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Researching Capitalism In Poland: Economic Interests As A Cultural Construction

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Abstract

Purpose: The three goals of the article are: first, to show some arguments surrounding the notion of capitalism in theoretical perspective, and also somewhat bashful connotations since it was introduced in Poland after the fall of communism; second, to present some historical facts about the rise of capitalism in Poland in comparative perspective, mostly European; third, to look for cultural categories necessary for analysing the peculiarities of Polish socio-economic development as the part of so-called „the second Europe".

Methodology: I go back to the history of European patterns of capitalist formation: Anglo-Saxon, French, German, Russian in order to show the Polish trajectory as strikingly different. Before entering the Polish case, I present Mary Douglas and Aaron Widavsky's proposal – how to analyze four cultures: individualist, egalitarian, hierarchical and fatalistic (authoritarian).

Implications: The main finding is that economic interests are always socio-cultural constructions, hence all definitions of the real life decisions (on public vs private, risk, externalities etc.) that the people make, must frame them within working life of given culture as the combination of universalism and particularism (of above-mentioned four cultures).

Keywords: capitalism vs market-private economy, economic growth vs economic development, institutional patterns of capitalism, "Second Europe", cultural theory of economic interests, four cultures, individualism, egalitarism, hierarchy, fatalism

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Goals

When writing this article, I set myself three goals. First of all, I wished to explore the very notion of capitalism present in the public discourse in Poland since 1989. Poles are somewhat bashful about using this term because of its unfortunate connotations: it was first associated with the shocks of neoliberal transformation, and later, since 2015, with efforts made to repair the damage caused by it. My second aim was to retrace the institutional development of capitalism in other countries, to compare and explain the causes of Poland's economic backwardness and point to some external factors that have contributed to relegating our economy to the semi-periphery.

Thirdly, I intended to look for cultural categories necessary for analysing the peculiarities of our development, given that theories of economic growth or economic and social development may prove inadequate for the task. After all, they have been developed in the West and, as a consequence, often fail us in the analysis of the so-called 'second Europe' of which Poland is an important part. Hence, I wish to prove that a thorough analysis of the relationship between economy and politics compels us to recognize the importance of socio-cultural factors. It seems particularly important in the case of Poland where, since 1956 these factors have been the main trigger of changes in all spheres of life. In 1989, at the moment of the geopolitical implosion of communism, they shaped the country's systemic transformation. All economic decisions are social constructs. Polish society, like any other, is culturally divided and its members represent different ways of life. I use the typology developed by the English anthropologist Mary Douglas and by the American political scientist Aaron Wildavsky in order to analyse the functioning of the following four cultures: hierarchy (or hierarchical collectivism), egalitarianism (equality of living conditions, solidarity), individualism (equality of opportunities) and fatalism (authoritarianism, apathy). Although cultures divide people, there is ample evidence that testifies to the possibility of cultural pluralism, or the existence of coalitions of cultures.

Capitalism: the first attempt at defining the concept

Some associate capitalism with exploitation, or at least with unjustified socio-economic inequalities; others, on the contrary, equate it with mechanisms that allow one to accumulate material wealth and give one access to new opportunities. We could also look at this concept in an all-encompassing manner; in this context, let us quote two statements. Meghnad Desai: "Despite the suffix – ism, 'capitalism' refers neither to an ideology nor a movement. It refers, if anything, to a set of economic and legal institu-

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tions, that together make the production of things for private profit the normal course of economic organization" (Desai, 2001, p. 108). Fernand Braudel: "In general (and only in general), capitalism is a manner in which the investment game is usually played, normally with limited altruistic motives", while a capitalist is "someone managing or trying to manage the introduction of capital into a continuous production process, which is the fate of all societies" (Braudel, 2013, p. 63).

Needless to say, this approach to capitalism is divisive, hence the appearance of more ecumenical concepts, such as the market-private economy, highly developed economy, the age of modern economic growth. Ultimately, even if we accept the term 'capitalist liberal democracy', it is strongly suggested that the world is rapidly approaching the era of happiness, also known as 'the end of history' (Fukuyama, 2001, p. 201–203). In the end, such naïve proposals are always rejected. This is why many authors and scholars prefer to distinguish between two concepts, i.e. capitalism and market economy, each designating slightly different aspects of the same phenomenon. For the above quoted economic historian Fernand Braudel, market economy is the economy of everyday exchanges involving 'no surprises', in which each party knows 'the rules in advance'; it ought not to be equated with capitalism, which is characterised by a sophisticated exchange among fiercely competitive companies and 'based on monopolies' (Braudel, 2013, p. 141–143). According to this author, the market is a 'hidden benevolent god', or 'Adam's Smith invisible hand' (Braudel, 2013, p. 57), while capitalism comes from above and from outside, only to subjugate us in a vicious manner. It is a system of various asymmetries and related uncertainties, risks and crises. Others have formulated ethically neutral definitions of capitalism: they perceive it as neither moral nor anti-moral, but rather amoral (Comte-Sponville, 2012, p. 135–141).

Poles are aware of social tensions generated by capitalism and, since 1989, have referred to this notion reluctantly and with a certain degree of uneasiness. Some associated it with the so-called shock therapy. This model has been criticized globally since the crisis of 2007–2008, and in Poland since 2015, that is, since the electoral victory of Law and Justice party. Nevertheless, the new rhetoric that emerged after the 2007–2008 crisis cannot keep calling for relinquishing any regional and global interdependencies. This would undermine the economic interests of both old and new actors on the global market. Hence the numerous attempts at redefining the situation. In the global arena, some phenomena seem a constant. In the 19 century, the UK could not prevent the rise of power of Germany, and now the US is powerless in the face of China's growing might and it can no longer disregard the EU or numerous smaller economic and political actors (Kotkin, 2018). Let us emphasize here that the values and interests of society in

Poland and other Eastern European countries have had much better chances of being advanced in circumstances that came into being after the demise of communism.

Old hierarchies and capitalists

Capitalism cannot exist without capitalists. Their number grew at a pace proportional to their social status, as they became recognized within the existing social order and granted a new place within society. This process slowly developed since the 16th century, when the so-called merchant capitalism was born. In *The Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776, Adam Smith refers to the concept of a 'merchant republic'. The notion of capitalism itself appears as late as in 1854, used by the English writer William Makepeace Thackeray, the author of *Vanity Fair*. Merchant capitalism developed in the West within old feudal structures, which generally favoured it, although not everywhere, for instance, it was eagerly embraced in England, but not in Spain. In Poland and in the countries of Eastern Europe, these processes were hampered, and therefore unravelled at a much slower pace. Capitalism required the establishment of institutions that would provide certain guarantees to capitalists. Probably already by the end of the 18th century, and certainly in the 19th century, such institutions operated throughout Western Europe. They are called democracy. Let us note, then, that capitalism is older than democracy. This allows us to venture the following conjecture: capitalism was a prerequisite for democracy, as capitalism was able to 'generate' a sufficient number of democrats able to maintain democracy.

How did capitalism come about? Some consider it the product of the laws or forces of history, regarded as rational or progressive. Such is the position among others of Weber (who emphasize the role of religion in the development of capitalism), and Marx (who insist on socio-material interests as the decisive factor). Others claim the opposite to be true: they see capitalism not as the outcome of general human progress, but rather an incidental consequence of removing barriers that used to hinder the process of accumulating wealth by representatives of new social strata. These barriers were removed slowly and for various reasons. The most important were legal guarantees protecting new types of private property, but they could not be permanent without institutions providing representation and political participation for new social classes, i.e. the parliament, independent judiciary, the division of power, etc.

What were those new social strata? In feudal societies, these were groups situated on the social ladder somewhere between the nobility or aristocracy and the peasantry, i.e. old middle classes: merchants, townspeople, craftsmen, the bourgeoisie. Their

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history goes back a long way, further back than the history of capitalism, but they had remained absent from the political scene until the 16th century. Changes started in the West and unfolded there at a much faster pace than in Eastern Europe. In the West, they were mostly associated with the activity of merchant capitalists, whose undertakings usually involved taking great risks. It is evidenced by trade expeditions organized in the 17th century by the English and the Dutch, who sailed as far as South-East Asia to acquire exotic produce and spices. The expeditions of English East India Company and Dutch East India Company (Fulcher, 2015) provide ample evidence of how this system worked. These two were emblematic institutions of merchant capitalism.

The old order was founded on relatively simple principles: there were higher classes, i.e. feudal lords (gentry, aristocracy), contemptuous about working or dealing with money, and low classes – peasantry, usually treated with callousness, even though in a number of European countries peasants were free. Higher classes interacted with middle classes, and eventually even with peasants, in a variety of configurations. The erosion of the old order gathered pace along with the processes of industrialization, in particular since the 1820s, when modern economic growth came into being. New middle classes appeared and industrial capitalists found themselves at the top of the social ladder.

What made new social forces so attractive? In the Antiquity, Aristotle commended the middle stratum of society for its alleged moderation and sense. Such considerations might have been important in certain circumstances, but certainly not sufficient. For instance, in the situation of demographic threat following the great plague (1346–1350), economic stimuli became a way to foster the development of capitalist enclaves (North and Thomas, 1973). Fernand Braudel described these shifts within the hierarchy as follows: "To be or not to be of capitalism depends on its confrontation with different hierarchies. Within each society, several hierarchies exist. They are the stairs that allow one to escape the ground floor populated by the masses, Werner Sombart's *Gruntvolk*. There are religious, political and military hierarchies, as well as various financial hierarchies. Depending on the time and place, these hierarchies may oppose one another, work out compromises or create alliances; sometimes, they slide into chaos" (Braudel, 2013, p. 87). Principles underlying the existing hierarchy were breached in many different ways, most interestingly through the combination of hierarchy and freedom within the rule of law, that is, through gradually extending the freedoms enjoyed by social strata situated below the aristocracy or nobility on the social ladder. In England, Magna Charta Libertatum, adopted in 1215, guaranteed certain rights, or elements of freedom within what is called the rule of law. After the Glorious Revolution (1688), the English Bill of Rights became part of a constitutional solution (Sandoz, 2001, p. 74–75).

Poland's paths towards capitalism were different from those followed in the West, hence the need for a comparative perspective encompassing a greater number of elements that contributed to the shaping of capitalism. Several could be enumerated, but Max Weber argued in favour of the following four reasons or preconditions of capitalism: the bureaucratic state, civil rights, predictable law and non-dualistic economic ethics, or Protestantism (Collins, 1986, p. 28). Although it would be easy to embrace this theory, it does not seem useful, as Polish capitalism is the product of both general circumstances, that we may label 'universal', and specific factors, typical of Poland alone.

Institutional patterns of capitalism

The first is the Anglo-Saxon pattern, with two closely connected variants: English and American. The American pattern copied many solutions adopted in England. One particular feature of this model was the willingness of the upper classes to confer rights on new social strata, yet only on the condition that the latter would not try to undermine the existing system. Therefore, the hierarchical system could be altered, but never eradicated altogether.

Unlike the majority of European countries, where feudalism was a system of decentralized power, England had centralized feudalism (North, 1997, p. 86–108). It made monetizing social relations possible and favoured, for instance, the development of market farming. An important feature of this model is the important role of the state as a result of the emergence of predictable rule of law: it was the case of England, but not of Spain (North, 1997, p. 86–108). In this model, the role of the state was not as great as in the countries that stepped onto the capitalist path later. This model, sometimes referred to today as classical, developed in England much earlier than in other parts of the Europe. The breakthrough moment was the Glorious Revolution of 1668–1669, as a result of which absolute monarchy morphed into constitutional monarchy following an agreement between the king, the parliament and merchants. Its major outcome was the institutional protection of property rights, considered the first condition of individual freedoms.

In accordance with the 'dependence path' paradigm, this pattern was developed, albeit in a modified version, by the United States (North, 1997). Although slavery was not abolished until the second half of the 19th century, an essentially democratic state was put in place from the very start, that is, after the United States gained independence. In both models, 'the new', later referred to as liberalism, coexisted rather coherently with 'the old', conservative; they seemed to complement each other. This path can be

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described as conservative-liberal, even though in the 19th and 20th centuries, the two countries came to represent liberalism in its imperial and hegemonic form.

Things did not have to take this turn everywhere in the West, as evidenced by France, the second pattern, where capitalism developed on foundations laid by the Revolution. By the end of the 18th century, the bourgeoisie came into a bitter conflict with the old regime of absolute monarchy. According to aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville, it was futile, as the bourgeoisie had managed to strengthen their position already before the revolution. He argues: "In 1789 the French made the greatest effort ever undertaken by any people to cut their fate, so to speak, in two, and to put an abyss between what they had been and what they wished to become. [...] they unconsciously retained most of the sentiments, habits, and ideas which the old regime had taught them, and by whose aid they achieved the Revolution; and that, without intending it, they used its ruins as materials for the construction of their new society" (Tocqueville, 1970, p. 35). We ought to bear these comments in mind and reflect on them in the Polish context since 1989, where sustained efforts were mada to eradicate the so-called *homo sovieticus* mentality, as undesired 'relics of the past'. Yet, elements of the 'old' form part of any 'new' social fabric. Social change can be likened to repairing a ship in the middle of the ocean, with no access to docks: one has no choice but to rely on the available resources. These fetters of the past can and should be removed, but only prudently, provided of course that the debaters can rise to the challenge. Humans tend to get carried away and become engulfed in a revolution or an ideology, even if the zero option is always a utopian pursuit (Offe, 1996, p. 3–57). Ample and tragic evidence has been offered by the French and the Russian revolutions, both in stark opposition to the evolutionary path developed by England and the United States.

The third is the German pattern, that is, the pattern of delayed (in relation to Great Britain) construction of capitalism. It is referred to as the 'Prussian path'. In Germany, capitalism was developed by the Junkers (i.e. noblemen) and the bourgeoisie, with a strong involvement of the state, much greater than observed in England or in the US. The state headed by the conservative Chancellor Bismarck was all-encompassing and multidimensional to such an extent that it began to lay the foundations for what we would analogize today with the welfare state. On the one hand, Bismarck wanted to bridge new social divisions created by capitalism, which were denounced by the rapidly developing radical social democratic movement; on the other hand, his intention was to integrate masses of people streaming into cities under one national ideology, a bid that he eventually failed in, as Hannah Arendt repeatedly pointed out in her writings (Arendt, 1993).

The fourth pattern developed in Russia, which joined the capitalist race much later. Let us note that the French Revolution broke out 100 years after the English Glorious Revolution, and in Germany changes started a century after the events in France. 100 years later, Russia was still not ready for capitalism. It was not until the disasters created by World War I that revolution took place and the former upper classes were stripped of the power they had always exerted. These events are commonly referred to a revolution despite numerous characteristics of a coup d'état organized by the party as an organizational weapon (Selznick, 1960). The Bolshevik Party took on the task of industrialization and modernization of the country; processes were carried out ruthlessly, with methods of highly centralized planned economy and the system of power called the left-wing totalitarianism. The task may have been fulfilled, but at a cost so great that 74 years later, the system imploded and lost its battle with Western capitalism. Consequently, after 1991, former party and state officials took it upon themselves to resume the task of building capitalism. Leaders of the Russian post-communist transformation, Yeltsin and Putin, epitomize this process.

In the context of Russia, it seems pertinent to recall the approach of the old upper class in Japan, whose members brought themselves to support the Meiji revolution in the second half of the 19th century, i.e. at the time of economic and social changes in Germany.

A few peculiarities of the Polish economic history

Poland's path towards capitalism has been atypical and, like any path, also had its twists and turns. Not only economic history scholars, but also representatives of several other disciplines have striven to track down the roots of these peculiarities. Several striking and distinctive features of Polish capitalism have been explored in literature.

1. Deep socio-economic divisions rooted in feudalism hampered and significantly delayed the advent of capitalism in Poland. Unlike in Western European countries, in Poland feudalism managed to hold up the emergence of capitalist or monetary economy for several centuries. This was primarily due to the gradual strengthening of the manorial system over centuries: not only was serfdom not abolished and peasants remained dependent on their lord, but it was reinforced – unlike in Western Europe, where around the same time, serfdom was nearly completely eradicated. Until the 19th century, it served the interests of the nobility who would gradually increase the number of days of unpaid forced labour that peasants were obliged to perform for their lord.

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This phenomenon was typical not only of Poland: "The periphery of Central Europe, up to Poland and beyond, is the zone of the new serfdom: peasants' subjugation, which had gradually disappeared in the West, was restored in the 16th century" (Braudel, 2013, p. 119). In world literature, accounts of peasant serfdom in Poland abound. Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson wrote: "As Western demand expanded, Eastern landlords ratcheted up their control over the labour force to expand their supply. It was to be called the Second Serfdom, distinct and more intense than its original form of the early Middle Ages. Lords increased the taxes they levied on their tenants' own plots and took half of the gross output. In Korczyn, Poland, all work for the lord in 1533 was paid. But by 1600 nearly half was unpaid forced labour" (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012, p. 100). Peasants did not get the chance of having their civil rights recognized. Similarly, the bourgeoisie was refused access to the open market: for instance, in Gdansk, instead of supporting Polish merchants, authorities commissioned Dutch companies to trade in Polish grain (and other products). Also the establishment of an institution in charge of resolving conflicts between the nobility and the peasantry or townspeople was no more than a forlorn hope (such institutions operated in the West). Only the state could have done anything in the matter, but there was no effective state. One of the reasons of this weakness was the fact that Poland had never been an absolute monarchy. The gentry developed an agrarian empire and focused solely on their own interests. It would be no exaggeration to describe the system as a bio-political grain republic built by nobles (Sowa, 2011, p. 109–205).

Polish noblemen eagerly resorted to the rhetoric of republicanism, although – starting in the (otherwise prosperous) 16th century – they gradually moved away from the practice of republicanism (Wyczański, 1999). Given the great demand for Polish cereals and agricultural products in the West, the gentry encountered no obstacles in safeguarding their interests. They owed their privileged position, however, mostly to specific institutional arrangements. Since the death of the last king from the Jagiellonian dynasty, there was no continuity of strong royal power that could restrain the nobility in its selfish drive towards ever greater wealth and power. The system of free elections was a manifestation of democracy among the noble, yet practiced at the expense of the state as a whole. Such are the origins of Poland's weak republican gene. The state became and remains an orphan until today.

2. From its very beginnings, capitalism was a system, that we would classify today, quite incorrectly, as global. It was a sort of world-system, but globalization was then in its embryonic stages of development. Nevertheless, since the end of the 15th century, the West begun its endeavours to secure for itself an increasingly dominant position in the world, which eventually led the dependence of local economic development – and

local capitalisms – on the external system. The influence of the external world on Poland's situation has been broadly debated, both in quite radical terms (e.g. by Marxists) and with more reserve. What all of these analyses have in common is the portrayal of capitalism as a system in which individuals higher up the social and economic ladder impose whatever they see fit on those beneath them. Again, let us quote Fernand Braudel: "By the mid-17th century, the European economic world is a conglomerate in which a great variety of societies coexist: capitalist, such as Dutch society, those based on serfdom and, at the very end of the scale, societies where slavery has yet to be abolished [...] the outer zones feed those more internal, in particular the centre" (Braudel, 2013, p. 119). When analysing the situation of Poland and its neighbouring countries, post-neo-Marxist Immanuel Wallerstein argues: "The decline of the Polish monarchy in the 16th and 17th centuries is a striking example of this phenomenon. There are two reasons for this. In peripheral countries, the interests of capitalist landowners lie in an opposite direction from those of the local commercial bourgeoisie. Their interests lie in maintaining an open economy to maximize their profit from world-market trade [...] and in the elimination of the commercial bourgeoisie in favour of outside merchants (who pose no political threat)" (Wallerstein, 1974, p. 71–72).

3. By the end of the 16th century, external factors had begun to have an impact on Poland's internal situation. Relations between Poland and the West could have been described in innumerable terms: influence, borrowings, fascination, use, osmosis are the most common used in this context. All of them seem to suggest that the Western influence was indirect. We must not disregard Eastern influences, perhaps less evident, but not altogether insignificant, such as Sarmatism, with its Turkish accoutrements and other trappings that Polish nobles valued much higher than Western styles. The concepts presented above are not sufficient for a thorough analysis of Poland's backwardness, in particular since the demise of the First Republic of Poland in 1795. Concepts related to the indirect influence of the outside world need to be replaced with those describing direct forms of impact that appeared at that time, namely the partition of the country, conquest, exploitation, administrative subordination, imposition, appropriation, emigration, captivity, etc. Phenomena to which these concepts relate in the context of capitalism concern mainly backwardness and peripherality (or semi-peripherality), but also certain positive developments in the area of economic development.

As a result of partitions, Polish lands became a field of power games to which society could not always adequately react, despite moments of hope. An example is the establishment of the Duchy of Warsaw by Napoleon Bonaparte, and the subsequent transfer of various ideas and institutions of the French Revolution. Society welcomed Napoleon with high hopes. The Kingdom of Poland – another model for the Polish People's

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Republic – was a period of certain capitalist resurgence. Polish lands under Russian reign were incorporated into provinces that were economically quite developed compared to other regions of the Russian Empire (with the exception of Moscow). In turn, the introduction of certain elements of political autonomy in Galicia by the Austrian authorities is considered a positive development. Before 1918, many Poles were entrusted with high-ranking functions in Vienna, St. Petersburg or Berlin, which was not always condemned and denounced as collaboration with the enemy, and on occasions even held in esteem, as evidenced, *inter alia*, by the case of Józef Piłsudski.

Although the range of factors that contributed to the development of Polish capitalism is broad, the most important was undoubtedly the abolition of the manorial economy. Importantly, we do not owe it to Polish nobility and landowners, but to the country's invaders: Prussia, Russia and Austria. Serfdom was abolished in the Russian partition in 1864, following a decision of the Tsar, whose intention was to divide Poles who were, at that time, in the process of organising the January Uprising. The situation was quite different in Galicia, where peasants gained their freedom as a result of the Galician Slaughter: peasants' revolt against serfdom that spiralled into a massacre of nobles. The situation in the Prussian partition was different still, but the gentry in all parts of Poland were to blame for centuries of negligence and failure to advocate and take steps towards any positive cooperation between nobles and peasants that could lead to the development of market economy.

The two world wars and, later, the communist rule trigger contradictory reactions. First, a great mobilization of the inhabitants of Wielkopolska and Silesia in 1918, followed by the involvement of the majority of Poles during the war of 1920, in which the participation of peasants was greater than ever before. Two impressive integration feats are worth recalling: the first – between 1918 and 1939, when the lands of the three partitions were successfully integrated and a number of important economic developments took place (cf. COP, Grabski, Kwiatkowski); the second – the development of Western Lands after 1945 (incorporated into the Polish territory in exchange for Eastern Borderlands). During the Second World War, the nation was annihilated: six million Polish citizens perished, and 38 percent of national assets were lost forever. The result of the Holocaust was the eradication of an important social strata with a particular potential for building Polish capitalism. The externally imposed (Soviet) model of industrialization, which admittedly helped Poland enter the group of economically developed countries, was implemented at a cost so high that the entire endeavour cannot be seen as a great economic success. Nevertheless, the industrialization was a road to mass advancement of the lower strata of the society, in a way it increased the inclusive dimension of our socio-economic development. The Soviet model proved

economically, however, inefficient and, after 74 years of experiments, it was defeated by capitalism in a geopolitical war between the two rival systems.

The post-communist transformation still awaits a thorough assessment. Could Poland have avoided the shock therapy, modelled on Western solutions? Probably not, although the Scandinavian model could have been taken into account. Nevertheless, the scale of errors committed then was incomparable with the fiasco of the communist rule, especially since the mid70s. In addition, Poland's dependence on the West is 'voluntary' and provides it with numerous opportunities and benefits that come from institutional affiliation with this group.

"Distance is the soul of beauty" versus "shortening the distance" to the West

Let us first point out two distinct positions that are perhaps only seemingly extreme. One is lodged within a broader orientation, referred to by Jacek Kochanowicz as 'the challenges of backwardness'. He describes it as follows: "The West [...] has always been a natural reference point for Poland, owing both to geographical proximity and the fact that Poles took from the West cultural and institutional models: Christianity in the early Middle Ages, colonization based on the German law, Italian influences during the Renaissance, French and English influences during the Age of Enlightenment, as well as institutions, technologies and cultural models imported at an unprecedented scale over the past twenty years. It was, therefore, also natural to compare the degree and nature of economic development in Poland with that of Western countries, and to gradually realize what in the 20th century was classified as backwardness. [...] From the 18th century to this day, the challenge posed by the distance and, simultaneously, constant comparisons with the West, remain a permanent fixture of the Polish way of thinking" (Kochanowicz, 2010, p. 153–154). What conclusion ought to be drawn? We should shorten the distance between Poland and the West as rapidly as possible, because it has always been our natural habitat.

The second assumption is that Poland belongs to the 'second Europe', because it has certain specific features that must be taken into account. Czesław Miłosz expressed this stance in his Nobel Price speech. He quoted Simone Weil, claiming that "distance is the soul of beauty" and it is not inherently evil. He added: "Yet sometimes keeping distance is nearly impossible. I am *A Child of Europe* [...]. Undoubtedly, there exist two Europes and it happens that we, inhabitants of the second one, were destined to descend into 'the heart of darkness' of the twentieth century [...]. And yet perhaps our most

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precious acquisition is not an understanding of those ideas [science and technology – WM], which we touched in their most tangible shape, but respect and gratitude for certain things which protect people from internal disintegration and from yielding to tyranny [...] sustained by family, religion, neighbourhood, common heritage. In other words, all that disorderly, illogical humanity, so often branded as ridiculous because of its parochial attachments and loyalties. In many countries traditional bonds of *civitas* have been subject to a gradual erosion and their inhabitants become disinherited without realizing it. It is not the same, however, in those areas where suddenly, in a situation of utter peril, a protective, life-giving value of such bonds reveals itself. That is the case of my native land" (Miłosz, 2006, p. 197). In this perspective, identity and, more generally, culture are paramount and determine not only our emotions, but also economic and political interests. Distinctiveness and specificity are emphasized, but without a judgement of value, without statements about inferiority or superiority, or claims that Poland needs to be civilized, because it is the Iroquois of Europe, as the King of Prussia, Frederick II the Great used to say after the first partition. In this perspective, each culture, not only Polish, is unique and original.

What is a broader view? Unless invectives similar to the one presented in the previous paragraph are resorted to, it is characterized by particularism, a natural complement to universalism. We may assume that the world culture, and also the culture of every country, is a mix of particularism and universalism. Miłosz and other writers, whom I shall refer to later on, demand a certain symmetry in the way in which we are perceived. Alas, it is not always the case, and the outlook of the West affects our own perceptions of the past and the future. This, in turn, triggers different strategies adopted at the level of both society and individual citizens. Both perspectives complement one another only in conditions of fairly steady economic development (capitalism), stable liberal democracy and active involvement of civil society. If these conditions are not met, representatives of both orientations are quick to accuse the other party of 'not being a real Pole'. These attitudes also emanate outside and act as a stumbling block to the development of pragmatic relations between Poland and the EU, the West or Germany.

Economists and economic practitioners representing the 'backwardness challenge' perspective have chosen two distinct paths. Some of them identify factors that are most conducive to economic growth: financial resources, human and social capital, investments, technology and science, etc. According to others, focused on economic development, economy is always dependent on global centres of economic domination, and therefore economic change cannot focus on technical and organizational matters, but needs to take into account the political and economic situation in the world/region construed as pyramids of inequality. Jacek Kochanowicz emphasizes that, although

growth theories focus on what is measurable, and development theories on qualitative changes, "a specific axiology underlies both of them: a conviction that it is better to have more than to have less, that it is better to be 'developed' than 'backward'. This axiology has its roots in the 18th-century idea of progress [...] (Kochanowicz, 2010, p. 155). Growth-oriented approach prevailed in Poland during the process of post-communist transformation, and it was clearly visible in the neo-liberal version of globalization. Since the economic crisis of 2007/2008, more emphasis has been placed on the country's own interests and political connections of the national state (geopolitics) that favour protectionist practices, as a result of intensified populist discourse. This trend can be observed in many countries, including Poland and the US.

Under the second perspective, reflections about the future are not rooted in any external theory or recommendations of institutionalised centres of economic and political domination (such as the IMF, the WB, the USA, etc.), but are rather the consequence of actual possibilities of society and its economic and social imagination. Practices shaped in the course of the country's history are a resource and a foundation for everyday life in every sphere of social existence. Charles Taylor, a Canadian Catholic philosopher, refers to the concept of the social imaginary, defining it as follows: "By social imaginary I mean something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations [...]. Social imaginary is that common understanding that makes common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (Taylor, 2010, p. 37). Taylor's stance contains an element that is close, though not identical to Miłosz's perspective, namely the conviction that specific meanings that people attribute to their actions and people around them are paramount. In the case of Miłosz, who often stressed tragic historical events, Poland is the 'second Europe', or the 'familiar Europe'. He does not seem concerned about the fact that universal Europe cannot see it, or does not recognize it; he perceives it rather as a deficiency of the West, and not as an imperfection of our part of Europe. Miłosz criticised Taylor's stance, claiming that it was utopian and unduly optimistic in its belief in the power of reason that, according to Taylor, can quash ignorance and obscurantism. Hence his reticence towards the 'Enlightened Europe', and in particular to EU projects (Miłosz 2012: 96–97). Paradoxically, this outlook is close to the views held by the supporters of Law and Justice party, of whom Miłosz has never been a favourite.

The matter can be examined from a different universal perspective, that is, the construction of a scientific theory. The West often imposes on the world theories that fail

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to take into account local conditions, which is not a common practice. The following statement of Talcott Parsons echoes perfectly Taylor's or Miłosz's thinking: " Since Kant I think it is fair to say that the overwhelmingly dominant epistemological opinion has been that knowledge could not be interpreted simply as the intrusion into the human mind of "raw" data coming from the external world, on the assumption that the mind was some kind purely passive photographic plate on which information from outside was automatically registered. Knowledge, on the contrary, is the product of the combination of an input of what traditionally has been called "sense data" with cultural components, in Kantian terms, the categories, and certainly requiring the active agency of a knowing personality" (Parsons, 1972, p. 260). Local knowledge and emotions are, therefore, to be applied in highly theoretical matters. For theoretical solutions should take into account local realities, which is in line with Taylor's and Miłosz's argument.

The practical conclusion seems to be the need to repair the damage recently inflicted mainly by neoliberalism, although the matter is much more complex, as it concerns the core of economic thought. 'We' need to be redefined taking into account local cultures. It does not undermine the idea of globalization, understood as the use of global interdependencies founded on the interplay between the processes of universalization and particularization. Neither does it challenge the logic of capitalist profit-seeking, but rather assumes that these pursuits are always embedded in a particular cultural and political reality.

Towards a cultural theory of capitalism

Capitalism is the most commonly defined in categories of economic interests supported by political power. This approach is called political economy. The adjective 'political', however, was first discarded at the end of the 19th century; during the past 30 years, it has been ridiculed by neoliberals and replaced by 'economics'. The aim of this theoretical and methodological operation was to ennoble economic sciences. However, political issues have never disappeared neither from business nor from scientific discourse. The economic crisis of the 1930s and, as a consequence, the growing popularity of Keynesianism, seemed to confirm it. Since the 2007/2008 crisis, political issues have returned into the sphere of theory and business practice, although no clear direction of the desired future change: it turns out that both the market and the state have their own shortcomings (Kaletsky, 2010).

Geopolitics, state protectionism, populism, etc. are currently subjects of fierce ideological debates, bringing back to the scene the notion of the nation-state, largely margina-

lized during the last wave of globalization. The market also does not concede defeat, which means that the two institutions need to rely on each other. I wish to go beyond the traditional state-market dichotomy and include in my analysis a third element, namely society and culture. After all, since 1956, society has been the main driver of change in Poland: the prime example is the role of Solidarity in the systemic change of 1989, even if Solidarity's success was only possible in the situation of a general defeat of communism by the capitalist West.

How can society and culture be included in the analysis of the economy-state-society triangle? Should we begin with economic interests, perceived as objective and real, relying on state aid when the economy/market fails to come up with satisfying solutions? Or perhaps inherently subjective needs, preferences, motives, etc. ought to be taken into account? Should we move even further, into the sphere of culture? First, I shall present two observations made by David Landes in his economic history of the world entitled *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*: "If we learn anything from the history of economic development, it is that culture makes all the difference. (Here Max Weber was right on.) Witness the enterprise of expatriate minorities – the Chinese in East and Southeast Asia, Indians in East Africa, Lebanese in West Africa, Jews and Calvinists throughout much of Europe, and on and on. Yet culture, in the sense of the inner values and attitudes that guide a population, frightens scholars. It has a sulphuric odour of race and inheritance, an air of immutability" (Landes, 2000, p. 577). Landes refers, albeit indirectly, also to Eastern Europe: "Europe's development gradient ran from west to east and north to south, from educated to illiterate populations, from representative to despotic institutions, from equality to hierarchy, and so on. It was not resources or money that made the difference; nor mistreatment by outsiders. It was what lay inside – culture, values, initiative. These peoples came to have freedom enough. They just didn't know what to do with it" (Landes, 2000, p. 289).

I shall follow this line of argument. Just as Landes, Aaron Wildavsky looks for the sources of preference not so much in interest, as in the sphere of human relations. He argues: "Preferences come from the most ubiquitous human activity: living with other people. Support for and opposition to different ways of life, the shared values legitimating social relations (here called cultures) are the generators of diverse preferences. [...] culture is a more powerful construct than conceptual rivals: heuristics, schemas, ideologies" (Wildavsky, 1987, p. 3). He claims that external interests (incentives) are not decisive, because as they are no more than "our analytic tails. The processes for determining who constructs what interest, with whom, under which circumstances, and how these interests are maintained in society, are essential to our understanding" (Wildavsky, 1998, p. 249). Wildavsky builds a cultural theory of preference formation not only in the

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socio-political sphere, but also in economic life. This operation is in line with the postulates formulated by poet Czesław Miłosz, philosopher Charles Taylor, and sociologist Talcott Parsons, yet Wildavsky's analysis is firmly embedded in the economic field, clearly very distant from the spheres of interests of the above thinkers. He strives to provide a cultural explanation of decisions regarding the distinction between public and private goods, risk, altruism, externalities (both negative and positive), etc. These phenomena are not defined in the same way in different cultures. He distinguishes four cultures: hierarchical, individualistic, egalitarian and fatalistic, stressing that coalitions of these cultures can be found in all cultures. His theory is based to a large extent on the research of the British anthropologist Mary Douglas.

With this approach, 'shortening the distance' paradigms do not seem sufficient to transform Polish capitalism into a system that would resemble any of the Western variants that developed over the past five or six centuries; one needs to look at values and interests that arise *hic et nunc*. Undeniably, even specific internal conditions are shaped within broader contexts, especially in the era of globalization, but what matters most is what Polish society itself thinks about its interests and values. What should be done, when, how, why and for what purpose, these are the questions I wish to address. To be precise, solutions adopted in Poland do not need to be original, but they must meet one minimum condition: they must be products of creative imitation. According to D.C. North, the culture factors were the main reasons for the rejection of communism in countries of the Soviet block (North, 2014, p. 153–174).

Aaron Wildavsky shows that answers to four questions about life allow us to classify a culture: "The cultural construction of the self proceeds by answering four basic questions – "Who am I"? and "What should I do?" – provide individuals with identity and guides to action. Either they belong to a group with boundaries whose decisions are binding on members, including the individual, or they act by themselves for themselves. Having learned with whom they should associate, people also need to know how to associate with them, the rules or prescriptions that make up the grid of social life" (Wildavsky, 1998, p. 240). In other words, it is about the "internalization of two social dimensions: the legitimacy of external prescriptions (grid) and the strength of affiliation with others (group)" (Wildavsky, 1998, p. 171). Thus, four cultures emerge: as regulatory pressure increases, but within group's low power, we observe a shift from individualism to fatalism; and within the group' high power, we move from egalitarianism to towards hierarchy. The four cultures are:

(1) fatalism (apathy, authoritarianism),
(2) individualism (competition, equal opportunities),

(3) hierarchy (collectivism),
(4) egalitarianism (equality of living conditions, solidarity).

Representatives of each of these cultures are to be found in every society, but in different proportions, e.g. in American society, the culture of individualism has always been strong, even though, recently, the culture of egalitarianism seems to have prevailed. This was predicted back in the 19th century by Alexis de Tocqueville, who wrote: "The gradual development of the principle of equality is, therefore, a providential fact. It has all the characteristics of such a fact: it is universal, it is lasting, it constantly eludes all human interference, and all events as well as all men contribute to its progress. [...] Can it be believed that the democracy which has overthrown the feudal system and vanquished kings will retreat before tradesmen and capitalists? Will it stop now that it has grown so strong and its adversaries so weak?" (Tocqueville, 1976, p. 25).

Let us consider the application of Wildavsky's concept to public and private goods. According to conventional economic wisdom, education, road infrastructure or protection by the police are public goods that must or should be provided by the state, as the market cannot manage them effectively. The author challenges this assumption, arguing that the distinction between public and private goods is a social construct, and that "public goods do not have characteristics that rule out private allocation. Rather, they are public goods because and only because society chooses to put the goods in the public sector instead of the private sector" (Wildawsky, 1998, p. 31). Here, culture enters the stage: egalitarians, who want to minimize social differences, will favour the provision of these goods by the public sector (the state), also because it eliminates coercion associated with private goods; for private goods, according to egalitarians, are intrinsically linked with a hidden hierarchy, which they are not willing to accept (Wildavsky, 1998, p. 43). In a similar vein he writes about negative and positive externalities. They are the source/product of social conflicts about who should be blamed for the possible damage they cause to the environment, and who is to pay the related costs. Each culture has its own approach to it. In the culture of hierarchy, society is perceived as stratified. Each stratum has its own obligations to fulfil, and therefore, if anything goes wrong, the fault falls on deviants who have failed to follow the rules. Experts are believed to know best what to do. Fatalists, not believing in the power of their own actions, adopt a withdrawal strategy. They do not believe that the world can be changed. In stark opposition to them, individualists, who think of themselves as masters of their own destiny, tend to blame one's own weaknesses. In fact, they disregard externalities, or at most consider them insignificant. Egalitarians, for whom equality of living conditions is a social norm, blame the system for being the source of inequality

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and attack the market. They put the accent on negative externalities and remain oblivious to benefits (Wildavsky, 1998, p. 68–69).

Different cultures: the US and Poland

Throughout its history, capitalism has proven its great capacity of innovation. The defeat of communism by capitalism demonstrated that communist institutions were not innovative enough. These institutions operated on the basis of many false assumptions, most notably the belief in creating 'new' humans that would form new types of relationships with others. Communist institutions did not stand the test of time. Wildavsky writes: "Recent events in Eastern Europe [...] cast light on an apparent anomaly that fear of loss inhibits innovation, yet innovation is much greater in capitalist countries, where such loss is possible, than in communist countries, where decision makers stand no risk of losing capital they have not invested. Because they could not fail, I would argue, managers in command economies are doomed not to succeed. They were always better off lobbying than producing. Their gains from innovation were limited by the practices of an exclusive hierarchy in which others got most of the rewards of change. Since they lacked capital assets, they were unable to use resources acquired through innovation to make further investments. This was equivalent to the pre-capitalist situation in which accumulation was rendered difficult because of the necessity of distributing it to numerous relatives and hangers-on [...]. The point is not only that individualists have a higher preference for innovation than hierarchs, but that an individualistic culture within a society that facilitates market transactions fosters a greater desire to innovate than does a hierarchical one embedded in a society that hampers market arrangements, such as a Soviet-style command economy. Without introducing the cultural context through which institutions create and reinforce preferences, innovation and revolt and much more cannot be explained" (Wildavsky 1998, p. 265).

He analyses the situation in the US over a long period of time, starting from the 1860s. As can be seen in an illustration of the Three Active Cultural Types from this period (Wildavsky, 1998, p. 305), the culture of egalitarianism (favouring the equality of living conditions and solidarity) quickly gained support, which now stands at around 50 percent and has overtaken the culture of individualism. Individualistic and competitive culture remains strong in the US, even though it has been somewhat overshadowed by the culture of egalitarianism. As for the hierarchical culture, its position has been gradually weakening: the figure suggests that support for it has dropped from about a quarter of the total population to the share that egalitarians held in the 1860s. Support for different options changes across voter groups and periods of American

history. The author seems concerned not so much about egalitarianism, as mainly about its radical variants, as "the rise of egalitarianism can explain both the apparent cyclical nature of part politics and the rapid shifts that sometimes occur between cycles" (Wildavsky, 1998, p. 313).

In the light of the above, what is the situation in Poland? Although no similar estimates are available, observations seem to confirm the following phenomena:

- First, the egalitarian orientation (favouring the equality of living conditions) continues to strengthen. The support for it seems to be growing at an uneven pace since the abolition of serfdom in the 1860s, the adoption of the democratic constitution in the initial phases of the Second Republic of Poland (with voting rights for all men and women), the agrarian reform and the mass emancipation of workers in the course of industrialization in the wake of WWII, political and economic transformation and the victory of Law and Justice party in 2015. Poles' expectations of improved living conditions are high or very high, which can be explained by the still unfulfilled needs of our relatively poor society constantly confronted with the consumer culture. The key question is: what mechanisms are expected to improve the living conditions of Poles? Numerous empirical studies show that many count on the assistance and intervention of the state (Rae, 2015). They accept the state hierarchy and believe it to be the most adequate for the task. They do not really believe in themselves, even if liberal and individualist attitudes have been (slowly) gaining ground. All in all, the egalitarian culture is stronger than the individualistic, and remains – in all probability – the strongest orientation in Polish society. We may therefore assume, just as de Tocqueville did, that the egalitarian tendency is universal, even if its strength may vary. When it transforms into radical egalitarianism, it can prove a threat to freedom..
- Secondly, the hierarchic culture, or more precisely hierarchical collectivism, remains strong in Poland, which can be explained by the following: (a) above all, 'path dependency' due to the patterns shaped as a result of the manorial system and the deep socio-cultural divisions it maintained for several centuries; (b) the legacy of communism with its central planning and command economy, which further reinforced the mentality and outlook rooted in the manorial system (while opposite processes were also taking place) (c) political transformation which, despite its liberal democratic character, brought new types of hierarchies related to unequal wealth acquisition (and not only), even if the growth of post-secondary education may have, to some extent, flattened these new

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divisions, (d) high expectations of welfare state services. Centralistic politics of Law and Justice may further bolster these attitudes.

The hierarchical past lives on within us. Olga Tokarczuk claims that an average Pole has a 'Gogolian personality', which she describes as "a sort of personality that can function only within a hierarchical structure. It means treating with haughtiness and contempt those lower down the social ladder, and with submissiveness those higher up" (Tokarczuk, 2018, p. 10). The reverse of a system of hierarchy is rebellion against it, or at least a negative attitude, quite typical of the Polish mentality. Indeed, even the Great Solidarity of 1980/1989 is an example of this kind of voluntarism, or even populism, albeit extremely innovative. The Solidarity movement was part of a series of events that proved the possibility of great social mobilization.

- Thirdly, the individualistic orientation is weakest, even if it continues to grow and become increasingly frequent (Zagórski, 2018). What is more, the colossal number of private enterprises established after 1989 (over one million) testify to the level of institutional innovation of Polish society (Cieślik, 2016).

Summing up, if we consider egalitarianism to be the most common orientation in the US and in Poland, despite stark differences between these two societies, we may infer that it is a universal requirement in modern civilization which, in turn, compels us to assume that cultural differences lie in orientations that rank second and further; these could be regarded as particularisms. In the United States, individualism – competitive individualism – ranks second; in Poland, egalitarianism is followed by hierarchy, or hierarchical collectivism. This means that the main cultural difference between the US and Poland lies in the preference for either individualism and hierarchy. In the case of the US, it determines the specificity of the coalition of two equals: individualism (equal opportunities) and egalitarianism (equality of living conditions), with a small share of hierarchy; in Poland, it translates into a specific combination of hierarchy and egalitarianism, which may give rise to either social democracy or social conservatism. The first took place in the period between 1989 and 2015, while the second can be observed since 2015.

Final remarks

Fascination with capitalism is unwavering regardless of whether things are going well, as they did in the 1990s, or earlier, during the so-called *Trente Glorieuses*, i.e. the thirty years of prosperity following the Second World War, or, conversely, when a crisis struck in 2007–2008. It generally means that capitalism had worked out effective economic

engineering methods. Only on rare occasions has the death of the system been announced (Wallersten, 2013); threats to capitalism are more often discussed, but a crisis of the middle class wrecked by the revolution of information technologies is perceived as more ominous than a rebellion of the working class (Collins, 2013). All in all, capitalism benefits from criticism, as it denotes the possibility of improvement and repair. As a result, the system does not have to collapse, because it is political economy rather than a market system and, as such, it enjoys certain political guarantees (e.g. ensured by the state). Consequently, "markets can exist in the future even while specifically capitalist modes of property and finance have declined. [...] Capitalism could swing further and further out of equilibrium. This may represent the irreversible 'bifurcation' of a quasi-natural system (as Wallerstein has it, following Prigogine)" (Calhoun, 2013, p. 3, 135).

Equally important arguments for capitalism are its socio-cultural roots, which I have tried to bring to light in this article. Donald Trump's victory in the US proves that capitalism has its advocates and defenders even within the old working class, who gives its support to the ultra-rich, while social inequalities keep growing. Such pluto-populism reveals the cultural foundations of capitalism, and above all the belief that American individualism can rise up to the challenges of globalization, and will even contribute to implementing several principles of egalitarianism.

Polish capitalist experience lacks continuity and coherence, first as a result of the country's loss of sovereignty, then due to its limited scope in the period 1945–1989. Freedom was eventually regained, but history did not end there. In 1989–2015, Poland was quite different from the country that has emerged in the process of the 'good change' initiated in 2015. This is why assessments of the political and economic transformation are so divergent. On the positive note, Poland – dubbed at the time 'the green island' – was not hit by the economic crisis of 2007–2008, and slowly reclaimed the position it had in the Jagiellonian era (A golden opportunity: 2014). A pessimistic view was held by Law and Justice party soon after its political victories in 2015–2016, that the country was 'in ruins', and even went as far as suggesting that it did not exist until 1989, disappears in recent years.

Although such diversity of opinions and assessments might be a sign of our times, these incongruous diagnoses jeopardize the chances of an effective therapy. Players in this game resort mainly to emotions, not knowledge or competences. Certain tried and tested practices of individuals/society are wasted or misused; worse still, the willingness to open up and experiment with one's own society, among one's people and with the world, is discounted, even though, as claimed by North, such are the elementary requirements of a non-ergodic world (North, 2014, p. 19–23). If the environment is constantly changing,

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the experiences of our ancestors will not suffice. For their value is sentimental – just like historical reconstructions that have recently been fed to Poles in great abundance. Our delayed and semi-peripheral capitalism compels us to experiment even more. Although the above-mentioned contradictory diagnoses are hardly surprising, we must not let them prevail, as they only contribute to the state of anarchy, which we know all too well from our history. If we reject the neo-liberal variant of capitalism and recognize capitalism as a natural state, then we ought to avoid tribal wars, or empty promises, such as those that were eagerly articulated left, right and centre by candidates for the office of the Mayor of Warsaw during the 2018 campaign. Poles must count on themselves: the EU or the US can help us only if we learn to take care of our own future.

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