of future social problems based on the observation of phenomena and trends taking place here and now is an inseparable element of every theory in the field of social pedagogy.

As a science about education, pedagogy is, by its very nature, directed towards the future. Education is a planned and long-term process of achieving specific goals, i.e. inducing certain future changes in various spheres of the student's functioning. Hence, if social pedagogues set specific goals for themselves, then it might be said

3 A clear increase in drug addiction in Poland was recorded since the 1960s, which was associated with the emergence of new methods of drug production. Another rapid increase occurred in Poland in the early 1980s. *Compare with: Narkomania w Polsce, edited by D. Adrejew-Frażczek, Kancelaria Sejmu. Biuro Studiów i Ekspertyz, Warszawa 1992, p. 1.*

4 A. Jablensky, *Characteristics of Current Substance Abuse Patterns in Countries of Central and Eastern Europe*, in: H. Klingemann, C. Goos, R. Hartnoll, A. Jablensky, J. Rehm (edit): *European Summary on Drug Abuse*, WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen 1993, p. 27 et al.

5 At present, close international cooperation is a prerequisite for an effective anti-drug policy. *Compare with: Prowadzić europejską politykę antynarkotykową w oparciu o rzetelne dane. Z Wolfgangiem Góetzem rozmawia Klaudia Palczak, „Serwis Informacyjny Narkomania” 2009, No. 3, p. 2*

that in a sense they design the future - both of the society and of social pedagogy itself. From this point of view, pedagogy, including social pedagogy, can be characterized as a science of a targeted process to induce changes or, to put it simply, to change the future. It is not by accident that one of the main elements of any ideology has always been a specific educational programme, the direct goal of which was to raise a “new man”, with the indirect purpose - to create a new society<sup>6</sup>.

For social pedagogy, this orientation towards the future means that it cannot be limited to registering social facts, their assessment and reacting to them in situations where this assessment turns out to be negative. Quite the reverse, social pedagogy should be one of the important factors creating the future. Yet, there is certain truth in the statement that in order to co-create this future, social pedagogy must be first aware of what processes are currently occurring in the society and which of them it is able to influence. Although not all the problems can be prevented by social pedagogy, and the ideal society will probably remain a utopian project forever, but even if its impact on the social reality must remain limited, it is able to change at least the effects of these future problems, thus protecting the weakest members of the society<sup>7</sup>.

As I have already mentioned, the provision of an effective and lasting solution to problems related to the environmental functioning of individuals on the scale of the whole society is possible only within the framework of a specific social policy pursued by the state. Hence, if we do formulate a forecast of the situation of social pedagogy in the near future, it seems obvious that at the same time we should also pose a question about the future of social policy both in Poland and in the more developed countries.

In the chapter on the relations between social pedagogy and social policy, I drew the readers' attention to the problems encountered in Poland when it comes to any attempts to implement an active social policy model. The main reason for these difficulties seems to be the lack of sufficient cooperation between individual institutions, including, in particular, social work institutions and employment offices. In the longer term, this state of things might probably lead to the emergence of two groups benefiting from state aid: those benefiting from the support of the aid institutions and social workers on the one hand, and those unemployed “activated” by the labour offices on the other. Thus, it might be assumed that all the support coming from social workers will be directed only to the first group of beneficiaries, which will be primarily material support, in other words, cash benefits for those without any means to sustain their livelihood. Consequently, the very reasonableness of running an active social policy in our country might become questionable, because this policy was intended for those individuals

6 *Compare with E. Fiedler, Nowy człowiek - 12 szkiców na temat ducha nowego pokolenia, Kraków 1935; M. M. Rozenhal, Budownictwo socjalizmu i narodziny nowego człowieka, Warszawa 1951.*

7 Perhaps it would be justified to create a separate specialty within the scope of social pedagogy, which could be dealing exclusively with the forecasting of education and upbringing. An advocate of creating such a specialization in Poland is, among others, R. Wroczyński.

experiencing serious and multifaceted difficulties in the very functioning in a social environment, and not only for those who are temporarily unemployed.

The example of Poland shows that even if we do formulate specific goals and methods of action at the level of social policy, it will be the cooperation between various types of institutions and organizations that will form a prerequisite for implementing any such policy. And in turn any harmonious cooperation between organizations, each of which was set up to perform rather different tasks, is possible only if the state maintains a coherent social policy - an element, as it seems, still missing in our country.

The tool by the means of which social pedagogy tries to influence the functioning of social environments is social work. In Poland, as I have already mentioned, there is no separate profession of a social pedagogue *per se*. Therefore, the function of shaping the social environment in terms of its educational interactions is fulfilled primarily by social work. Hence, it is obvious that the situation of social pedagogy will pretty much depend on the development of social work. Now, because in the last two decades there has been a rapid development of the area of social work in Poland, with the number of social workers *vis-à-vis* the number of residents in our country already comparable to the European standards, we can reasonably expect that this trend will continue as in other places across Europe.

One should, therefore, expect a progressive specialization in the area of social work in the first place. In addition, this will be correlated with the development and improvement of various methods for the evolution of the effectiveness of social work, thanks to which new approaches will develop, leading hopefully, with limited resources and increasing social work demand, to satisfactory results. At the same time, the education of social workers will evolve, as it will be necessary for students to acquire knowledge and skills, which are currently not included in the scope of education for social work<sup>8</sup>. All these new specialties and methods of social work will become the subject matter of a theoretical interest of social pedagogy.

One of the problems of social pedagogy as a theory is the fact that it derives from the output of many other sciences, each of which uses its own conceptual apparatus. This in turn raises the necessity of specifying the meaning of the basic concepts of social pedagogy, as it is rather obvious that these meanings differ significantly within each of these science areas. At the same time, it is possible to indicate certain concepts, which are used by social pedagogy and other social sciences, yet each of these sciences giving such concepts a somewhat different meaning. An example to this could be the concept of a social environment. In social pedagogy, it is synonymous with the concept of educational environment, being a set of factors influencing the development of an individual. Meanwhile, in sociology and other social sciences not related to pedagogy, the term of local environment is used (i.e. social group, local community) only with reference to

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8 Compare with S. Zhdanova, *Improving the Professional Competence of a Future Social Worker Social Security Institutions: Theory and Practice*, „Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research” 2013, No. 17 (11).



a group of individuals bound by specific relationships. Due to the emergence of new research areas (new educational environments and changes taking place in already existing environments), it will become important to develop new research methods in social pedagogy.

Disputes within the social pedagogy area will also concern fundamental problems for a wider area of social sciences as such. One such problem is the question of the epistemological status of social pedagogy. It is necessary to answer the question here whether pedagogy is an empirical science, and thus a form of cognition based on the opposing object of cognition and the subject, which in the process of learning about this object does not question whether it belongs to the humanities or not. In this case, one should assume that the subject and object of cognition remain in the relationship of mutual dependence, and each acquisition of knowledge about the object causes certain changes both in the object itself and in the subject. Contrary to appearances, this is not only a theoretical dispute, because the choice of the research method depends on whether social pedagogy is classified as a social or empirical area of sciences. In the empirical sciences, the basic method is observation and measurement, so one can formulate a number of precise methodological guidelines, the use of which allows one to meet the so-called scientific criteria (i.e. objectivity of results, intersubjective communication, etc.). The humanities, however, do not use any established, commonly accepted methodology, nor do they use any pre-accepted theoretical models that provide criteria for the interpretation of the phenomena so studied<sup>9</sup>.

Various practical tasks, which in the near future will face social pedagogy, will be, naturally, a resultant of those development processes currently taking place across specific societies. In order for the theoretical goals and assumptions to be implemented in practice, social pedagogy should rethink the most fundamental issues, and so it should ask itself about its own subject matter, its goals, methods as well as any possibilities of future action. The very answer to the question as to what constitutes the educational environment of a man today, is - for obvious reasons - completely different than in the period when mass media and the Internet did not exist, when travel possibilities were much more limited and when a profession mastered for once gave a guarantee of employment throughout the whole period of one's professional activity. This argument is not only about the emergence of various new types of educational environments, which are consequently opening up novel areas of research for social pedagogy, but above all, it is about the fact that all traditional educational environments have practically undergone some fundamentally profound changes, including such concepts as family, school, peer groups, environment at the workplace, local community, etc.<sup>10</sup>.

The experience of both more developed countries and Poland shows that not all social problems can be effectively solved. Although social educators and social workers do undertake certain activities to mitigate a number of social problems, yet, at the same time, in many cases they tend to transform the educational

9 S. Palka, *Pedagogika w stanie tworzenia*, Kraków 2003, p. 16.

10 An example of a problem that will be the subject of intense research in the near future is, undoubtedly, the emigration of Poles and its consequences. *Compare with: Migracje kobiet. Perspektywa wielowymiarowa*, edited by K. Slany, Kraków 2008.

environment in such a way that it becomes the source of further dysfunctions in the social functioning of individuals. Therefore, it seems necessary to revise the existing goals and methods of action in this context so as to solve certain problems and avoid creating any new ones.

The main point here is to clearly outline those areas where it is possible to implement the practical solutions aimed at provoking certain changes in the future. The basic principles of social pedagogy, such as the principle of subjectivity (according to which each person is the creator of his or her social world, so they can create it quite consciously), the principle of equal opportunities for all or the principle of social assistance, remain the same, however, the conditions under which these principles are to be implemented change. How should we understand today, for example, the principle of individual autonomy requiring to exhibit respect for individual choices, hence also those regarding certain lifestyles that are not accepted by the majority of the society? Do we have the right to force drug addicts to undertake treatment or should we respect their craving to take intoxicating substances? Does the state have the right to take children away from their parents who refuse to take up a job by living solely on state benefits? How should we set the boundary between tolerance and permission for the evil?

These are all those questions that social pedagogy will have to answer, just as it did so in the past. From today's perspective, it is impossible to resist the impression that traditional social pedagogy was excessively paternalistic. Let us note that the very term "problem" makes us think of certain social phenomena as a disturbance of social order and harmony, which we should get rid of in order to restore the desired state of affairs in our social environment. Difficulties in the social functioning of an individual are, therefore, treated as a disorder of social order and, as it seems, the society that supports these individuals in solving their individual difficulties does, in fact, pursue not so much the interest of these individuals in question, but rather its own interests.

The issue of subjectivity in social pedagogy also requires re-thinking. Traditional social pedagogy is based on the belief of existence of "hidden" forces inherent in every human being, which - with an appropriate support from the social environment - can be extracted, thus enabling any individual to tap into the potential inherent in him or her<sup>11</sup>. At the very basis of this belief, however, lies the classic concept of a subject, according to which it is a coherent and homogeneous whole, devoid of internal contradictions, shaped by a series of events that make up his or her autobiography and, above all, who is the proper agent of all the volitional activities. Meanwhile, the contemporary postmodern philosophy has questioned this belief<sup>12</sup> (mainly because, among other things, it is not supported

11 M. Cichosz, *Pedagogika społeczna w toku przemian – wypracowane koncepcje, obszary badań – ciągłość i zmiana*, in: *Oblicza współczesności w perspektywie pedagogiki społecznej*, edited by W. Danilewicz, Warszawa 2009.

12 According to A. Mączkowska, the concept of an autonomous subject is at the centre of the contemporary philosophical and political discourse. It is a discourse "providing alibi to the political concepts in which the image of a universal freedom harmonizes with the totalizing vision of the social order". Compare with A. Mączkowska, *Podmiot i pedagogika...*, p. 17.



by the discoveries of modern sciences, e.g. psychoanalysis). Social sciences cannot be indifferent to critical arguments that undermine the legitimacy of the classic concept of a subject<sup>13</sup>.

I have mentioned above that as a result of rapid changes in the modern world, many new educational environments have emerged, which should become the subject of research on social pedagogy. The development of electronic means of communication means that for many individuals one of the most important educational environments today is the Internet. One should observe that as a social environment, the Internet is an educational ecosystem in the full sense of the word, because an individual establishes a number of social contacts through this medium and comes across a great amount of information and views, while also being able to express one's own beliefs and receive feedback from other users - in a nutshell, the subject here is exposed to the same social impacts as in the real world.

There is no doubt, therefore, that in the near future social pedagogy will have to take into account various changes caused by the popularisation of electronic means of communication (both negative and positive) in the educational environment of the present-day societies. The aim of this research should be, on the one hand, understanding how modern communication means exert an educational effect on the development of an individual, and on the other, identifying threats that may lead to the emergence of negative consequences in the functioning of the entire social environments in the future. These are both direct threats, such as violence in the cyberspace, pornography (including child pornography), the so-called grooming (seducing children online), distribution of drugs, activities of various sects online, etc., as well as indirect threats, such as Internet addiction, disappearance of interests due to the limitation of creative and active ways of spending free time, difficulties in establishing lasting social relationships, etc. While the threats of the first category are subject of research across various scientific disciplines, with certain actions being undertaken to protect children and the youth against such threats<sup>14</sup>, the impact of these indirect dangers on the social life of individuals is still impossible to be clearly determined. The Internet creates a form of reality which is parallel to the real world - one in which completely different rules apply: non-verbal communication is reduced to the very minimum, everyone is treated in the same way, so the sense of social disparities disappears, everyone can shape their own identity in any way, relationships between people are impermanent, one-sided communication is also possible (i.e. the formulation

13 It seems advisable to maintain the tradition of conventions of social educators, during which the place and tasks of social pedagogy in specific social conditions were discussed. The first such congress took place in Łódź in 1945, the next in Warsaw in 1975; subsequently, conferences devoted to particular problems of this discipline were held: the relationship between social pedagogy and social policy (1967), the history of social pedagogy (1979), the aspect of education in the conditions of political transformation (1981). Compare with A. A. Przecławaska, W. Theiss, *Pedagogika społeczna – dyskusji ciąg dalszy, „Problemy Opiekuńczo-Wychowawcze”* 1994, No. 8.

14 S. Taboń, *Niebezpieczny komputer i Internet*, in: *Zaniebane i zaniechane obszary edukacji w szkole*, edited by M. Suświłło, Olsztyn 2006, p. 338 et al.; P. Kwiatkowski, *Internet – szansa na rozwój kompetencji społecznych czy zagrożenie uzależnieniem?* in: *Czego obawiają się ludzie? Współczesne zagrożenia społeczne – diagnoza i przeciwdziałanie*, edited by M. Libiszowska-Żótkowska, Warszawa 2007, p. 358 et al.

of messages that are not addressed to a specific recipient), etc<sup>15</sup>. Undoubtedly, we are dealing here with long-term changes, probably irreversible, the diagnosis of which requires equally long-term research.

The effects of spending a lot of time in the cyberspace tend to cover all areas of the individual's life, however, they become the most visible within the family, which is the most important environment of life and education. Due to the development of modern communication technologies, the family has ceased to be a place where certain values and attitudes are passed to children, for they can learn these from the media and the Internet. All at the same time, the basic functions of the family environment have been reduced to satisfying essential mental needs and the needs related to the biological existence of an individual. For this very reason, the intergenerational gap deepens, with parents ceasing to stand as authorities for their children, whereas the behavioural patterns in particular areas of children's lives are becoming increasingly different from those of their parents' generation.

In addition to those changes in the functioning of the family, the Internet may exert negative consequences with regard to the social life as such. Any continuous contact with content that contains scenes of violence and cruelty may actually lead to a decline in one's ability to distinguish between the good and the evil, thus cementing indifference to other people's suffering. The superficiality and impermanence of social contacts may become the reason why local communities, which in any case are in quite poor condition in our country, might completely disintegrate, because the very groups that make up those communities will no longer be bound by real relationships<sup>16</sup>.

All this together might easily lead to unfavourable changes in the personality and social functioning of children and the youth (and the whole society in the near future) - a phenomenon which should be countered radically. Social bonds in the social environment are subject to weakening or even degenerating, and this is especially so in the context of family, which ceases to pursue educational functions<sup>17</sup>. Social pedagogy is not the only area with responsibility for action to eliminate such negative effects, but it also has an important role to play in this regard. What needs to be profoundly understood is, above all, the long-term educational influence of the Internet (and other electronic media) on various types of social environments. Since the Internet is able to influence so many different areas of the functioning of an individual, it may be possible in the future to actually take advantage of it and use it as a tool for a planned impact on the shape of the social environment and the development of individuals - thus using it as an educational measure.

In the last few decades, the family model has undergone a fundamental transformation, regardless of the development of the mass media, although they have undoubtedly accelerated this process. Though many families are still

15 B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Podstawy komunikowania społecznego*, Wrocław 2002, p. 22.

16 Education dangers related to the Internet are discussed by S. Kozak, *Patologie komunikowania w Internecie. Zagrożenia i skutki dla dzieci i młodzieży*, Warszawa 2011.

17 S. Koczy, *Rola nowych technologii informacyjnych w aspekcie patologii społecznych*, in: *Oblicza patologii społecznych*, edited by S. Bobas, Radom 2011, p. 157 et al.

struggling with “traditional” problems, which often lead to their disintegration, including violence, alcoholism or drug addiction, there have appeared also those families where certain roles ceased to apply, and members choose to treat themselves more like partners<sup>18</sup>. Hence, since there are no clear criteria to define the proper place and functions of individual family members today, it seems that it is no longer possible to speak about the concept of authority in relation to the family. Therefore, it seems advisable to distinguish between different external factors that have a destructive impact on the family and the processes of change that the modern family model is subject to.

Moreover, an unhindered and universal access to the Internet is an element of a wider issue, namely the impact of globalization on the contemporary educational environment. There is no doubt that globalization exerts a significant impact on this environment, and it should, therefore, become the subject of research undertaken by social educators. Globalization, understood as a process of international communication and trade, is not in principle a negative phenomenon, and a number of positive outcomes can be highlighted here<sup>19</sup> (including accelerated economic development, free market, increasing number of democratic countries, dissemination of modern means of communication<sup>20</sup>, etc.). However, as it stands, it also has a number of negative consequences for societies around the world<sup>21</sup>. Among these harmful effects of globalization one should mention, among others, increasing overpopulation in developing countries, which with limited resources leads to difficulties in satisfying basic living needs, growing debt of some states, enterprises and households, growing gap between the privileged elites and the poor masses, pollution, development of international criminal activities, etc.

Globalization is also the reason why the contemporary educational environment is much more diverse as compared to two or three decades ago. Thanks to modern information transmission methods and media, the present-day man can cherry-pick from a wide range of different, often mutually exclusive values, ideas, beliefs, attitudes and lifestyles. What is more, these ideas, values, etc. are not just a collection of ideological alternatives from among which we can freely choose, because they are often pitched at us by means of various types of propaganda activities and manipulation. In Poland, these ideological revolutions are even more dynamic than elsewhere, because changes associated with the recent political system transformation tend to overlap with those changes which

18 Research shows that the vast majority of women perceive themselves as equal partners in marriage. Dorota Lubet, *Kobieta jako równorzędna partnerka mężczyzny w małżeństwie i w rodzinie*, „Pedagogika Rodziny” 2011, No. 1, p. 164.

19 “It is necessary to insist - said Pope John Paul II - that globalization, like any other system, must serve the human person, must serve the solidarity and the common good”. Jan Paweł II, *Sprawiedliwość każdego człowieka źródłem pokoju dla wszystkich*, „L'Osservatore Romano” (Polish edition) 1998, No. 1, p. 5.

20 W. Grądzki, *Konteksty i wyzwania globalizacji*, „Edukacja i Dialog” 2004, No. 4, p. 32 et al.

21 Z. Bauman defines globalization as a “process of concentrating capital and other effective financial resources; also, and perhaps first and foremost, as a process of concentrating freedom of movement and action (two kinds of freedom which, for legitimate reasons, have become synonymous)”. Z. Bauman *Globalizacja. I co z tego dla ludzi wynika*, PIW, Warszawa 2000, p. 85.

are forced by the European integration and globalization processes<sup>22</sup>. Due to the latter, the contemporary educational environment is much more complex than in the period in which social pedagogy developed in Poland, which actually places social educators in a completely new situation.

One of the effects of globalization is the gradual weakening of the state's capacity to influence the social life of its society, which in turn leads, among others, to reducing the possibilities for the state to solve certain social problems. The social assistance and welfare system is, after all, one of the institutions of the state, and so it should be expected that with the weakening of the role of the state in the area of social life, the possibilities of this system might also be reduced. Social pedagogy and social work may, therefore, be in a precarious situation in which social problems grow, while at the same time real possibilities of solving these problems diminish. Certain endeavours are already undertaken to transfer certain state's tasks to other entities (mainly non-governmental organizations), yet we do not know at this moment whether these bodies will prove sufficiently effective in the future. Undoubtedly, the cooperation of state institutions and non-governmental organizations will become one of the most important areas of social pedagogy research in the near future. Taking all this into account, it seems understandable and necessary to postulate the need to develop a long-term programme of social policy reform to face those challenges the first symptoms of which are already visible and which in the near future might become the most pressing social problems. This programme should contain indications referring to both the social policy of the state and the non-governmental sector.

On the other hand, the reduced role of the state as the main factor capable of initiating targeted changes across social environments will be probably balanced by strengthening the possibilities of local communities. Thanks to this, central social policy might be complemented by the local policy. On the other hand, however, in our country, as I have repeatedly pointed out, local communities tend to be too weak to effectively support individuals who are not able to function properly in the society, and the role of local self-government still comes down primarily to performing certain care functions.

Due to the multidimensionality, pace and unpredictability of changes taking place in all the educational environments, another postulate can be formulated here, namely to return to the concept of schools as the centres interacting in the broadest way possible with the out-of-school environments of children and young people. The very idea of a school as a centre interacting in different ways with the entire local communities appeared in Poland already in the pre-war period (the so-called "Wolna Wszechnica Polska"), and in practice this model was attempted to be introduced in Poland during the communist period. However, during the period of political transformation, the tasks of the school as an institution were limited, practically speaking, only to the didactic sphere. Currently, especially in small, rural communities, schools remain the only institutions that can possibly influence the educational environment of individuals, transforming it in such

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22 Compare with P. Sztompka, *Fromm East – Europeas to Europeans: Changing Collective Identities and shifting boundaries in the New Europe*, "European Review" 2004, No. 4

a way so as to become friendlier to the development of such young people. This function can be effectively implemented only if the schools cooperate with other local institutions and organizations, such as the institutions for the promotion of culture and recreation, social support institutions, care facilities, workplaces as well as parishes.

Another consequence of globalization is unemployment, and more accurately speaking, the form of it that we are dealing with today. There are divergent opinions among the economists as to whether in the long-term globalization leads to an increase in the number of jobs or whether it causes higher unemployment. There is no doubt that the use of modern technologies has resulted in an increased employment in those countries where industries have implemented these modern technologies on a large scale. However, these were mainly jobs requiring high qualifications, while the number of positions not necessitating any specialist preparation did not in fact increase in the same period<sup>23</sup>. Yet, it can be presumed that this increase occurred mainly due to the computerization of individual sectors of the economy, hence it was transitory (which seems to be confirmed by the increase in the unemployment levels after the 2008 crisis).

In any case, due to globalization, a social group emerges which is composed of individuals with a low level of professional qualifications and whose chances of finding a job in an increasingly demanding labour market are continually decreasing. As the research shows, these people tend to remain unemployed for a long time, which only results in their social exclusion, even if they initially do undertake certain activities to find employment<sup>24</sup>. This means that social pedagogy will have to develop methods to activate not so much those unemployed and those threatened with social exclusion, but rather those already excluded. This method can constitute social work aiming at activating entire communities (and not, as up to now, only individuals)<sup>25</sup>.

However, the most critical issue facing social pedagogy in Poland in the near future is actually the gradual aging of the society, i.e. the so-called demographic crisis. Although social policy can significantly affect the birth rate, the change in the demographic structure of any society usually takes place in long time intervals. Hence, even if thanks to some decisive actions it was possible to reverse the situation and radically increase the birth rate, the effects of such an endeavour could only be felt in the distant future. There is no doubt, therefore, that regardless of what actions are undertaken at the moment, it is rather possible to state with a dose of certainty that there will be a number of social problems arising in our country as a result of the phenomenon of the aging society (including a decline in the standards of living associated with the necessity to decrease the amount

23 K. Żygulski, *Globalizacja procesów społeczno-gospodarczych*, in: *Międzynarodowe stosunki gospodarcze*, Warszawa 2000, p. 426 et al.

24 K. Faliszek, E. Leśniak-Berek, *Społeczność lokalna wobec problemu wykluczenia społecznego – organizowanie pomocy dla samopomocy*, „Acta Universitatis Lodzensis. Folia Sociologica” 2011, p. 38.

25 A supporter of the “renaissance” of environmental social work is M. Rymcza. M. Rymcza, *Aktywna polityka społeczna w teorii i praktyce*, in: *W stronę aktywnej polityki społecznej*, edited by T. Kaźmierczak, M. Rymczy, ISP, Warszawa 2003.

of retirement benefits, difficulties in accessing free health care, slowdown in the economic growth, etc.)<sup>26</sup>.

There are also serious social problems faced by developed countries that are unlikely to affect Poland in the foreseeable future. An example of such a problem is multiculturalism, immigration and social integration of national minorities. In multicultural societies, the principle of tolerance towards all sorts of minorities tends to be winning the supreme principle title that regulates the whole social life, because the society that does not show a tolerant attitude towards its minorities is not able to function as a whole. "The idea of tolerance", writes A. Borowiak, "is thus gaining the rank of a superior cultural value, a specific "first principle", that can enable an efficient and peaceful functioning of a post-modern society composed of extremely different units (culturally, ethnically, religiously, ideologically, etc.)"<sup>27</sup>. Following the Polish literature on the subject, it is rather difficult to resist the impression that in Polish social pedagogy there is still a lot of attention attached to the issue of integration of minorities, which, as it seems, is the result of striving to make up for the distance separating Polish social pedagogy and Western pedagogy. Meanwhile, there is no indication that Poland could become the target of migration in the foreseeable future, and so the problem of integrating minorities will probably play a marginal role<sup>28</sup>.

On the other hand, it also seems that the period in which certain attempts were made to copy Western patterns and solutions and transfer them into the Polish conditions is slowly coming to an end, at least in the context of social pedagogy. Moreover, Polish social educators recognize the very specificity of social problems in Poland in comparison with those of the most developed European countries. There is also the feeling that despite some similarities in social problems in Poland and in more developed countries, there is also a number of significant differences that simply might not be overcome in the foreseeable time perspective, as a result of which social pedagogy in Poland will only be able to use the experience of other countries to a limited extent.

There is also a whole range of social problems on which social pedagogy has no major impact, which, however, it can study and predict. These problems are related to those changes occurring in the society under the influence of specific objective factors, including, above all, the economic factors, i.e. an increase in the wealth levels of the society and the manner of its distribution. In turn, this wealth increase in conditions of liberal market economy is possible only when a strong middle class is formed<sup>29</sup>. The experience of those countries where this

26 In comparison with other European Union countries, the percentage of young people in Poland is still much lower. For demographic forecasts of the next two decades, see GUS, *Prognoza ludności na lata 2008–2035, 2009*, [www.stat.gov.pl](http://www.stat.gov.pl) [accessed 18.01.2012].

27 A. Borowiak, *Światopogląd postmodernistyczny, a postulat tolerancji*, in: *Tolerancja i wielokulturowość. Wyzwania XXI wieku*, edited by A. Borowiak, P. Szarota, Wydawnictwo SWPS Academica, Warszawa 2004, p. 42

28 In spite of many differences, the directions of migration over the last two decades have not changed. Compare with S. Castles, M. J. Miller, *The Age of Migration. International Population Movements in the Modern World*, MacMillan 1993.

29 The process of shaping the middle class in Poland during the transformation period is discussed by H. Domański. According to this author, in addition to numerous institutional



class has been being shaped for many decades shows that certain social problems can be solved by creating conditions by the state in which citizens can freely develop their own initiative and entrepreneurship. In Poland, the conditions for the development of individual free enterprises tend to be still more difficult than in many other countries, which is just another argument to support the idea of coordination of the state's activities in many different areas not related at first sight to social policy.

Despite the above-mentioned difficulties and challenges that social pedagogy will face in the future, the pessimism as to its ability to affect social life seems, in general, pretty much unfounded. Although many social problems cannot be solved and may not even be solved in the future, it would be unjust and unreasonable to state that social pedagogy as a practical activity turns out to be completely ineffective. If we look at the development of social pedagogy and social work from a historical perspective, it turns out that in the first periods of their existence the most important social problems required solutions to devastating working conditions. At that time, this problem seemed as difficult as many modern social problems, yet consequent endeavours to enact effective social legislation made the problem of degrading working conditions completely resolved in the developed countries. In highly advanced economies, certain social problems related to poverty, for example, are successfully resolved. A good example is the problem of homelessness, which in the vast majority of these countries has significantly decreased in the last few decades.

Also looking at the development of social pedagogy and social work in Poland, it cannot be denied that a significant progress has been made over the last quarter of the century. Both the legislative conditions and the functioning of aid institutions have changed for the better (among others, the number of social workers has increased many times). During this time, Polish social pedagogy has managed to acquire certain solutions developed in other countries, while at the same time effectuating a synthesis of achievements of the Polish social pedagogues and social pedagogy developed on the other side of the "Iron Curtain".

Educational catastrophism in the context of social pedagogy seems to be unjustified also because of the fact that pessimistic forecasts regarding the education, which were presented decades ago, actually turned out to be untrue. For example, the total disintegration and disappearance of the family as an educational environment was forecasted. Meanwhile, in reality, although the family has changed in many respects, with some of its functions disappearing (e.g. it is no longer preparing the children for the future professional activity, the number of incomplete families as well as informal relationships has increased and will probably continue to increase), it is still in existence as the most basic educational environment and there is no indication that it can ever disappear<sup>30</sup>.

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obstacles, a significant hindrance to this process were historical events: the period of the Polish People's Republic and, earlier, the period of partitions, during which the Polish intelligentsia believed that it had a national liberation mission. H. Domański, *Polska klasa średnia*, Wrocław 2002.

30 Compare with M. Gordon, *The Nuclear Family in Crisis: The Search for an Alternative*, New York 1972.

We are now in a period in which it has become clear to all that certain foreign patterns (both theoretical approaches and legislative solutions) are no longer effective in our conditions and, therefore, new possibilities for action should be sought. Some formal solutions that already exist in other countries will be implemented in Poland successively (e.g. privatization of social work or popularisation of social workers' supervision roles, etc.). However, there is no doubt that any automatic transfer of solutions to social problems from countries that can spend much more on social policy than Poland, will be ineffective due to the limited resources as well as the different type and scale of social problems.

Furthermore, even Poland's accession to the European Union did not mean that social problems in our country became smaller or that new ways of solving them suddenly appeared. Quite on the contrary, certain phenomena that emerged in Poland during the period of political transformation, such as the pauperization of large population groups and the social exclusion of the weakest, have not only remained, but have also become a permanent element of our social reality. Mass emigration of Poles in search of employment has, to some extent, mitigated the effects of high unemployment and poverty, yet, at the same time, it has also created a number of new problems. And because these negative phenomena seem to be of permanent nature in our country, they should be treated not so much as a temporary crisis which will soon be overcome (they were treated as such both during the transformation period and in the first years after Poland's accession to the EU), but as a permanent element of the educational environment.

The orientation of the care and social welfare system in Poland mainly for providing direct support to individuals, whose biological survival would be impossible without such assistance from the state, is actually the aftermath of the transformation period, as a result of which large social groups that are unable to cope with the new reality appeared<sup>31</sup>. As I have already mentioned, the Act on social assistance of 1997 in practice did not contribute to the changing of the way the system works<sup>32</sup>. The new Act on social assistance of 2004 was supposed to adapt the operation of the Polish system to the standards of the European Union, so that the activation of those excluded would become a priority. Yet, again, it does not seem that the desired changes have ever taken place<sup>33</sup>. What, then, is the main obstacle to the introduction of these changes?

One can risk a thesis that the main factor inhibiting the introduction of changes, which are quite successfully introduced in other countries, is a certain type of attitude present in our society, both on the side of the institutions providing

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31 Compare with M. Rymsza, *Reformy społeczne lat dziewięćdziesiątych. Próba podsumowania*, in: *Reformy społeczne. Bilans dekady*, edited by M. Rymsza, Instytut Spraw Publicznych, Warszawa 2004.

32 Compare with M. Rymsza, *Praca socjalna i pracownicy socjalni po drugiej reformie samorządowej z 1999 r.*, in: *Wielowymiarowość pracy socjalnej*, edited by K. Frysztacki i K. Piątka, Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne „Akapit”, Toruń 2002.

33 Compare with M. Rymsza, *Rola służb społecznych w upowszechnianiu aktywnej polityki społecznej*, in: *Aktywizacja. Partnerstwo. Partycypacja. O odpowiedzialnej polityce społecznej*, edited by M. Grewiński, J. Tyrowicz, Mazowieckie Centrum Polityki Społecznej, Warszawa 2007.

assistance and the very individuals and groups benefiting from such support. Therefore, along with formal and institutional changes, the mentality of the society should also alter. In the approach of the Polish people, there is still too much conviction that the state or, more broadly, the community is obliged to provide certain benefits to the individual, who in turn has the right to make certain claims towards the state. This “communal” way of thinking about the social reality is undoubtedly the legacy of the past, but with new conditions present, it is actually one of the main factors that keeps individuals and entire communities in a state of learned helplessness.

Social pedagogy is in this respect in a special situation, because its subject matter is not so much about the individuals as entities actively shaping themselves, but rather about the environment and its impact on such individuals. The basic assumption of social pedagogy is the thesis about the individuals' dependence on their social environment. Social pedagogy, therefore, tries to shape such a social environment in a way that it favours the development of a person, abstracting in some sense from the fact that the person in question is not entirely a product of his or her social environment, but remains an autonomous subject capable of conscious self-development while opposing the environmental pressure. The fact that the institutional help covering entire social groups leads, in effect, to the emergence of dependence on the assistance and the disappearance of individual activity should in the future encourage social educators to seek such forms of support that will not generate separate problems for the whole society.

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