

## New brand Poland – Polish society in a consumer era

### *Abstract*

*In this article I would like to approach a peculiarity of Polish capitalism. My main assumption is that Polish capitalism is similar to the American one in its consumer aspect. Polish people want to take part in consumer culture and, year-on-year, they spend more money on products and services. I argue that Polish consumer culture has assimilated some values of American society: in particular, a life on credit (there is an increasing number of credit cards in Poland); and the use of brands as symbols of social status. The article explores the rapid development of consumer culture in Poland, where the Protestant work ethic roots of capitalism, for one reason or another, have not taken hold, and the relationship between that culture and civil society. The author concludes that it would be easy to see an inimical relationship between the two concepts, but that what is most important is to create a balance between them as a means of overcoming the 'self-centred' nature of modern capitalism.*

**Keywords:** *Polish society, consumer culture, capitalism, civil society*

### Introduction

It is difficult for sociologists to avoid recalling Max Weber when thinking about capitalism.<sup>1</sup> It is universally known that he is the author of one of the most famous theses in sociology, which claims that protestant ethics are the origin of capitalism. This thesis is so deeply-rooted in sociological theory that – in general – no-one reflects on whether or not it is right. There have been many critics who have tried to refute Weberian thinking and assumptions. More inquiring readers of the author of *Economy and Society* know that, for Max Weber, protestant ideas were very important to the rising culture of capitalism – but that they were not the only ones.

Considering these limitations, one should be conscious that the ethical pattern of Protestantism is very important. Thanks to the idea of predestination, people were convinced that God had chosen their destiny. They could not penetrate the mind of the Creator and discern what was in store for them. Thus, in theological meaning, the situation of the Puritans was dramatic because uncertainty and fear ruled human fate. The main question was: 'Is God merciful to me?' However, the problem was resolved. God had to provide some premise on the basis of which people come round to the view of their salvation after death; one of which these was prosperity in ordinary life. If someone was leading a life full of material success, it meant that that person had deserved it. A good, rich life indicated the chances of eternal redemption.

It was commonly known that waiting for a good life and for riches was a little dangerous because it pushed humans into the arms of both quandary and fear – whether

1 Weber, M (1994) *Etyka protestancka a duch kapitalizmu* Lublin: TEST.

everything would be fine after their death. Waiting was not a good way to behave. It was better to do something; to act and to work, to create fortune to 'help' the Creator. The result was that people began to 're-forge' their own fate in happy endings and spiritual destination. In such a way, the ethics of work – related to Protestantism – was born. It demanded very hard work and the accumulation of profits from which to invest further. It did not condone the use of material benefits in a hedonistic way, which could raise God to anger.

Thanks to investment, capital developed; factories, companies and enterprises grew; and a middle class was established. With riches a new economic model was created; based on supply and demand, we call it capitalism. Looking in its face today, it is very difficult to believe that its forerunners were, in their lifestyles, puritan-ascetics who treated their work as a religious vocation and their life according to the will of God.

The old, ascetic capitalism of those times turned into dust and ashes. Daniel Bell got the point when he described what had happened with the protestant spirit of capitalism.<sup>2</sup> In 1902, industrial production of large window glass was starting, for people's houses but, most of all, for shops. Varied and colourful goods were becoming available and, with time, small shops were replaced by supermarkets. In small ones, the well-known retailer could pack for us all our shopping. In bigger ones, everything was in the same cardboard packaging and cashiers were anonymous. Products were branded and their quality was always the same – that was the impact of factory production.<sup>3</sup>

Changes in mentality and attitudes were not only caused by the new technologies. We should add to these advertisements, marketing and credit. The last of these made it possible to purchase desired goods or services, even if someone did not have the right amount of money. Most of all, it undermined puritan authority rooted in a culture of savings. The financial crises we have recently experienced have shown very clearly that credit has become an everyday way of life for millions of people. Goods and services being on general release, and with credit easily obtained, led to old protestant ethics being altered by a new capitalist economy based on hedonism, indulgence and hyper-consumerism.

As a result, the morality of joyness takes the place of the 'morality of goodness' that restrained urges.<sup>4</sup>

Capitalism, supported up to this point by a strong moral authority, falls in Daniel Bell's opinion into cultural contradictions:

From one point, corporations expect individuals to work hard, make careers, agree on delayed gratuity – they want workers to become a member of the organisation. On the other hand – the

2 Bell, D (1994) *Kulturowe sprzeczności kapitalizmu* Warszawa: PWN.

3 Markowski, G (2004) *Świątynia konsumpcji* Warszawa: Trio.

4 Bell, D (1994) *op. cit.* p. 107.

products and entertainments proposed by corporations induce people to consume, based on instant pleasures and self-indulgence.<sup>5</sup>

The market ‘takes over’ successive domains of human life and, due to this process, they become more commercialised. Now:

Consumer culture is such a culture in which the relationship between everyday social life and symbolic and material resources – on which that life is based – is mediated by the market and its mechanism.<sup>6</sup>

Tomasz Szlendak mentions the features of contemporary consumer society which are connected with the so-called ‘new capitalism’. Those features are:

The predomination of the service and information sector over the production sector; the shift from mass production and mass consumption to flexible and specialised consumption and production, adapted to the needs of various groups of consumers; the advanced fragmentation of the working class; and the radical extension of forms of leisure and entertainment.<sup>7</sup>

The ‘new capitalism’ (in which people are above all consumers, not producers) has caused changes in the consumer area and the coming of a ‘new consumerism’, also called ‘hyper-consumerism’. The ‘new consumerism’ is described by Juliet Schor as mass ‘over-spending’.<sup>8</sup> Consumerism at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is hyper-consumerism where people spend more than they should and more than they have. What is the reason for that? Schor looks for an answer in alternations among reference groups. After the Second World War, the main reference group was the neighbourhood. In the 50s, the Smiths had to have the same as the Johnsons: a washing machine; a vacuum cleaner; and – most of all – the newest Chevrolet parked in front of their house. In the 70s, changes came and disturbed the previous idyll. At that time, housewives who had not worked before were entering the labour market, and the consequences of this were highly important. The most evident is that they began to see (and compare) people who were living differently, behaving differently and who belonged to other (and on the whole, higher) social classes. The reference group hitherto was displaced by people from other social backgrounds: executives; managers; rich people – all consuming in a distinctly different manner.

The other factors bringing the ‘new consumerism’ were: advertising (especially on television); consumer loans (for the masses) via credit cards; and also continuing increases in the standard of living. Satisfying the wishes (induced by ads) became more

5 *ibid.*

6 Szlendak, T (2005) *Leniwe maskotki i rekiny na smyczy. W co kultura konsumpcyjna przemieniła mężczyzn i kobiety* Warszawa: Santorski, p. 82.

7 Szlendak, T (2004) *Supermarketyzacja. Religia i obyczaje seksualne młodzieży w kulturze konsumpcyjnej* Wrocław: UW, p. 68.

8 Schor, J (1999) *The Overspent American: Upscaling, Downshifting and the New Consumer* New York: Basic Books, p. 20.

possible when banks under-rated the previously indispensable requirements behind getting access to money. When credit became common, living on credit and over-spending also became common. The rest is well-known. The global financial crisis was, in one way, the consequence of excessive consumption and of living beyond one's means. The crucial question is: what will be the next step in the history of capitalism?

### Polish capitalism

I introduced the history of capitalism (of course, briefly) in order to provide a good foundation for an analysis of the Polish situation. The passing from 'Protestant' to 'hyper-consumer' capitalism was not accidentally signalled. However, I think that there has not been a 'protestant' era in the youthful history of Polish capitalism. Polish capitalism, with all due reservations, is the 'consumer' one; an ethics similar to puritan attitudes has never appeared in Poland. The reasons for this are various and I mention some of them below.

The communist era ended in 1989 and was replaced by the market economy. There were many problems and social conflicts during the incorporation of liberal ideas in Poland. I write 'liberal', because the main thinker behind the Polish economic transformation – Leszek Balcerowicz – is a person with a liberal system of values:

The neoliberal economic reform incorporated at the beginning of the 90s in socialist countries, and brought in to transform recession, demonstrated itself by distinct reductions in output and services. It was accompanied by other recessive phenomena such as: a reduction in gross national product, a decreasing level of consumption, a high rate of inflation, an increase in unemployment, etc.<sup>9</sup>

The well-known 'Balcerowicz Plan' gained many adversaries, including among the best-known Polish economists.<sup>10</sup> This plan was called 'shock therapy', due to its radical break with the heritage of the socialist economy. Nowadays, the Polish economy is a free market economy but, from 1989, the economic transformation evoked many protests and strikes, and resulted in some populist parties gaining in support. The standard of living was poorest at the beginning of the 90s. At the time, negative opinions prevailed over positive ones by a factor of three.

At the time of implementing the economic reforms, there were periods of rising unemployment (while 'structural unemployment' also occurred), as well as the creation of an underclass. It appeared that the collapse of public factories and works (those which were restructured or the ones which did not manage to succeed in the circumstances of economic competition) left thousands of people out of work and – what is perhaps most important – without any creative ideas for the following times. In many cases, there were no alternatives for the unemployed who were left behind.

It also appeared that some people were incapable of taking risks, to retrain; they were just not accustomed to decide for themselves. Certainly, their mentality was not

9 Karczmazczuk, K (2000) 'Determinizm a ryzyko transformacyjne. Przedsiębiorstwa w warunkach polskiego "wschodzącego rynku"' in *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* XLIV(3): 84.

10 Kołodko, G (2008) *Wędrujący świat* Warszawa: Prószyński.

enterprising; and undoubtedly not ‘Protestant’. Almost one-half of those questioned in a survey (47 %) think that the transformations in Poland after 1989 have brought more benefits than losses. Less than one-sixth (16 %) evaluate that the losses exceed the advantages, while less than one-third (30 %) believe that output is balanced. Nevertheless, it remains the case that 89 % of Poles think it is good that the change in the economic system happened.<sup>11</sup>

These data have led some thinkers to consider Polish capitalism to be ‘unreal’. Tomasz Szlendak and Krzysztof Pietrowicz argue that there are not too many entrepreneurs in the population.<sup>12</sup> Poles want to have permanent job positions even if this is in contrast to global trends. Poles, according to these sociologists, want their work to bring in a deal of money and to guarantee other kinds of benefits, like good terms of trade or social allowances. Examples of protests inspired by trade unions show that occupational groups can defend their own interests regardless of whether or not this has a negative effect on their company. On many occasions, the Polish government has yielded to the pressure of, for example, miners.

In the last presidential election, nearly 50 % people voted for candidates who referred to the slogan ‘Solidarity Poland’, which was used to signify that government and the state are prepared to assume a role in the distribution of resources and wield a level of guardianship. According to Edmund Mokrzycki:

Polish democracy is recreating, in another institutional framework, the traditional structure of power characterised by a division between ‘authority’ and ‘society’ – ‘authority’ in its characteristic east European meaning which one cannot translate into English or French. Society, in its basic foundation, endows the ‘authority’ (elected in a democratic way) with the attributes of authoritarian power and expects to be ‘ruled’ well, in an appropriate way.<sup>13</sup>

A ‘passive mentality’ is typical of a majority of citizens. Andrzej Słaboń understands it as:

A reliable carrying out of duties and waiting for rulers to solve all the problems.<sup>14</sup>

People with a mentality of this kind are leading a ‘simple’ life, achieve an average material standard and like peace and quiet and a lack of trouble. Their existence is based on daily routine and certainty. Such people do not take risks and do not have innovative ideas, either in their own life or in the surrounding environment. ‘Passive-man’ never becomes ‘self-made man’ (he/she is ‘self-made’ rather by family, social demands, and

- 11 [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K\\_094\\_10.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K_094_10.PDF) [last accessed 23 August 2010].
- 12 Szlendak, T and K. Pietrowicz (2005) ‘Konsumpcja i stratyfikacja w kapitalizmie bez kapitału’ in T. Szlendak and K. Pietrowicz (Eds.) *Na pokaz. O konsumeryzmie w kapitalizmie bez kapitału* Toruń: UMK, p. 13.
- 13 Mokrzycki, E (2001) *Bilans niesentymentalny* Warszawa: IFiS PAN, p. 148.
- 14 Słaboń, Słabo (2007) ‘Problemy kształtowania mentalności ekonomicznej’ in J. Mucha, M. Nawojczyk and G. Woroniecka (Eds.) *Kultura i gospodarka. Ku antropologii życia gospodarczego we współczesnej Polsce* Tychy: WSZiNS, p. 49-60.

so on) and no-one should expect from him/her the ‘tipping points’<sup>15</sup> which revolutionise management and deliver the new in place of the old. ‘The new’ can be led only by people with an expansionist mentality. This characteristic is very difficult to attain for people brought up under socialism. The result is that only a minority of people are ‘expansionist’ in Poland.

The middle class, as a complex of qualities and not as a social class within the traditional meaning, has not been created in Poland. One of its qualities is the making of progress, development, not standing still. It means being ready for that attitude towards investment when thrift would not imply further investment. However, according to research carried out by Henryk Domański:

On the side of the adherents of self-discipline, 87 % were farmers and landowners. Such attitudes were found more infrequently among intellectuals, managers and proprietors where, theoretically, the spirit of capitalism should dominate. (...) The average Pole preferred to consume even at a low level of surplus income, which illustrates the face of Polish capitalism and the moderate consumer possibilities of our middle class.<sup>16</sup>

Polish people are not inclined to save money for their future. Only 13 % of people of productive age declare that they are saving with their retirement in mind, while 21 % declare that they are not saving but have an intention of doing so. Over one-half of respondents of productive age say that they are not saving for their old age and that, furthermore, they do not intend to do so.<sup>17</sup>

Jadwiga Staniszkis terms Polish capitalism as either ‘state’, ‘public sector’ or ‘incomplete’. According to Staniszkis, the features of ‘incomplete’ capitalism are: the stopping of investment processes; weakening domestic demand; declining export competitiveness; the waste of resources in the public sector (clientelism); and a downturn in the liquidity of the economy due to blocked payments, mutual debts and the decline of borrowing power. Domestic demand was fuelled by the individual debts of Poles and it has been operable only partially. In the face of the crisis, it appears that many Poles were not able to live beyond their means and, as a result, many people have problems with regular payments.<sup>18</sup>

It is interesting that the strong role of the state is also emphasised by the governing party in Poland (Civic Platform), which is descended from the ring of people who have always described themselves as ‘liberal’ (most of all in the economic sense):

The party of economic liberals is creating network corporations controlled by government: from the financial sector through to the power industry and the machine industry. The CP, with a breadth which Jarosław Kaczyński did not dream of [Jarosław Kaczyński was the leader of the Law and Justice Party which ruled in Poland from 2005-2007 and which professed slogans

- 15 Gladwell, M (2009) *Punkt przełomowy* Kraków: Znak.
- 16 Domański, H (2001) ‘Klasy średnie w Polsce a wybrane aspekty protestanckiego etosu’ *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* XLV(1): 113-114.
- 17 [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K\\_077\\_10.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K_077_10.PDF) [last accessed on 23 August 2010].
- 18 Staniszkis, J (2003) *Władza globalizacji* Warszawa: SCHOLAR, p. 115.

on solidarity and welfare state, and which is now the main opposition in the Polish parliament], is developing a state capitalism – nationalising successive companies and greedily clocking private retirement funds. It has nothing in common with the liberal economy.<sup>19</sup>

The features of the middle class have not been created on a major scale in Poland. Also, the number of entrepreneurs who have built significant personal fortunes is still low. Among the 125 richest people in the world (in 2009), there was no Polish entrepreneur. Polish capitalism has not had the time to develop considerably (compared to other countries in western Europe); however, after twenty one years, and due to various reasons, Protestant attitudes have not, in general, come into being. Probably, in addition to the reasons stated above (the socialist mentality; the state being made responsible for all issues; and a reluctance to save and invest), one can provide others.

In Poland, Protestant ideas have never been popular and under no circumstances have they determined the economic approach. The main denomination and the strongest religion, with the most popular worldview, has been the Roman Catholic Church. Catholic social teaching very clearly emphasises the social aspect of the economy and has always been critical of liberal assumptions (which can be found, for example, in papal encyclicals).

To the abrogated mentality of church teaching one should add the very fast rate of change after 1989. The liberalisation of economic life was a shock for many social groups. The ethos of hard work and asceticism was not possible in a situation in which – both mentally and legally – Polish society was not prepared for the capitalist way of life. Simultaneously, after the opening up of the world – mostly the western one – Poles had the chance to make up for the deficiencies of goods and commodities. The consumer culture was open to them, with all its benefits. However, an insufficiently developed market economy has led to the creation of something called ‘capitalism without capital’. Poles do not have both the financial capital to invest and the social capital to build civil society.

At the same time, the lowly means which Polish people have at their disposal are very quickly spent on consumption – especially after promotion by advertisement. The debts of Poles are rising, but not their social capital. With the lack of a bourgeois class and an ignored voice of intellectuals, Polish society identifies with the American one. Without developed civil aspirations, it has turned towards hyper-consumerism, which is becoming the main face of the Polish people. In 2009, Poles had overdue debts to the value of €4.2bn – double the 2008 figure.<sup>20</sup> In 2007, Poles estimated their financial opportunities to borrow money more optimistically. In 2008, over one-quarter (28 %) borrowed money from a bank (or another financial institution). In contrast, however, the proportion of people who had borrowed money was reduced by about five percentage points.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, almost one-half of respondents to a recent survey (46 %) declare that they have some duties, rates, loans or credit to repay. Seven per

19 Kowalik, F (2010) ‘Czebole po polsku’ *Forbes* No. 8, p. 20.

20 <http://www.money.pl/gospodarka/wiadomosci/artykul/zadluzenie:polakow;drasty-cznie;wzroslo,73,0,595529.html> [last accessed on 23 August 2010].

21 [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K\\_021\\_10.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K_021_10.PDF) [last accessed on 23 August 2010].

cent admit that their household is exceedingly indebted; that is, it has problems with repayments. The majority of households (63 %) have not gathered any savings and not much above one-third (37 %) is putting money by for a rainy day.<sup>22</sup>

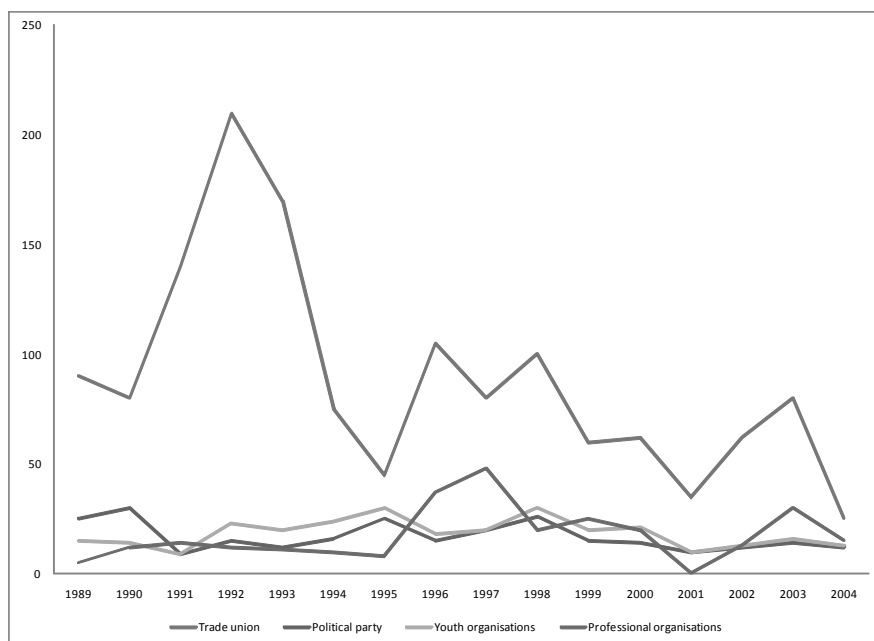
### Consumer culture and civil society

In 2009 – the same as two years before – one-fifth of adult Poles (20 %) worked voluntarily and for free on behalf of the environment, the church, or estates, cottages, cities or people in need. The distinct majority (80 %), therefore, did not carry out such actions.<sup>23</sup>

Concerning social trust – the foundation of civil society – Poland comes last but one in Europe, ahead only of Greece. The general assumption of caution in relations with other people (to assume, this means people outside one's own closest circle) is connected with the everyday life of Poles. When asking about trust in an unknown person with whom – in various conditions – respondents have been in contact, only one-third (34 %, three points less than two years before), answered in the affirmative, while 30 % suggested a limited level of trust. Nearly one-half of the population (46 %) do not trust strangers and one-fourteenth (7 %) absolutely do not do so.<sup>24</sup>

Figure 1 below highlights which organisations – and to what degree – arranged protests and street demonstrations during 1989-2004.

- 22 [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K\\_050\\_10.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K_050_10.PDF) [last accessed on 23 August 2010].
- 23 [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K\\_010\\_10.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K_010_10.PDF) [last accessed on 23 August 2010].
- 24 [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K\\_029\\_10.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K_029_10.PDF) [last accessed on 23 August 2010].

**Figure 1 – Organisations leading or sponsoring the event (no. of events)**

Source: Michal Wenzel and Jan Kubik (2009) *Civil Society In Poland. Case study paper presented at the international conference 'The Logic of Civil Society in New Democracies: East Asia and East Europe', held in Taipei, 5-7 June.*

It can clearly be seen that the main initiators of protests have been the trade unions. They are disposed towards a particular view and have regard most of all not for general social change but for the interests of their own members. Unions tend to protest only when the government seeks to enact a bill concerning the rights of trade unions – for example, when a bill seeks to confine union benefits or to privatise a factory. Usually, they do not protest at poor social problems in general (for example, unemployment in other areas, violations of minority rights and so forth).

In comparison to unions, however, other organisations (mainly NGOs) have taken social actions to a considerably smaller degree.

These details show that Polish society – running as it is into the arms of the ‘hyper-consumer’ variant of capitalism – has a very weak foundation for civil society. It is interesting that other countries of western Europe (with more developed consumer cultures and attitudes) distinguish themselves concerning the level of civil activity, although they probably have stronger, and longer, traditions in this area. Polish society is, in contrast, explained by a long duration of socialism.

However, the development of ‘consumer’ capitalism is conducive to a deepening individualisation, a weakening of social ties and a corrosion of citizenship. These are

the dark side of consumerism and are exactly as described by some thinkers. I would like to present some aspects of this in this section.

Is consumer culture the ‘enemy’ of civil society? According to some, the answer is ‘yes’ (of course, most are left-wing, or liberal democrats, in their thinking). Consumption takes place most of all in the individual dimension and this is not a breeding ground for developing community attitudes. To want to cope with the latest fashion trends, consumers need a greater and greater amount of money in their pockets. Should this be lacking, they take out a credit card – subjugating the future (via the delay to payment) to the aid of joy in the ‘here and now’ (this phenomenon is connected with the present-day transformation of time, as Manuel Castells argues).<sup>25</sup> However, this always demands more earnings. More earnings are connected with more work: more money equals more hours in the company. In consequence, there is less time for family and social works. In the first case, the response is to provide ‘guilt money’<sup>26</sup> – guilt at spending too little time with children is compensated by the spending of more money on toys, sweets, hi-tech equipment, mobile phones, computers or TV sets – everything a child could need to stay on their own in their own room (for instance, children in the USA have the highest level of TV sets in their room). In the second case, as Robert D. Putnam has proven, civil activities are being corroded, as are the opportunities for building social capital.<sup>27</sup>

Benjamin R. Barber argues that the consumer culture is infantilising the adult. Thanks to the alteration of adults into children, it is much easier to manipulate them and make them centred upon the market and on shopping. Every parent knows that children would purchase every good if only they could, whereas adults are supposed to be the buffer to protect their children from the influence of advertising and marketing programmes. For companies, the solution is to change parents into infantilised people who can behave like kids, whereupon the stream of irrational purchases would be opened up. Barber notices the threat to democracy in this:

The ethos of infantilisation introduces a division between culture and capitalism. That ethos has become more effective thanks to the alliance with the ideology of privatisation, which is destructive to civilisation in itself. We are encouraged to take back from our public selves and separate out to gated communities where, for private funds, we can buy those goods and services which formerly had a public character, such as: waste disposal; police protection; and the education of children – concerning all such private things.<sup>28</sup>

However, can individual choices build civil attitudes? It is difficult to say. Surely, the manner of conscious choice, a kind of dialogue with one’s self, could be a promising beginning. The existence of choice in definition assumes diversity and a variety, which is associated with democracy. Very often, social movements rise up to provide a re-

25 Castells, M (2007) *Spoleczeństwo sieci* Warszawa: PWN.

26 Schor, J (2004) *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* New York: Scribner, p. 25.

27 Putnam, R. D (2008) *Samotna gra w kregle* Warszawa: WAiP.

28 Barber, B (2008) *Skonsumowani. Jak rynek psuje dzieci, infantylizuje dorosłych i polyka obywateli* Warszawa: MUZA, p. 200.

sistance to harsh living conditions (such as poverty and political repression). It is more friendly when civil activity is born of unconstrained intention, i.e. is the result of people deciding clearly for themselves. Consumerism has some contiguous points with civil society – albeit, I must assume, very weak ones. Consumption is integrally connected with competition on the individual market. The consumer, with all due reservation, is an individual. A citizen is a person who has rights and who can take advantage of them. Both the consumer and the citizen have the ‘right’ to choose; or to give up. So, perhaps the consumer-citizen dichotomy has been improperly formulated. These are two sides of the same coin. They are connected with different everyday issues (and – in general – they are only connected), but they are also in some way inseparable.

## Conclusions

Rafał Drozdowski comments:

It is said nowhere that the masses of consumers which do not feel responsible to respect old, traditional civil commitments have to be devoid of consumer ethics (demanding, for example, not to buy false products and not to accept producers who produce more cheaply but at the expense of human and ecological rights).<sup>29</sup>

Simultaneously, however, in the context of Polish society, Drozdowski is trying not to place himself under illusions:

Now, however, the wide-excited consumer aspirations of Polish society are connected to its still relatively low purchasing power, but are effective as regards selfishness and the deeply anti-social disposition of consumer strategies. This is related to the fact that, in a consumer’s mind, thinking in terms of the categories of consumer benefits becomes dominated instead by categories of civil benefits.<sup>30</sup>

If one is considering the passivity and apathy of citizens (connected with low electoral turnouts and young people being unattached to any idea), one can say that ‘the side of consumption’ prevails and is impairing ‘the side of citizenship’. Civil attitudes need to reflect on more sophisticated issues and, for many, this is more boring than a walk to the shopping centre. Therefore, the matter of fact is not how to change the consumer into the citizen, but rather: how to balance both sides. It is also a task for teachers, journalists, researchers and, most of all, parents. This is particularly so in Poland, where capitalism with a distinct ‘self-centred’ shade seems the only option we have.

29 Drozdowski, R (2008) ‘Spontaniczny demontaż idei dobra wspólnego’ in J. Mucha, E. Narkiewicz-Niedbalec and M. Zielińska (Eds.) *Co nas łączy, co nas dzieli?* Zielona Góra: UZG, p. 109.

30 *ibid.*