

*Projekt finansowany w ramach umowy 857/P–DUN/2016  
ze środków Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego  
przeznaczonych na działalność  
upowszechniającą naukę.*

Nazwa zadania:  
Stworzenie anglojęzycznej wersji publikacji



Ministerstwo Nauki  
i Szkolnictwa Wyższego

Zeszyty Naukowe  
Wyższej Szkoły Bankowej w Poznaniu  
2016, t. 71, nr 6

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## **Poland's Education System at a Time of Demographic and Economic Crisis**

**Abstract.** *Since there are close links between market economy and the education system, economic crises will have a visible effect on educational institutions at all levels. The late 2000s were marked by a coincidence of financial, demographic and immigration crises. The 2007-2009 global financial crunch, coupled with Poland's demographic crisis that dates back to 2007 and was exacerbated by mass emigration of young Poles, and the European refugee crisis that began in 2015 with increasing numbers of people flocking from African and Asian countries have had, and will continue to have, an substantial impact on the education system of Poland. The article highlights some of the crisis symptoms and their implications for Poland's education sector. As a result of the ongoing population decrease, we have seen schools being closed down, curricula being revised, and a wave of consolidations sweeping the higher education sector. The financial crisis has demonstrated that there is a need to reengineer higher education curricula in an attempt to attract more students and to focus educational effort on students who already have certain requisite skills. One benefit of the new approach would be raising the professional integrity of managers and thus minimizing fraudulent practices such as those pursued by the proud and self-serving executives of Enron and WorldCom. By contrast, the 2015 European migrant crisis has become a stimulus for developing a reasonable migration policy in lieu of fear-driven solidarity. It is clear that the education system should play a central role in making this policy a reality.*

**Keywords:** *education system, financial crisis, demographic crisis, immigration*

## Introduction

Poland's education system is to a large extent market-driven and commodified, as a result of an explicit market orientation of most Polish educational institutions. What local and central decision makers are determined to do is train workforce that will be readily employable and will ensure that there is always a good supply of eligible candidates available to managers in the market. This instrumental approach to education compromises learning outcomes and turns knowledge into a commodity which the graduate is a "vehicle" [Cellary 2007]. Nonaka and Takeuchi define knowledge in economics terms as information and an asset, that is, an economic good that can be owned by an individual and hence marketed [Nonaka, Takeuchi 2000].

When it is all too common to look at knowledge and knowledge acquisition merely as tools that can be used to better one's position in the job market, the autotelic approach to education cannot stand ground. What this flawed perspective on education results in is graduates' tendency to develop a strong sense of entitlement and channel their frustration into various forms of protest, such as the "Indignados Movement"<sup>1</sup> or the ongoing expansion of the so called precariat [Standing 2014]. As a social phenomenon, precariat is relatively new to Poland and has not yet been investigated thoroughly<sup>2</sup>. The emergent stratification of society calls for a change of approach to the educational system. Increasingly more degree holders experience difficulties finding jobs commensurate with their qualifications, thus facing social exclusion. After all, the precariat clearly represents an outcome of the social exclusion of many university graduates. These widening disparities are likely to increase social inequalities, and no educational system should contribute to making this happen. Indeed, the awareness of this social fact ought to stir an insightful debate over the objectives that the current educational system supports.

The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century culminated in a coincidence of financial (2007-2009), social (2007 – mass emigration of young Poles, 2015 – a wave of refugees from Africa and Western Asia) and demographic (a demographic low) crises that spurred changes in the education sector. The changes were felt throughout Europe and might soon affect Poland. What can be observed even now is the proliferation of schools teaching in the Arab language in Germany and the emergent demographic structure of many Swedish schools where aliens make up a majority of students. Poland could experience similar phenomena if it gullibly accepted the

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<sup>1</sup> [www.oburzeni.org.pl/news.php](http://www.oburzeni.org.pl/news.php) [accessed 15.11.2016].

<sup>2</sup> Besides the study by G. Standing that came out in Polish in 2014, other relevant Polish-language publications include the following: Sowa 2010; Śmiałek 2010; Urbański 2014; there are also a number of non-Polish-language publications, e.g.: Bourdieu 1963; Lindenboim, Perez 2004: 21-31; Lewchuk, Clarke, de Wolff 2008: 387-406; Korpi et al. 2003: 17-30.

proposed immigrant quotas to share the excess of west-bound refugees among the European states. In this context, the worsening standard of education is manifest in the trend to put stress on effective test-taking strategies rather than on developing abilities and attitudes. Meanwhile, the learning outcomes that should be accomplished as a result of an education process are defined in terms of specific knowledge, skills, and social competences. Increased emphasis on social competences, rather than on knowledge as such, is part of the Bologna Process initiated in 1999 and pioneering a fundamentally new outlook on the objectives of the teaching process [Joint declaration 2006].

These crisis situations notwithstanding, the recent changes have not had the expected effects on the quality of instruction. As subsidies were tied to the number of students, governing bodies of educational institutions were forced to start thinking commercially. The sustainability of an institution, and the number of jobs it can create, was hence linked to its earnings – from educational services or from research as much as from business activity. A gradual departure from that market-driven logic is what now stands for change.<sup>3</sup>

With the notorious underfunding in the education sector and in the face a demographic low accompanied by a west-bound surge of economic emigration (nearly 2.4m in 2016), it will be a major challenge for Polish government's social policy to get the society to acquiesce in the admission of new immigrants – which is solicited by wealthier EU states (e.g. Germany) from those less affluent ones (the Visegrad Group, or V4, countries). Considerations such as the need to preserve local identity and tradition will be no less important now that Poland's educational system has become part of what is referred to as the European Education Area and regarded as a key ingredient that comes into the making of a common Europe [Surina (ed.) 2012: 21].

## **1. The financial crunch**

The worst financial crunch since the Great Depression of the 1930s began in August 2007 and lasted, formally speaking, until 2009. The United States of America and Western European countries suffered the most. Its origins can be traced

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<sup>3</sup> The establishment of a national agency for academic cooperation, the designation of research universities, increased support for Universities of the Third Age, and the setting up of “science buses” to visit Polish schools – are some of the harbingers of a revolution in science and higher education announced by the Minister of Science and Higher Education Jarosław Gowin in a recent PAP interview: <http://wpolityce.pl/spoleczenstwo/307753-gowin-zapowiada-kolejne-zmiany-w-szkolnictwie-wyzszym-trzeba-dofinansowac-nauke-i-zreformowac-uczelnie> [accessed 15.11.2016].

back to the collapse of the post-war world order geared to ensure steady economic growth and the well-being of societies. It was just as a shift began away from the egalitarianism of the first three post-war decades that the world was set on a path toward the present difficulties. Many of those most knowledgeable about the U.S. economy discerned the social inequalities and the lack of prospects for upward social mobility experienced by an increasing fraction of American citizens. This compelled politicians to seek solutions to address the ambitions and aspirations of the excluded ones who looked up to the more and more affluent elites in defining their needs. The solution that presented itself was in line with the prevalent doctrines of Reaganomics and Thatcherism and led to the “credit bubble” in the real estate market whose spectacular bursting triggered the 2007 crisis [Wójcik 2015: 78-87]. The dramatic bankruptcy of two global players, Enron and WorldCom, provided a striking example revealing, for everyone to see and for some to experience hands-on, the dreadful consequences of fictitious financial statements, being just one of many failures of the existing system. Enron’s accounting fraud was inscribed in an endless list of phony financial reports produced “as the management of so many companies, blinded by the lure of stock-option riches, recklessly pushed and pressurized everyone in the system to go along with the fabricated financial statements” [Jackson 2009: 6]. Evidence of how common financial statement manipulations are can be found in the 2002 SOX Report, unveiling multiple forgeries that were committed over a period of five years, July 31, 1997 through June 30, 2002. The report concludes that “[o]ver the Study period, the Commission filed 515 enforcement actions for financial reporting and disclosure violations arising out of 227 Division of Enforcement investigations” [SOX Report 2002].

The repercussions of the crisis persist even today and it remains hard to predict when the global economy effectively recovers and its normal operation is restored. The aftermath of the post-crisis situation severely affected not only the U.S. economy but many other economies, too. A number of large banks and financial institutions went bankrupt, while independent investment banking, a sector with a several decades-long history, ceased to exist. The stock markets in the U.S., in the U.K., across the Euro area and Asia, plunged. Dealings in mortgage-backed securities came to a halt. Investment and pension funds suffered a sharp slide in their returns. World trade plummeted, alike investments and consumption. The adverse developments in world economy had an obvious effect on every household and business through declining production, rising unemployment rates, decreasing incomes, and constraints on the availability of borrowing, notably of mortgage loans [Adamczyk 2012: 13-29].

## 2. Market economy vs. the education system

Following the banking crisis of the 2000s, the condition of market-based economies has impinged strongly on the educational system. This is just as true about countries that were less afflicted. During the 2007-2009 financial crunch Poland was officially proclaimed a “green island” that proved immune to the crisis except for an economic slowdown that became an important incentive for educational system reforms. In effect, an educational system designed to merely train for a profession becomes an outdated and vain idea. Managers of education institutions find it difficult to meet the requirement to apply market rules in controlling their schools’ finances. Governmental decision makers seem to believe that every headmaster should be able to demonstrate enough business acumen to make the school profitable and that the head of every university should be able to derive income from its research findings. At the same time, any earnings that a school or university happens to generate are transferred to their governing bodies rather used directly toward satisfying its own needs. Interestingly enough, an upgrade of qualifications and competences does not immediately benefit a university graduate by translating into a higher salary. In fact, in Poland as well as in the U.S., degree holders get paid relatively less and less. Although nominal wages are rising, their purchasing power is diminishing [Phelps 2007: 28-29]. An education process focused primarily on the acquisition of qualifications for an attractive, well-paid profession may lead to what U. Beck described in his book *Risk Society, Towards a New Modernity (Risikogesellschaft – Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne)*: based on the example of Germany, he commented that, despite market-oriented learning outcomes, the popular rush for higher education diplomas created a “cleavage between generations.” The consequences are visible in relations between genders, in parental behaviors, and in political culture (new social movements). As a result, we have been witnessing the phasing-out of class culture and of privileges based on social background. Since compulsory schooling was extended, traditional mindsets and lifestyles have been relativized and jettisoned as an outcome of the adoption of uniform teaching and learning environments, methodologies and contents alongside linguistic forms used [Beck 2002: 112-123]. The so called educational revolution favored schools that made one eligible for further education. Similar effects were observable in the expansion of higher education that, in many cases, brought about a common mismatch between education and employment.<sup>4</sup> This means that the intrinsic goal of instruction, which is to

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<sup>4</sup> In 2009, there were 461 higher education institutions in Poland (including institutions run under the auspices of the ministers of national defense, internal affairs and public administration), of which 131 were government owned and controlled and had a total student population of 1,266,900

steer individuals toward learning a profession, is frustrated or ruined by external interference from the job market [Beck 2002: 221]. For fear of unemployment, a lot of young people choose not to graduate in time or to continue education. Nonetheless, the unemployment rate among the highly educated population is growing in Poland as well as across Europe. In 2013, one out of ten university degree holders aged 25-29 was out of work (10.5%). While this is still below the EU average of 10.7% and much less than the Euro area average of 13.2%, the implications might be unpredictable.<sup>5</sup> The belief that higher education is an effective protection against unemployment has waned. Instead, there is an increasing awareness that too many young people choose to train for professions that are not in demand in the labor market, thus inflating the “disparity between education and employment”, since Polish schools equip them with specific knowledge but do not teach groupwork, loyalty toward the employer, assertiveness, patience or diligence – qualities that are valued by employers. Most such deficiencies are developed in post-primary education, in schools that are focused solely on high test scores. Long-term and structural unemployment causes discrepancies within the process of vocational training and undermines confidence in the “incumbent” education system. It can be presumed that the lowest levels of the educational ladder will continue to produce an increasing number of permanently unemployable individuals [cf. Beck 2002: 223]. Hence, it seems more relevant than ever to look for the meaning and purpose of education in education itself. It is the autotelic approach that offers a real alternative to the prevalent job training approach.

### 3. The demographic crisis

It should be underscored, however, that the key challenge to be faced by the Polish education sector is of demographic nature. The declining birth rate in the last two decades has had a tremendous impact on the number of students in education. The 2015 GUS (Central Statistical Office) statistics show that 2014 was the third consecutive year that the population of Poland shrank; this time

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(66.7% of all students in higher education countrywide), with a new enrolment of 324,000 this year: [GUS 2010].

<sup>5</sup> In 2013, Greece had the highest employment rate in Europe, approximating 43% among the young and educated, compared with nearly 27% in Spain and 20% in Portugal. For many years, the lowest unemployment in this population group has been observed in such countries as Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands – 3.2%, or the United Kingdom – 3.7% in 2013 [Drozdowicz-Beć 2014: 3].



by an estimated 54,000 that was the largest population decrease in history (37,000 people less, with the rate of decrease at -0.1%) [GUS 2015a: 2].

The *Raport o stanie edukacji 2013* [2013 Education Report] [IBE 2014] indicates an increase in schooling, albeit accompanied by a high unemployment rate among university graduates and the highest rate of emigration since the 2007 record when 2.27 million people left Poland.<sup>6</sup> There were fewer admissions into higher education, primarily at private higher education institutions and in part-time programs, consistent with the demographic trend. At the end of 2014 Poland had a population of some 38.5m, which stands for a 17,000 decrease relative to the previous year. 2014 was also the third consecutive year the population shrank after years of growth (2008-2011).

What can be observed at nearly all stages of education is the expansion of private, non-state institutions. They already represent a majority of post-secondary schools (more than 63% of all institutions and almost a half of the student population in the segment in 2012) [IBE 2014: 47-48]. In the higher education sector, out of 338 institutions that were in operation in 2011, 27 have gone out of business while 22 are currently in liquidation, and the process is gaining momentum. Polska Konfederacja Pracodawców Prywatnych Lewiatan (Polish Confederation of Private Employers Lewiatan) estimates that in 2025 there will be only 50 left.<sup>7</sup> In an effort to broaden their course offerings, enhance the quality of instruction and bring down the costs of their operations, more and more institutions of higher learning decide to merge. As a result, they are able to target a wider population and offer a more pleasurable study experience. Examples of consolidations in the region of Dolny Śląsk (Lower Silesia) include Wyższa Szkoła Bankowa we Wrocławiu (WSB University Wrocław) and Dolnośląska Szkoła Wyższa (University of Lower Silesia) whose size enables them to compete with public universities. The consolidation process is now undoing what has been seen as fracturing in the higher education sector and shown e.g. in the Ernst&Young and Instytut Badań nad Gospodarką Rynkową report developed for Poland's Ministry of Science and Higher Education [Ernst&Young and Instytut Badań nad Gospodarką Rynkową 2009; 2010] or in the 2013 OECD study *Education at a Glance 2013* covering the 34 member states and delineating global trends in education [Education at a Glance 2013]. Consolidation processes are commonplace in other countries, too. University mergers occur worldwide – e.g. in Germany, France, and the Scandinavian countries. Not so long ago, two Finnish

<sup>6</sup> At the end of 2013 GUS estimated that around 2.196m Polish citizens were temporary residents of other countries. The figure is indicative of a 3.1% increase (by 66,000) compared to 2012 (around 2.13m) [GUS 2014].

<sup>7</sup> [http://natablicy.pl/w-2015-roku-bedzie-mniej-uczelni-niepublicznych-w-polsce,artykul.html?material\\_id=50a0bcf616f1dab55b000000](http://natablicy.pl/w-2015-roku-bedzie-mniej-uczelni-niepublicznych-w-polsce,artykul.html?material_id=50a0bcf616f1dab55b000000) [accessed 30.08.2015].



universities with campuses situated 50 kilometers away from each other merged to form the University of Eastern Finland.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the two institutions were awarded generous government subsidies. Likewise, Denmark just recently set up a powerful university in Aarhus by combining several higher education institutions and research institutes.<sup>9</sup> Such moves are naturally underpinned by the Scandinavian approach to education.

Finland, that has just risen to be the leader in education, was until recently under strong Swedish and Russian influence. Inscriptions in the Swedish language are still to be seen in public spaces (streets, the media) as relics of that past [Johnsson 2013: 443]. For years, Finnish learners have topped international rankings, including the reputable PISA survey, even as the gap between the best and the poorest has been closing due to effective support addressed by schools to less able pupils. In addition, each school tries to assist its learners and their families by offering the services of a social worker. Family support takes the form of free meals served in-school for all students. Of course, such policies will incur substantial expenses and involve a firm commitment to teacher development. Even more rigid requirements have to be met by pre-school teachers. Classes are only cancelled in exceptional cases, as schools arrange substitutions, and strikes are very rare at Finnish educational institutions. Headmasters have a large degree of autonomy including the powers to dismiss a teacher who falls short of their expectations. At the same time, the Finnish educational systems is much cheaper to run than e.g. the Polish one, where schools are overburdened with reporting and paperwork that engages some staff in generating information on their educational activities while hundreds of others are busy processing the data. Bureaucracy is ubiquitous – focused on interpreting defective laws, inflexible and unfriendly toward the workforce, oblivious of the actual subject of the educational process, and concerned with whatever happens inside their offices rather than with the outside world. In Finland, on the other hand, schools thrive on trust: the government trusts teachers to do a good job and therefore does not need to “invest” in control systems to keep tabs on schools and teachers. Once the educational system is ridden of the control function, the resulting optimization stands for reduced operating costs at educational institutions. This approach to school organization is in tune with a national culture that looks to the future. It should be stressed that Finland does not employ any standardized tests to assess learners’ progress and schools are free to be guided by their own discretion in designing curricula [Fazlagić 2015]. High priority is given by the Fins, the Swedes and the Danes to adult education that provides opportunities for skill upgrading, obtaining additional qualifications, reducing social inequalities,

<sup>8</sup> [www.uef.fi/en/uef](http://www.uef.fi/en/uef) [accessed 10.09.2015].

<sup>9</sup> [www.au.dk/en/](http://www.au.dk/en/) [accessed 10.09.2015].

and participation in special interest groups, discussion groups, training courses (not necessarily related to professional development), as well as in lectures and seminars held by institutions of higher learning and vocational schools. In Finland, adult education is, on the one hand, part of the formal education system and, on the other, flourishes outside of it, too. Judging by the number of attendees, course loads, and considerable public funding, adult education is in high demand and fits perfectly into the idea of lifelong learning that is a central ingredient of public policy pursued by an efficient government [Gmerek 2013: 400-401].

#### 4. Regression in teacher employment

The dwindling enrolment figures call for organizational changes in the education system to adjust the number of teachers, institutions and facilities to the evolving needs. Statistics show that between 2006 and 2014 the number of classes fell by more than 17% in post-primary (*gymnasium*) schools, by 12% in secondary schools, and by 7% at the primary school level. The average class size decreased, too, with more and more schools being transformed into so called school complexes [IBE 2014: 45-46]. At the same time, enrolment in higher education slumped even more dramatically – by almost a quarter [GUS 2015c: 26].

The adverse demographics have had an obvious impact on employment among school teachers. In 2007-2012, the decline in the population of children and adolescents led to a 3% decrease in the number of school teachers. The most significant decreases were observed in general education *lyceums* (secondary education), elementary vocational schools, and in *gymnasium* schools (post-primary education). At the same time, the number of pre-school teachers went up by 32%. The demographic trend has also affected teacher workloads. Over recent years, there have been hardly any fluctuations in the proportion between full-time and part-time teachers, with part-time employees representing some 26% of total employment. The percentage is much lower in pre-school education (about 15%). However, in recent years the dynamics of changes in these two groups were very different: while there was a rapid 5.5% drop in the number of full-time teachers in schools for children and adolescents, institutions of pre-school education hired more full-time (a 38% increase) than part-time teachers (a nearly 26% rise) [IBE 2014: 60]. In addition, 2014 was marked by a slight decline in the number of teachers in the higher education sector (by 2% relative to the previous year) [GUS 2015c: 43].

## 5. Polish mass emigration of 2007

A country's total population is influenced by natural increase and international migration. The 2014 decrease of Poland's population was mainly due to negative net cross-border migration that was accompanied by a negative, albeit slightly, rate of natural increase. Net permanent international migration has in fact been negative throughout Poland's post-war history. In 2014, it equaled 15,800 [GUS 2015b: 133-134]. Another disconcerting fact is that more and more Poles undergo naturalization in the United Kingdom and, ultimately, acquire British citizenship.<sup>10</sup>

Mass emigration had a negative impact on enrolment in Polish higher education institutions. Coupled with a demographic low, it resulted in what enrolment figures are at the moment. To make things worse, forecasts indicate that they will continue to deteriorate to reach 1.2m by 2020. The consequences will be felt, in the first place, by privately-run higher education institutions, many of which are likely to have problems enrolling enough students, particularly into part-time programs that their survival effectively depends on. This condition is further aggravated by increasing poverty, as tuition fees are charged for all part-time programs even in public universities. Insofar as there were 3.37m people aged 19-24 in 2010, it is estimated that there will be only 2.23m in 2020 [Czeladko 2011]. The Demograficzne tsunami report contends that the first wave of the demographic low will initially strike peripheral private institutions based away from strong academic centers, to then affect other schools. At any rate, it will have the worst impact on private higher education institutions, already experiencing a decline in enrolment (in 2014, enrolment in private institutions accounted for some 24% of the total enrolment in higher education) [cf. Antonowicz, Gorlewski 2011; GUS 2015c: 30].

## 6. The 2015 migrant crisis

In the summer months of 2015 Europe faced a multitude of illegal immigrants, chiefly from Africa and Western Asia (e.g. Syria, Iraq), that caused a humanitarian crisis comparable to that associated with the record numbers of incoming

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<sup>10</sup> In 2013, 6,000 Poles became British citizens, twice as many as in 2012, and three times as many as two years earlier. The Home Office reports that there are currently 600,000 pending applications for citizenship, 10 times as many as 10 years ago: [http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114871,16060573,Coraz\\_wiecej\\_Polakow\\_na\\_Wyspach\\_przyjmuje\\_brytyjskie.html](http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114871,16060573,Coraz_wiecej_Polakow_na_Wyspach_przyjmuje_brytyjskie.html) [accessed 10.09.2015].

refugees following the outbreak of the 1992-1995 Bosnian war.<sup>11</sup> This several thousand hundred strong crowd of refugees seeking a better life in Europe is bringing change to the continent.

In the absence of a consistent EU immigration policy, the migrant wave alters the way the Schengen Agreement works, as border controls are restored between certain Schengen Area member states. One of the cornerstones of the European Union is thus shaking. The migration crisis has also sharpened the divisions between the Schengen member states and their non-Schengen neighbors. The growing tensions are best illustrated by the stance that the authorities of Britain, a country remaining outside the Schengen Area, took toward the attempts to cross the English Channel made by refugees from the French port of Calais.

Further, the construction of a barrier fence on the Hungarian-Serbian border was a move toward border militarization. These are some of the facts that are plain to see, however, it is much more difficult to determine the real reasons why these massive migrations take place.

The fact alone that the immigrant movement is headed for wealthier EU countries indicates that it would be of economic or religious rather than political nature. French sociologist Mohand Khellil was one of those who strove to uncover the religious motivation behind the Europe-bound movement of Muslim populations [Khellil 1991]. Nearly two decades ago, he envisaged many problems and dangers inherent in the European integration of North-African refugees stemming from their firm rootedness in their religion and culture founded on values derived from the Quran. Islamic law is totalitarian in nature, embracing all aspects of the believer's life. Every human act and behavior is enumerated, classified and evaluated by the law. It is through the Sharia law that Islam has become a creed as well as a distinct, closed culture and has formed a specific educational system that is impervious to external influence and focused on developing a strong sense of religious identity.

The implications of a massive refugee inflow were also depicted in literary form by J. Raspail in a novel published more than thirty years ago [Raspail 2015]. The writer draws the reader's attention to the threats to European identity arising from infiltration by great numbers of immigrants who are strongly committed to the religious and political directives of their religious leaders. Symbolic rather than utopian in its design, the novel reveals the interesting mechanism whereby immigrants assimilate into a new society: "boat people, the growth of radical attitudes in the Muslim community [...], the increasing psychological pressure from sundry 'human rights defenders', the deepening

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<sup>11</sup> Overall, 866,000 asylum requests were filed in 44 developed countries, which represents a 45% growth relative to 2013. The number of applications nearly equated the peak level of 9000,000 coinciding with the beginning of the Bosnian war in 1992 [Uchodźcy w Europie 2015].

crisis of Christian doctrine over the ways the Gospel is preached by the clergy, the false 'angelicity' of human conscience, the refusal to confront the truth..." [Raspail 2015: 11].

While migrations have been taking place for centuries, the recent massive inflow of populations that are culturally and religiously alien to the Latin value system founded on natural law, is put new demands on school curricula even in Poland. The educational system may soon be seriously challenged as Pew Research studies show that the Muslim minority across Europe totaled 6% of the population in 2010 and is likely to climb to 8% by 2030. Most Muslims are settled in areas where they have dwelled for many generations, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Bulgaria, and Russia. At the moment, as the waves of immigrants from Syria and Iraq surge into Europe, movements have also intensified from areas of traditional Muslim settlement, e.g. from Albania and Bosnia.

In Western Europe, the largest Muslim population of nearly 5 million inhabits France, amounting to 7.5% of the country's total population. 4 million Muslims live in Germany. Relatively numerous Muslim minorities are also found in Belgium (6%), Austria and Switzerland (5.7% each). By contrast, the number of followers of Islam living in Poland is estimated between 15,000 and 25,000, which represents less than 0.1% of the country's population [Wojtalik 2015].

Overall, the Muslim population in Europe approximates 44m, making up 6% of the continent's total population, and is predicted to grow over the next two decades. While in 2010 there were 1.6bn Muslims worldwide, the number is expected to rise by around 35% to reach 2.2bn by 2030. It is estimated that in 15 years there will be 58.2m Muslims in Europe alone – a 32% increase that nearly parallels the global growth rate.<sup>12</sup> What therefore seems inevitable is a clash of civilizations and the subsequent emergence of a new world order. S.P. Huntington argues that culture plays an important role in the process, since "culture and cultural identities, which at the broadest level are civilization identities, are shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration, and conflict in the post-Cold War world" [Huntington 1996: 20]. Hence, culture will also be largely germane to the education process.

## 7. Culture vs. education

To some extent, education can be viewed as a reflection of the culture prevalent in a given era, therefore the search for a model that would be adequate to a specific type of culture is among the hottest issues to be addressed by those

<sup>12</sup> [www.euractiv.pl/politykawewnetrzna/artykul/muzumanie-w-europie-006454](http://www.euractiv.pl/politykawewnetrzna/artykul/muzumanie-w-europie-006454) [accessed 30.08.2015].

undertaking to modernize education systems. It is particularly relevant at a time a culture is threatened by refugees born in another region of the world, brought up in another civilization and a very different culture. Multiculturalism has not delivered in Europe since, according to its criticisms summarized by Kenan Malik in a *Foreign Affairs* article: "Europe has allowed excessive immigration without demanding enough integration – a mismatch that has eroded social cohesion, undermined national identities, and degraded public trust" [Malik 2015]. On the other hand, minority groups arriving in European countries may not be refused protection for their rights. For example, Germany's North Rhine-Westphalia state government decided that a 320,000-strong population of children following Islam was big enough to offer them a dedicated school subject. Consequently, as many as 44 primary schools across the region will complement their curricula with the course called "Introduction to Muslim Faith" [Wąsowski 2015].

Right at the heart of the relationships between culture and education is the university, being in itself an important culture-building institution. In Poland, this role of university was vital during the years of totalitarian rule. Today many universities have come to resemble business enterprises (entrepreneurial university, industrial university). The traditional academic values have been replaced by the rules of the market. Education and research work much like "production lines" and research findings are traded like any other commodity, while conducting research is seen as providing a service. Alike educational services, where "raw material, i.e. students, are molded (or, rather, transformed) into final products (capable of performing predefined professional roles). They are formed very much the same way a steel nail would, while technical specifications for their production (termed as competences) are provided by government administration and employers" [Czerepaniak-Walczak 2013: 11]. The quality stamp for this specific product is an academic degree that thus turns to a consumer good. This implies growing conformism, or even (mostly political) servilism, on the part of the university, which is in striking contrast to the university's traditional role. Reforms attempted by governments around the world are made in line with the principle "change everything so that everything can stay the same, where the secret [...] is not to blow the trumpet too loudly and to stick to a strategy of window-dressing" [Wallerstein 2008: 82]. The present-day model of education is characterized by a "deficit of culture in education" and encumbered by a "technocratic overload" [Rudenko 2012: 51]. Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the keynote has been given in all aspects of life by technology (and technocratic) factors and elements, while spiritual factors and elements have retired to the backstage. "Technocratism" has also found its way into education.



## Conclusion

To sum things up, in today's Poland the education system has long lost the power to determine social status. The degree alone will no longer do to launch a career or guarantee a professional status along with a matching income and prestige. This, however, does not imply that education does not matter at all. Unless you have a relevant qualification or university diploma to acknowledge the completion of a higher education program and the award of a specific professional degree, your chances to make a successful career are virtually nil. It is an increasingly common belief that degrees and credentials are less and less sufficient but more and more indispensable if you want to climb to one of the positions that are becoming so scarce [Beck 2002: 227].

The paper attempts to demonstrate the impact of demographic and economic factors on Poland's educational system by looking at some relevant aspects, such as the recent financial, demographic and migrant crises. In this context, the links between market economy and education as well as between culture and education are outlined. As a result of tensions between the rules of the market and the objectives of an educational system we have seen regression in teacher employment. Interesting alternatives that seem to be able to reverse the current trends in the teaching job market can be seen in the educational models developed by Finland or Denmark that have departed from an alienational, elite-centered and grossly ineffective approach to arrive at one that proves effective and inclusive [Jurczyk 2016].

The 1999 Bologna Accords and the Lisbon Agenda of 2000 aimed to make European higher education more competitive over just a decade despite the diversity of cultures, languages and national education systems involved, and despite wide academic autonomy as well, by establishing Europe-wide collaboration and coordinated higher education policies. These objectives have not been attained. Although the UE supports the mobility of students and teachers, fosters links between schools and between their governing bodies, and sponsors the development of European curricula, it has not yet succeeded in making the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area truly competitive vis-à-vis American higher education and science [Kosieniec 2016]. Therefore it seems advisable to consolidate Polish higher education institutions that have the potential to play a key role in the European Higher Education Area.

A discussion of the Finnish education paradigm indicates an imperative to apply a different philosophy to the design of school curricula, giving more prominence to local requirements and based on mutual trust. In Finland, the gaps between core curricula at subsequent levels of education are much narrower than e.g. in Poland, which makes transition to a higher level less stressful. This facilitates knowledge acquisition as well as the development of skills and social



competences that are key to the elimination of fraudulent business practices, such as those pursued e.g. by the executives of Enron or WorldCom and underlying the global economic crisis of the 2000s. As soon as unnecessary barriers are removed, school teaching can become a pleasurable experience, with good rapport and friendly relations arising between teachers and students, and with valuable skills brought forward into adulthood that accelerate the buildup of social capital and hence benefit the society at large. The Finns chose to concentrate on promoting teamwork, peer relations, and equal opportunities, and that way have made a success that is approved of by the society. Their refusal to follow the trend toward the commodification of human life meant moving away from standardized exams, from the development of test-taking skills, and from the common practice of private coaching. Despite this divergence from the mainstream education paradigm, Finnish students garner top scores on the PISA tests [Odrowąż-Coates 2014: 324-325].

In a relevant insight contributed by P. Sahlberg, quality education and social inclusion are pinpointed as preconditions for the inception of a new economy based on knowledge and inclusive information society – values that were instrumental in developing a response to the financial crises of the 1990s and the 2000s and whose effects are likely to continue into the 21<sup>st</sup> century [Odrowąż-Coates 2014: 325]. What makes this concept difficult to implement in Polish educational settings is, in the opinion of many scholars, “the disintegration of Polish society, impoverishment, inequalities, and the shortage of funding for effective assimilation and rehabilitation” [cf. Kłusak 2001; Rejzner 2010; Galor et al. 2012].

Mass migrations call for Europe to place more emphasis on building European and national identities and thus resisting the influence of Muslim culture – one that is inclined to challenge whatever is alien to it in terms of religion and culture. In that sense, education systems and curricula should be closely aligned with a given country's culture and tradition. It should be also accentuated that the European treaties are predicated on a resolve to respect national identities of all countries and regions.

The paper also highlights the need to move away from the solicitation of solidarity in fear of immigrants toward the development of an immigration policy that respects national sovereignty and identity and allows for the educational system to play a central role in strengthening the European identity – one originating in Mediterranean civilization and based on natural law rather than sharia.

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### **Polski system edukacji w dobie kryzysu demograficzno-ekonomicznego**

**Streszczenie.** *Gospodarka rynkowa jest silnie skorelowana z systemem edukacji, dlatego każdy kryzys ma wpływ na funkcjonowanie placówek edukacyjnych na wszystkich szczeblach. Kryzys finansowy z lat 2007-2009 dotknął sfery życia publicznego w segmencie finansowym, demograficznym, migracyjnym i edukacyjnym. Kryzys demograficzny, objawiający się niżem demograficznym i masową emigracją Polaków w 2007 r. oraz migracją ludności z krajów afrykańskich i azjatyckich od 2015 r., miał wpływ na polski system edukacji (nastąpił spadek liczby studentów, likwidacja i konsolidacja szkół wyższych). Głównym celem artykułu jest ukazanie polskiego systemu edukacji przez pryzmat zmian demograficzno-ekonomicznych. Rozważania mogą stanowić przyczynek do szerszego dyskursu na ten temat. Celem szczegółowym jest wskazanie na konieczność zmian, zwłaszcza w obszarze szkolnictwa wyższego w Polsce, m.in. na potrzebę konsolidacji uczelni. Kolejnym celem szczegółowym jest ukazanie potrzeby zmiany podstaw programowych w celu pozyskiwania przez uczniów i studentów umiejętności kluczowych, pozwalających uniknąć błędów kadry zarządzającej Enronu i WorldComu, które m.in. doprowadziły do globalnego kryzysu. Wskazana została także potrzeba przejścia od wymuszanej solidarności strachu do budowania polityki migracyjnej, zachowującej suwerenność i tożsamość narodową, w której system edukacji powinien odgrywać istotną rolę.*

**Słowa kluczowe:** *system edukacji, kryzys finansowy, kryzys demograficzny, migracja*