

Social policy - An Introduction



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Politicking and governance

The term 'politicking' has two, fundamental meanings. The first one is applied to the struggle of different groups to gain power over society and its subsequent expansion and consolidation. The second relates to power, not as an end, but rather as a means with which to achieve other objectives, such as sustainable and multi-dimensional development with the participation of – and for – everyone. The distinction in English corresponds to the difference in meaning between the terms *politics* and *policy*. In Polish, the first aspect may be considered politicking and the second, governance. In the first, political parties are in competition with one another for votes (in the case of a political democracy); once the race concludes and a government (or a coalition) is established, the governance phase commences during which hard law – and in recent times soft law, or laws that are not threatened with negative sanctions or public administration when violated

– play a very important role. It is a service provided by the state and law (hence the term 'civil service') which is controlled by amendments or by politicians from different parties wielding only public, state or local authority.

Traditionally, social policy has always been connected with governing rather than politicking, meaning the legal and technical aspects of solving social problems, rather than with their ideological and political dimensions. This corresponds to the view that objectives are determined in a democratic political process (including political agendas and government discussion documents such as White and Green Papers as well as in ultimately adopted strategies); only in later stages of governance (state objective implementation programmes) there is a more rational analysis initiated that focuses on the question of how to achieve objectives that have been set out and their instrumental assessment. Organisational and executive activities occur at the end of the entire process in which public administration has traditionally played the most important role.

In social policy, activity may be schematically divided into several, wider areas:

- 1) Organisational and regulatory – protecting public order, issuing prohibitions, orders, permits, issuing licenses, concessions, allowances, overseeing the implementation of rights and responsibilities, imposing fines;
- 2) Welfare – providing benefits to citizens in the form of services, goods, money;
- 3) Managing development – measures to increase regional cohesion, support underdeveloped and peripheral areas.

Social policy is, to the greatest extent, connected to another area of public administration: social welfare. It represents a solution to the problems and the implementation of objectives specific to societies in which groups residing in cities also increasingly depend on work in industry and service sectors to support themselves within a free-market capitalist economy.

Social policy is also the implementation of organisational and regulatory activities. When labour market regulations were first introduced in the nineteenth century as a response to the emerging problems of the labour market which was established at the time and which prohibited child labour and reduced the length of the working day (initially to ten hours), work inspection was brought into effect. Its purpose was and currently is to monitor,

supervise and enforce labour standards. This developed significantly in the twentieth century and is reflected at the international level with more than 180 conventions of the International Labour Organisation.

Social policy has much in common with the politics of development, specifically that which deals with redistribution and supporting underdeveloped and marginalised areas. Many issues which seem entirely natural within society, such as the redistribution of resources from rich to poor in order to improve conditions, are transferred from households to larger centres of population – to differently scaled local communities or regions. Development is understood broadly in this context, taking into account three basic dimensions: economic, social and environmental, as well as issues of long-term sustainability which are reflected in Poland's Constitution and the Lisbon Treaty. As far as we know, the main thread of social policy is, first and foremost, social welfare: an answer to the problems that became common in the industrial era.

Public services

A characteristic feature of social welfare is that it is provided upon legal grounds and within the scope of the law. Citizens entitled to receive welfare are not required to pay for it, or may pay out a portion, which implies that the means of providing benefits must be at least supplemented in relation to those citizens which are affected by its provision. They come primarily from taxes – direct, indirect, general or specific – as well as from mandatory contributions and other fees of this type. This also indicates that planning has a significant meaning in managing welfare: how much must be provided and to whom? How much will it cost the whole of society, the region, the local community?

A typical example of social-based welfare is healthcare (including medical rehabilitation and the supply of rehabilitation equipment) and teaching. The first is essential, especially if there is vast potential to effectively treat various diseases and save lives. To use simple market logic in this area – every person has the kind of healthcare he or she is able to afford – means the fact is accepted that certain people (who could be cured and whose lives could be prolonged) will be deprived of medical treatment. This is hard to accept on the basis of basic humanity, however there are also other arguments in favour of treating these diseases (especially infectious diseases) which result in people being or becoming unable to work.

Education is not only a right, but also an obligation of citizens of a certain age. In practice, this means free tuition for primary and secondary school and occasionally, higher learning institutions. At present, reading, writing and counting skills are so fundamental, that people without these skills have extremely limited opportunities to participate in the labour market and in other social activities.

For various reasons, school education (general and vocational), may not be enough to find one's own place in the world of work. Benefits also play an important role: job centre employment services, and careers advice and training which allows people to become qualified and gain new competences. They are offered as a form of social welfare specifically to the unemployed or to those who have unsuccessfully attempted to find work. The more we care about encouraging occupational development for people who have smaller chances of employment and who are less motivated to do so, the greater the range of employment services which can be offered and which could also include counselling, social support, social and vocational rehabilitation, work training, impact on hiring, as well as additional services (such as child care, labour assistance).

In recent decades, support services have become increasingly important for families who care for and raise children (institutional care nurseries and kindergarten), for elderly care (day care centres, nursing services) or for complete relocation such as into foster families, orphanages (the official name in Poland is 'całodobowe placówki opiekuńczo-wychowawcze typu socjalizacyjnego' – 24h social, residential care and education institutions), family care homes or nursing homes (institutional care for the elderly and the mentally ill). The importance of these services is increasing for several reasons. Firstly, marriage has become less popular and less stable. Therefore, the number of children in single-parent families has increased; there are more divorces and remarriages; family ties and responsibilities are becoming weaker. Secondly, the scale of female occupational development has increased which, in a conservative society (normally the type of care that is a burden to women without the provision of services to better help unite education and career aspirations with caring for dependent family members), means that fewer and fewer children are being born and that there is an increase in the number of elderly without adequate care.

Several new professions have emerged as a result of the development of service-based welfare: therapists, carers, advisors, mediators and social officials. One of the most important in the context of social and family support is

social work with its three methods: individual counselling and/or therapy (social casework), counselling and/or group therapy (social group work), and animation/community organisation (community work). The professionalization of social work in Poland entered a new stage in the 1960s; however, it grew dynamically after 1989 together with a departure from the concept of social welfare in favour of social assistance and social work. However, the breakthrough only came in the first decade of the twenty-first century, when the ideas of active integration began to be more firmly promoted; a transformation occurred and it was no longer necessary to safeguard social work with public welfare. Perhaps, to a lesser extent, this occurred as a result of the establishment of development services; to a greater extent, as a result of a more restrictive approach to pensions.

Cash benefits

Perhaps the most recognisable sign of social policy are cash benefits; however, it is a mistake to identify them exclusively with a system of social security income. From 1933 – 1939, during the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the United States, a programme of reform was introduced as a response to the Great Depression, called the New Deal. It not only introduced unemployment benefits and social security, but also introduced a massive public works programme creating new jobs and increasing domestic demand in an economy in crisis. A discussion on modern social policy began when, in the 1880s, Germany introduced a national system of compulsory insurance for workers. Financial benefits were guaranteed (sickness, disability, retirement – from the age of 70 (the average age at the time did not exceed 40)) in the event of temporary or permanent incapacity to work due to illness, accident, or once old age was reached. These were typical social risks in the industrial era. In the twentieth century, other active professional groups were added to the insurance system (including entrepreneurs) as well as new risks, particularly unemployment and, at times, infirmity (the necessity of long-term care of the elderly).

Social security can be distinguished from other types of security on the basis of the range of risks which typical situations encompass making it difficult or impossible to work, and which threaten poverty and responsibility. It is different from other benefits in the manner of vesting (paying premiums for a required period) and the presence of risk, without the conditions pertaining to low income.

After social security had been extended to all productive sectors of society (labourers, workers, civil servants, businessmen, farmers) and to every social risk, little space remained for helping the poor which was a predominant issue at the time prior to insurance. This applied especially to industrial societies in the thirty years following World War II, when unemployment had ceased to be an important social problem. Social aid was considered a supplement to social security (for those who had not earned insurance benefits) and, at the same time, significantly differed from the aid which existed prior to the twentieth century. Cash benefits are currently less discretionary in nature and the amount is usually well-defined. It is possible to appeal the decision to a body if it is considered to be groundless. However, low income is still the primary criteria for receiving benefits, and more generally, a small amount of material wealth. In Poland, one more constraint is yet added, as receiving benefits is subject to a visit and family environment interview conducted by a social worker at the home of the person who is applying for benefits.

The exception to this rule in Poland pertains to family benefits – primarily family allowances and additions. These require only a confirmation of a poor income situation (in other countries, these are universal benefits which do not require low income conditions to be met) and other qualifying conditions (connected with children).

Several kinds of financial benefits are not insurance or assistance benefits, so entitlement to them does not require a contribution period or the fulfilment of the criteria for being poor. Such benefits are assigned to specific categories of people, such as to those who have been disabled since youth and who were not able to earn insurance benefits. An example of this in Poland is the social pension. Entitlement to it requires confirmation of disability by a doctor specialised in judging these matters. Unemployment benefits in Poland are not a type of insurance, however many are heading that way. Employers pay a contribution to the Labour Fund and previous employment is required from the unemployed, however the benefit amount is not dependent on the amount of pay but on other conditions; among other things, it decreases with the length of the payment period and may be higher or lower for certain unemployment categories.

The existence of several financial benefits operating on different bases is the reason that problems exist when coordinating them (what may be combined with what and when, and why not? What benefit types may be combined with paid work and on what terms?). A good example of this in Poland was the proposal that persons receiving

social pensions and on the grounds of incapacity to work could combine them with another salary without restrictions (currently, after receiving a certain amount of income, pension benefits are suspended). However, this was vetoed on the grounds that a pension is intended to be compensation for the inability to work and not constitute an additional wage for the disabled. Such an approach, in turn, makes the occupational development of the disabled very difficult, among whom there is only a relatively small number of cases resulting in a complete inability to work.

For a long time, there have been discussions in the Western World about what conditions that should be met by someone who is applying for social benefits. Cash benefits provided to persons who are able to work without the right to social insurance benefits have been particularly controversial. Is household poverty enough in their situation? Should an additional constraint be added to this (as in the case of Polish social aid)? Should requirements be introduced for certain behaviour such as searching for work (a typical condition for financial benefits for the unemployed), visits to doctors (implemented in Poland in the event of pregnant women who wish to receive a one-off allowance for the birth of a child, so called a 'baby bonus'), or to ensure that children attend school and not be truant (such as in Mexico and Brazil)? Problems such as these are more important in areas where there is a developed and comprehensive social policy that provides a high level of occupational activity and employment. Even then, to a lesser extent, there is the problem of social aid to persons who are able to work, because the unemployed are served by social security and established systems for development.

After the golden era of social policy development

The welfare system described above constitutes the backbone of modern, developed social policy. Due to the fact that it encompasses all the stages of life of all citizens, we are dealing with a state that, in countries which developed after World War II, started to be called a *welfare state*. When rendered into Polish, the first word constitutes problems, and is often translated as 'opiekuńcze' (caring). It cannot be linguistically justified ('opieka' in English is 'care'), and it is also not tactical in a Polish context. The term 'social care' is no longer used in Poland (officially and educationally), and it equally has never applied to the whole of social policy, but only to a part which is currently called social aid (the Welfare Act of 1923 was replaced by the Welfare Act of 1990). Translating

the term *welfare* as 'dobrobyt' (*well-being or welfare*) in Polish suggests a prosperous state without adequately emphasising its active role in shaping the conditions of economic activity or the large scope of the redistribution of wealth generated by it.

The term *state* also creates problems – not linguistically, however – in relation to the reforms which were initiated by the alleged crisis of the welfare state, as well as with other processes such as globalisation and decentralisation. The crisis of the welfare state was announced in the early 1980s, and was not related to contemporary economic troubles, the criticism of the (capitalist) state in general, and universal social services in particular. The right-wing neoliberals put, above all else, the ideal of the free market, arguing that the extensive social state generates more problems than it resolves. On the other hand, left-wing criticism specifically articulated by the new social movements (student, feminist, anti-racist, environmental, etc.) expressed a growing distrust of the capitalist state as a tool for achieving the objectives of radical politics.

Therefore, from the 90s, a replacement was not only sought for the term *welfare* (the most popular term in this case was the neologism *workfare* with an emphasis on occupational development), but also for the term *state*, i.e. a less interchangeable term such as *regime* or *system*, or one that had already expressed a clear preference towards changes to the main body of social policy; rather than a state, a society is proposed. In the most radical representation, the terms *welfare* and *state* both vanish; an alternate term, *workfare society*, has been proposed, for example, as suggested by the government report, *Poland 2030*.

In the history of social policy, the following three decades commencing with the 1980s are called the years of restraint (retrenchment) – in contrast to the golden era of post-war development. Despite rumours that the irrevocable end of the *welfare state* has come and the only step remaining is to deconstruct or replace it with something else entirely, nothing to this day has occurred. Institutions of social policy have proven to be extremely resistant to wave after wave of hostile rhetoric and the subsequent crises of the globalised world. Resistance pertained to concluding impulses rather than to reforms in general, and these were carried out primarily under the influence of an ideology called the new public management. It critically referred to the entire public administration organised on the basis of Weber's principles of hierarchical organisation. The primary message was not so much its maximum limits, but applying known formulas from the private business sector

within its operation. One of the difficult terms to translate from this approach is *enterprising state*, or the rather inarticulate 'uprzedsiębiorczenie' ('enterprisation') of the state. The new public management gained great popularity in English-speaking countries and subsequently infiltrated other developing states and transitioned to Europe and beyond. It applies to reformist discourse and the practice of public sector reforms, including social policy.

Within the internal functioning of social policy, much has changed. For example, various market mechanisms were introduced with increasingly greater participation in management and in providing benefits to the private sector with decentralised public responsibility and soft regulation (standards, quality standards, and self-regulation). Such commercialisation does not mean the elimination of the social rights of citizens connected with them or of the obligation to provide certain benefits or to leave everything to the market, family or charity. In addition to this, the market can operate in various ways within the different sectors of social welfare, strengthening the position of different groups such as private entities, public regulation entities or groups which receive benefits. In every instance, however, the position of the professional groups that directly provide services visibly weakens: doctors, teachers, social workers, employment agents, etc.

Another important reformist theme is the increasing pressure to strengthen the influence social policy has over employment opportunities, especially education (better interaction with the world of work) and financial benefits for people of a working age (stronger incentives to work).

Social policy has always been based on the assumption that everyone who is able to work should work, and that supporting those who are unemployed and able to work should be further justified. Radical critics of social policy have proposed something different altogether – a universal citizen income which removes or significantly reduces the financial compulsion to work (at least for citizens or permanent residents). Basic education and health services may be considered a way to equip those who are unable to work with general and specific professional skills that may help them return to work. Well-defined social risks represented typical situations in which people, from no fault of their own, were not able to work and support themselves and, as a result, it was necessary to provide them with temporary or permanent income security. Scandinavian countries, known for having the most generous and costly welfare systems, had and presently have the highest employment rates and labour force participation.

An important prerequisite for developed social policy is, therefore, a high level of occupational and professional development. This does not, naturally, depend (first and foremost) on social policy, even if education is included, but on economic policy, specifically employment policy. It is meant to ensure, through economic development – which is constantly changing under the influence of technological progress, globalisation and other factors – enough jobs so that everyone willing and able to work is able to find high-quality employment.

Structural changes in economies:

- a) shifting the profile from agriculture, via industry, to services,
- b) technological revolutions that make whole economic sectors disappear and new sectors appear,
- c) a significant increase in labour productivity,
- d) economic globalisation and the free flow of capital and – less constrained – migrant workers,
- e) and the occupational development of women

made the modern world of work different from what it had been. The prevailing view is that, due to these changes, labour law reforms and social benefits are necessary for people of a working age, able-bodied and disabled, although able to work. The main trend of labour law reform is to make it more flexible which, in simple terms, means that the restrictions placed upon hiring and permissions for atypical forms of employment are reduced. Various forms of flexibility apply to hiring and firing, as well as to the internal organisation and to outsourcing work. Contractual employment, according to the principles of labour law, is typical for an unspecified amount of time, full-time, or with full entitlements. In connection with making reform more flexible, problems began to be highlighted within the labour market which was segmented (good quality work and poor or very poor quality work), as well as with the generational inequalities and the general, growing uncertainty associated with it (precarization, precariat).

Changes to the system of service-based pro-employment benefits for people of a working age are dependent upon them being expanded into what is now called active labour market programmes. On the other hand, cash benefit reforms pertained to parameters such as initial

conditions, amount, length of payment period or the ability to combine them with employment. They were introduced in the hope that a community, which found itself worse-off in terms of employment, would be more motivated to look for and find work in this way. However, without ensuring attractive offers of employment, little changes with such actions. It is possible that the situation may worsen if the people motivated to seek employment do not find a suitable job offer, in turn, decreasing motivation.

From the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, a solution to the problem of unemployment, segmentation and job uncertainty has slowly emerged in the flexibility of labour law and with extending employer freedom. An intensive investment of public funds in effective and active labour market programmes has accompanied it, however, while ensuring social security and appropriate incentives in the system of financial benefits. This model has been called flexicurity. The term combines the definitions of flexibility and security. As employees and those out of work, we may agree that the quality of work has deteriorated (more atypical forms of employment, more employer freedoms), however, under the condition that the result will not be an increase in exploitation and a reduction in the mobility of low-quality segmented work for that of higher-quality work. The question is whether it can be achieved. The main risk lies in the fact that more flexibility will exist, however the remaining elements of flexicurity will remain underdeveloped, weakening the position of workers and all of its negative consequences: exploitation, job uncertainty, polarisation, exclusion and risks associated with them, without any compensation in the form of increased security.

Where are we heading?

It is difficult to answer the question which pertains to a common direction of change, because social policy is a combination of various regulations and benefits spreading itself out into wider areas of health care, education, job market services, social work and social security. Even if a similar set of ideas permeates reform mentality, their application into different areas may result in various consequences. The energy of new public management along with the belief in the potential of reform competition seems to be dwindling; however, it may be that the effects of these reforms will continue to remain with us. Alternatives are increasingly being suggested such as a Neo-Weberian state (reverting to public administration with its specific organisation and values) or a new public governance with great emphasis placed on networks and

partnerships. Stemming from this may be: a more or less participatory model for forming social policy at different scales (from local to European and world-wide), more or less restricted and diversely operating competition in providing benefits and the role of the public sector adapted to it.

A greater emphasis on occupational development in social policy will most likely remain, primarily because of the demographic and financial context. However, development may be implemented with emphasis on at least two different ways. Firstly, to mainly impact the system of financial benefits, so that those able to work would have no other option but to accept any job, regardless of the quality, so long as it was legal. Secondly, to develop benefits in the form of services, called 'employability', which are intended to provide improvements. The first strategy carries with it the motto: 'work, first and foremost, as soon as possible', while the second: 'it is most important to build work potential in the long term'. Horizontal health and education policies exist in the background.

In recent years, there has also been the political proposal to implement the Green New Deal, which has been specifically and intensively developed within the European Union. This Green New Deal builds upon the experience of both the New Deal of the 1930s and the post-war welfare state. With these concepts, the European Green Party has indicated the necessity of integrating economic, social and environmental policy, recognising the ecosystem aspect as a new policy element which strongly determines the remaining two elements. Climate change, the depletion of raw materials and energy, and the reduction of universal access to water and food resources are increasingly affecting the development of twentieth century social and economic policy.

In *Zielony Nowy Ład w Polsce* (*The Green New Deal in Poland*), which is a book about social development published in 2010, we attempt to discuss how traditional problems of social policy combine with important issues in Green politics.

SOCIAL POLICY – developed by Dariusz Szwed and Bartłomiej Kozek

Unsustainable	Sustainable, green
Elite: inequality (and even an increase in it) is treated as a stimulator of development, privatisation of public services	Egalitarian: equality as a key principle of sustainable development, smart reduction of inequalities as a way to achieve development goals
Not solidary: a low level and narrow range of investment, most often of selective, public services	Solidary: a high level of investment and wide range of public services, with a prevalence of universal services (assigned to citizenship, not income)
Focus on treating the effects of social problems and damage and the higher costs which arise from them (including high external costs)	Focus on prevention: preventing social problems and damage, lower total costs (including external costs)
Absence of external social costs in the analysis and implementation of policy, full costs awarded against perpetrators, such as the health costs of air pollution borne by citizens, and not by power plants which emit toxic chemicals	Internalisation of external social costs in the analysis and implementation of social policy in accordance with the principle: 'the polluter/person who causes the damage, pays'
Failure to follow safety procedure to a full extent	Safety procedures as an important part of social policy
Assessment of development on the basis of primarily macroeconomic quantitative indicators such as GDP, number of hospital beds and expenditure on medication	Expanding the set of integrated, quality and sustainability indicators, such as the Human Development Index (HDI), and Sustainable Society Index (SSI)
As a basis for social policy, economic growth is measured by the growth of GDP	Integrated indicators for sustainable development as a better illustration of the durability of implemented development strategy
Ideological social policy, including health care, through predominant doctrine or dominant religion (i.e. the free market doctrine, or the doctrine stating that life begins at conception)	Social policy, including health care, is neutral to world-views and religion and is based on scientific evidence
The economics of care and domestic work remain in the private sphere	The economics of care and domestic work are considered in social policy
There is a lack or low level of gender mainstreaming	Gender mainstreaming is a key element of social policy
Human capital and its development as a dominant element of social policy and is based primarily on competition	Ties between people, health and competence of people and capital: the social and human elements are considered to be equal in social policy
A low intensity and culture of cooperation with social partners, shifting public tasks to NGOs	A high intensity and culture of cooperation with social partners, joint implementation of public tasks on the principles of partnership
A low level of public participation in creating policies, a low level of social, civic and political activity	A high level of public participation in creating policies as well as social, civic and political activity

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