

## The Culture of Poverty in Warsaw District of Praga

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**Abstract:** This article presents a study of the urban culture of poverty conducted between 2019 and 2021 in Warsaw's Praga district, culminating in a PhD thesis written at the Maria Grzegorzewska University (APS). The research conducted provides a better understanding of how the persistence of the culture of poverty, a kind of social "disability" and, at the same time, a social necessity, is sustained. It points to problems in the relationship between respondents and their social environment, as well as to mechanisms of marginalisation and self-exclusion. The article consists of three parts. The first presents the concept of the culture of poverty, the second presents the form and conduct of the research, and the third presents the research results and conclusions.

**Keywords:** culture, culture of poverty, pathology, society, community, social exclusion, forms of social life, grid/group.

### Enclave of Culture of Poverty in the Warsaw District of Praga

The problem of the culture of poverty I want to address here can be illustrated by the fate of Mr Gum (*Pan Guma*), a specific Praga artefact. Mr Gum is a rubber monument by Paweł Althamer erected in 2009 on the corner of Stalowa and Czynyżowa Streets, representing a character typical for a community degraded by alcohol and poverty. His living prototype (at the time of the statue's creation) was pointed out by children from the Pedagogy and Social Animation Group of Praga Północ. Mr Gum, made of rubber, wearing a characteristic jacket, stood in a humble pose on a spring built into the pavement but not everyone liked him and he soon disappeared. According to the official version, it went for refurbishment. Asking old and new residents of the district about Mr Gum, one learns how controversial a subject he is and how difficult it is to talk

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about him. Regardless of the stance taken, it is apparent that there is a significant lack of language to express respect towards culturally different people who were born and brought up in Praga. The problem of culturally reproduced poverty across generations is an issue of a specific social disability, which is at the same time systemically produced. It therefore constitutes a kind of mirror in which it is worthwhile to look from time to time – although we mostly avoid doing so.

Enclaves of poverty have always existed in Poland, also under communism, when the problem of poverty-based exclusion was programmatically “overlooked”. Over the years, a kind of the phenomenon of culture of poverty developed in these enclaves (Lewis, 1969). The area of Warsaw’s urban poverty, associated with a build-up of problems often referred to as social pathology, existed here throughout the communist era and was not an exception on the map of Poland (cf. Wódz, 1988). The persistence of the phenomenon, its intergenerational transmission and the resistance that Praga’s distinctiveness offered to socio-economic change were observed here despite the intensive rehabilitation work carried out after 1989, mainly by NGOs. Only intensive gentrification measures and the displacement of the marginalised population to other parts of the city seem to put an end to the phenomenon today, but concerns about a mundane and easily overlooked thing – human fate – still remain.

Although, at the same time, it is essential to emphasize that the enclave to which we refer here do not involve the whole of Praga district. In Praga, we find the whole social spectrum and the term “culture of poverty in Praga district” is related this particular enclave. The research on the culture of poverty in Praga, carried out between 2019 and 2021 as part of the doctoral studies at the APS, makes it possible to show people in connection with their fading cultural background. Fortunately fading – one would like to add – although, as the collected material shows, this fading does not always and not entirely have a positive effect. The research also makes it possible, on the basis of the theoretical foundations of the concept, to show the inevitability of the existence of areas of exclusion (not necessarily spatial) in modern societies. The thesis of the cultural conditioning of Praga’s problems and the indication of the mechanisms by which this conditioning is governed sheds light on the difficulties and paradoxes of effective social policy and, above all, on the necessity of the long-term nature of comprehensive, culture-oriented re-socialisation activities.

The article, which aims to present the results of the research, formulates the postulate of bridging the gap between subcultures and the mainstream. It consists of three parts. The first presents the concept of the culture of poverty, the second presents the form and conduct of the research, and the third presents the research results and conclusions.

### Oscar Lewis' concept of the Culture of Poverty

We owe the concept of the culture of poverty to Oscar Lewis, the American anthropologist who initiated a systematic study based on interviews with residents of the *favelas* of Mexico City in the 1960s. These became famous in academic circles thanks to the multiplied interview, a groundbreaking autobiographical method in which Lewis made heard the voice to family members representing the community of interest. Their parallel stories, written down on the basis of insightful interviews and long-term observation, made up to a polyphonic tale of life in the *favelas* of South American cities, revealing its material, emotional, social and spiritual side. Lewis continued to work in other cities, including those of India (Lewis, 1959, 1970, 1976). The autobiographies he presented and the descriptions of life observed through the eyes of the families living in the *favelas* added up to a picture of a distinct culture, governed by distinct laws which are modelling the thinking, and consequently the lives, of its members. Lewis sought to demonstrate that the intergenerational transmission of approaches to life, resulting in remaining in the poverty zone, has the characteristics of cultural transmission. The inculcation of the mechanism that perpetuates a particular way of functioning in the world takes place through immersion in that culture, which governs both domestic life and the life of the community as a whole. The processes of transmission remain beyond the consciousness of the transmitters and the recipients; all have a sense of living in the only possible world in which only possible human destinies are realised. Thus, the culture of poverty, with its own references, creates its own meanings and influences a specific, characteristic way of functioning in the world. It is these references and this functioning that are subject to transmission from generation to generation and that constitute cultural distinctiveness.

Lewis first used the term “culture of poverty” in 1959 and returned to it many times in numerous articles and prefaces to published books. The latter took the form of multiplied autobiographies, sketching the lives of Mexican and Puerto Rican families in the words of different members of the same family, describing the same events from their own perspective. Lewis defined the culture of poverty as a social entity existing parallel to the mainstream. He believed that the culture of poverty is a reaction to a low class position in capitalist society. It has an adaptive character, adapting to the particular conditions of living in long-term and multi-generational poverty, most often in the suburbs of big cities, in slums, but also in backward rural regions (in Poland, one can point to the example of the post-communist rural “PGR” slums). After all, the researcher’s attention was caught by a different characteristic of adaptation: the culture of poverty is not just an adaptation to a set of objective conditions of the wider society. Once it exists, it tends to persist from generation to generation. By the age of six or seven, children

are absorbing the basic values and attitudes inherent in the subculture, making them mentally unfit to take full advantage of the changing conditions and increasing opportunities life may offer them. The culture of poverty is thus determined by specific social relations. Lewis pointed out that the subculture develops mechanisms of perpetuation, manifested especially in the formation of the world-view, aspirations and character of the children growing up in it (Lewis, 1969, pp. 198–199).

Lewis' work outlined the clear cultural distinctiveness of the members of the community under study. He identified as many as seventy traits indicating the existence of a culture of poverty, traits unique to it and not found in representatives of other lower classes. These are, above all, fatalism, lack of a sense of agency and self-confidence (even the promising enterprises end somehow badly, Sanchez family members remain in a kind of vicious circle, nullifying efforts by themselves for reasons that are not entirely clear). In the environment of a culture of poverty, there is an acquiescence to pathology, a willingness to tolerate behaviour that the middle class considers deviant (such as daily violence, both verbal and physical – against children, women and also strangers, expressed in the almost constant threat of street brawls; alcohol and drug abuse, tolerance of fraud and theft). The lack of trust in the world around them, the lack of dependence and the lack of belonging make the representatives of this subculture feel like strangers in their own country, living in the belief that existing institutions do not serve their needs and that there are no persons or institutions defending their interests.

However, Lewis pointed out that the subculture of the poor only forms under specific conditions and does not apply to all people living in poverty. It is a confluence of adverse factors, overlapping over time. Essential to the formation of this phenomenon is the specificity of poverty experienced by people, educated in multi-generational and total immersion in it. Short-term, incidental poverty is not a breeding ground for the development of the characteristics inherent in the subculture of poverty. Material deprivation in any environment degenerates living conditions and creates similar problems and thus, enforces similar ways of functioning. Lewis, however, points to the example of members of the middle class who, having experienced episodes of poverty and even lived for a time in slums, do not, by virtue of previously acquired values, assimilated norms, an educated ability to observe them and an established middle-class lifestyle, contribute to the culture of poverty. This is not to say that members of the subculture of poverty do not evolve or are not subject to change. However, attention is drawn to the fact that the elements of the culture of poverty are so persistent and so distinctive that they are dominantly responsible for the living situation of those in its circle, and even a partial change in material status does not guarantee that a member of this culture will permanently leave the vicious circle of poverty. The culture of poverty

is analysed at four levels. From the level of wider society, we observe that it is characterised by a lack of active participation in large institutions (e.g. no membership of political parties, associations). This is mostly due to a lack of financial resources, also to overt or covert discrimination. On the part of the representatives of the culture of poverty, we observe fear, suspicion or apathy. The lack of ties to the institutions of the wider society translates into a lack of participation in the life of the wider community (occasional membership of an organisation is not tantamount to a denial of belonging to the culture of poverty). Criticism of the core institutions of society, expressed in hostility to the police and dislike of dignitaries and government, is characteristic. At this level of analysis, attention is also paid to structural factors such as persistent unemployment, casual work, frequent pawning of personal belongings, borrowing money, acquiring mainly clothes and second-hand items. The analysis from the local community level draws attention to the struggle with poor housing conditions, cramped conditions and lack of infrastructure, as well as a widespread dislike of strangers and confinement to the family or neighbourhood circle. Related to this is the next level of analysis. At the family level, the main characteristics of the culture of poverty are the absence of childhood as a special stage in life with special protection, the prevalence of cohabitation, and the tendency towards matriarchal families. At the psychological, individual level, one perceives a sense of exclusion and marginalisation, low self-esteem, helplessness, a tendency to addictions.

The pioneer of research into the cultural aspects of poverty in Poland, also in the Lewisian sense, was Elżbieta Tarkowska (1999, 2000, 2002a, 2002b). Acting at a time of rapid economic change in Poland, Tarkowska devoted herself to restoring public awareness of the issue of poverty, acute in interwar Poland, tabooed during the Polish People's Republic and returning in a great wave during the Third Polish Republic. Attention was focused primarily on the most current, already mentioned, rural post-PGR poverty. This type of poverty created the largest poverty enclaves in times of political transformation. Affecting many families, it showed the tendency to intergenerational inheritance, along with accompanying syndromes such as drunkenness and alcoholism, violence, including the one in the family, lack of family and life planning, low education and unemployment.

Among the pioneers of poverty culture research, in the style of life aspect, was Hanna Palska, who highlighted spatial segregation and the aspect of isolation of the underclass from society. Being a marginalized local community, the culture of poverty is relegated to the periphery and spatially restricted, resulting in a concentration effect – of people and problems. As a result, the culture of poverty encompasses all typological elements of exclusion: social, economic, cultural and psychological (Palska, 2002).

Many other researchers, associated with “good governance of society” after the political transformation and accession to the European Union, were inspired by the above mentioned, and adapted the poverty measurement apparatus and conceptual system to that used in the European Union. There were also those interested in the culture of poverty itself (Karwacki, 2003; Karwacki & Antonowicz, 2003; Kowalewska, 2018; Osińska & Śliwińska, 1999; Skulmowska, 2004, pp. 85–98).

Studying the fate of people whose personalities were shaped within local communities of poverty led Karwacki to the conclusion of the “vicious circle” of the reproduction of the culture of poverty and the need to recognise the requirement of cultural analysis of the intergenerational transmission of the specific norms and values that develop on the ground of the underclass (Karwacki, 2006, p. 93). Karwacki pointed to the generalised problem of the crisis of local ties; he wrote about “good” (inclusive, where people work together, committed to common goals and caring for a common territory) and “bad” localness (2006, pp. 40–41) and gave his approach a universal character favourable for practical purposes.

Particularly noteworthy is Monika Oliwa-Ciesielska and her methodologically exemplary study of foundational material – the diaries of the unemployed from the 1920s from the collection of the Institute of Social Economy (*Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego*) of the Warsaw School of Economics (SGH), in which we find an analysis of the lives of the poor in the categories of Lewis’ concept, researched in the perspective of grounded theory (Oliwa-Ciesielska, 2013).

### **Form and Course of Research**

The district to which left-bank Warsaw turned its back for many decades, Praga, the area around the Wileński Railway Station, the Różycki Bazaar and, earlier, the bazaar on Strzelecka Street, has become overgrown with *lumpenproletarian* folklore and has developed its own cultural profile, which bears the hallmarks of a culture of poverty transmitted through generations, with all its ills and vices. Whether this is actually the case and how the thesis about the existence of cultural distinctiveness can be justified was the main goal of the research, conducted at a time of rapid shrinking of the scope of the phenomenon in question. Recent years’ changes in Praga district happen at a dizzying pace, under the influence of the social policy pursued by the city authorities in cooperation with non-governmental organizations. At the same time, intense gentrification activities improve infrastructure, in particular communication (metro) and new buildings are being built in a place of degraded tenement houses, intended for wealthy Warsaw residents which results in the gradual removal and pushing of the poor population out of the district.

The research problem, formulated as a thesis about the existence of a Praga culture (or subculture) of poverty, was associated with several auxiliary hypotheses. These were assumptions about the functioning of institutions in certain areas of Praga that organized the life of communities different from the mainstream of Warsaw life. Firstly, the existence of another dominant family model, which is an adapted to overcome everyday difficulties – a flexible model, taking into account factors such as density or alcohol problems (and further problems caused by the latter). Secondly, the existence of different aspirations and life goals of people living here, different socialization (resulting in conflicts with mainstream institutions such as school, police and law). Thirdly, creating different traditions of spending time (not only free time) – specific forms and traditions characterizing local community. Street workers organizations (dealing mainly with children who spend most of their time on Praga streets, in courtyards and in the staircases of devastated Praga tenement houses) know best about the fact of families by accumulated problems. I was interested in whether, by analyzing the above aspects, it is possible to demonstrate lasting cultural distinctiveness of the studied environment.

The reasons for undertaking the research was at first the desire to remember the people who lived in the “bad neighbourhood” for several generations, but above all – an attempt to capture the principles on which the paradoxical durability of a culture is based, which at first glance seems to be an environment difficult, burdened with pathology, fatalistic, devoid of opportunities, dooming to failure in the personal, social, material and purely aesthetic dimensions. The principles of functioning of the culture of poverty cannot be ignored in social rehabilitation work. While intending to intervene in this area, this must be taken into account since cultural formation largely determines the personality and character of the person we want to work with.

The method used in the research is field study, first introduced as a sociographic method in the Vienna Marienthal unemployment environment (Jahoda et al., 2007), called today an ethnographic method. It consists of various techniques, the basic of which are observation and unstructured interview, creating a strategy for examining social aspects of life (Konecki, 2012). The ethnographic research approach is aimed at discovering the nature of phenomena and processes, the task of the ethnographer is to document culture (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The analysis of ethnographic material involves inductive research leading to the isolation of key themes and issues of an axial nature, with reflexivity and a common view of the world of the subject and the researcher playing an essential role here. This is facilitated by participant observation and staying in the field as long as possible. As it follows, it is a qualitative study, aimed at a “thick description” (as Clifford Geertz would like) of the community, taking into account the behaviors,

connections, interactions and views of people representing the studied community. The use of the ethnographic method is therefore a procedure in qualitative research that allows a researcher to achieve the goal of gaining insight into customs and practices hidden from the eyes of an average observer. The aim of the research in Praga was to provide such insight and verify the thesis about the cultural distinctiveness of Praga.

### **Characteristics of the Research Group and Method of Recruitment to the Research**

According to the research assumptions, the research group was to consist of residents of the district of destroyed houses in a ghetto of poverty located opposite (by the Vistula River) the most representative district of the capital, stretching along Krakowskie Przedmieście Street. The research was limited by possibilities: it was conducted by the author herself, during a time marked by the pandemic and restrictions on interpersonal contacts, in a culturally alien environment. Therefore, the process of selecting respondents turned out to be the most difficult stage of the study, with the greatest organisational problems. I wanted to reach representatives of a specific group characterised by being closed off and cut off from contacts with strangers, being at the same time on a completely external position, as a stranger, with all the attributes of foreignness: an unwanted, intrusive, threatening person. Ultimately, I adopted the “open door” strategy (described by Hammersley & Atkinson, 2001) and appealed to the help of organizations operating in the area I was interested in – the Open Door Association (Stowarzyszenie Otwarte Drzwi), dealing with, among other things, the problem of homelessness and the Change Foundation (Fundacja Zmiana) which runs the “Neighbourhood Libraries” project and offers a possibility of community service as a replacement of prison punishment. Based on an agreement with organizations, I was able to contact respondents on their premises. Foundation created special conditions for me, including the time of interviews into the service time specified in the sentence. This exchange became an effective motivation for several dozen respondents, from whom I selected the group of focus – representatives of the Praga culture of poverty: isolated and self-isolating, reproducing intergenerational patterns of closing within poverty and pathology, implementing its own institutional patterns and values, different from the mainstream culture.

The core of the research group consisted of people in or in proximity of Brzeska Street, some are linked with other poverty enclaves of the district (names and some details changed): Alicja – an 18-year-old man with a non-binary sexual orientation, primary education, homeless (lives in a shelter of the Otwarte Drzwi Foundation), street guitar player; Anka – 19 years old, incomplete primary educa-



tion, works as a cleaner, has a criminal record; Bart – 42 years old, vocational education, construction worker, alcoholic; Kuma – 60 years old, with unfinished vocational education, moved outside Warsaw but returns to Brzeska in search of occasional work; Kaj – 65 years old, raised in an orphanage, primary education, served 22 years in prison, pensioner, lived in different tenement places in poverty enclaves of Praga; Kamila – 26 years old, catering worker, vocational education, well-functioning, but commits minor crimes, lives in Stalowa Street; Luka – 29 years old, primary education, criminal record, currently helps in a store, lives in Stalowa Street; Marek – 25 years old, incomplete primary education, waiting for a sentence, earns his living from “business” on a bench; Maciek – 38 years old, culinary vocational school, dealer, drug addict, alcoholic, convicted (in Poland and abroad); Marta – 39 years old, primary education, mother of three children, earns her living by cleaning, uses her mother’s help and social services; Targ – 22 years old, incomplete secondary education, performs construction work, specializes in electricity (self-taught); Nuk – 20 years old, secondary education, homosexual, homeless (lives in a shelter); Robert – 19 years old, primary education, makes a living from petty theft, lives on Brzeska Street; Kamil – 21 years old, did not finish primary school, works on a construction site, currently rents a flat at Rondo Wiatraczna; Piter – 34 years old, primary education, stonemason; TS – 48 years old, incomplete vocational education, built an illegal house where he lives; Struś – 42 years old, secondary education, does not work, lives in Wiosenna; Wie – 62 years old, vocational education (mining school), nomad associated with Brzeska and Targowa; engages in illegal trade; X – 28 years old, incomplete primary education, dealer and dealers’ supervisor, lives in Brzeska (but usually in prison).

### **Research Results and Conclusions**

After transcribing the recorded interviews and photocopying the written ones, I divided the obtained material into categories specified in the questionnaire as well as those identified during the research – thus, it was in accordance with the pattern observed by many researchers about conceptual breakthroughs occurring during the research. Finally, I received a kind of collective interview, grouping the answers of my interlocutors around categories that were interesting from the point of view of research assumptions. These categories made it possible to disclose the mechanisms used by the Praga culture of poverty, its exclusion as a whole, and the perpetuation of the boundaries of division. A detailed analysis of aspects of Praga culture is the subject of a doctoral dissertation written at the APS.

Based on the interviews, the following research categories were distinguished:

- 1) house and apartment,
- 2) family and interpersonal bonds,
- 3) work and education,
- 4) free time,
- 5) fun and fighting,
- 6) help,
- 7) alcohol and other stimulants,
- 8) violence,
- 9) crime and imprisonment,
- 10) feeling poor.

With respect to individual categories, the material allowed for the following characteristics:

### **1) house and apartment**

- the apartments occupied by my interlocutors belong to the city's municipal resources, they are cramped and there is not always a bathroom; residents use up every space and surface, including in passages and corridors,
- the area is damaged and neglected: falling plaster, broken windows, dirty staircases; it resembles a vicious circle of administrative negligence (lack of renovations) triggering destructive behavior of residents which in turn leads to administrators being discouraged from renovation initiatives; there is always glass on the street (Nózka, 2016),
- there is order in the apartment itself, which seems to be a condition for survival: (a) spatial order, attention to the condition of equipment and (b) specific rules of behavior that allow family members to function in a limited space – prepare and eat meals, do homework, use the bathrooms and toilets, share cleaning and care responsibilities (the characterization of the home as a family space with shared responsibility was given by Douglas (1991, pp. 287–307),
- paradoxically, the memory of the narrowness of the family home is sometimes associated with nostalgia for closeness to other people,
- there is a feeling of loneliness, isolation from both the mainstream and “one's own” environment (which is an example of its atomization),
- the environment is characterized by particularly effusive hospitality towards the group identified as “one's own” (usually a family group): the apartments of poor people will inexplicably be room for many guests, especially during

holidays. There will also often be a place for relatives who are at immediate risk of homelessness. And – there will be room for a dog and a cat,

- residents strongly identify with the district and are reluctant to leave it; young people, despite being more mobile, also like to stay in Praga.

## 2) family and interpersonal bonds

- the Praga family is characterized, according to the definition of Zbigniew Tyszką (1990) by cooperation of family members adopting the tasks determined by personal development challenges and cultural requirements. Here, however, it is often socialization to prison, through dropping out of the education system and conflicting the law; thus an aggressive personality is formed, at the same time suppressing and denying emotions,
- family is mentioned as a fundamental and primary value (which confirms the universal human need to create lasting bonds) and also as a compensatory need (possibility of relying on another person lies often and mainly in imagination),
- the forms of unmarried cohabitation and ways of caring for children are many and common, despite declared traditional values; they often resemble the *avunculate*, where mother's family, esp. brother, is responsible for children's behaviour (this protects both children and adults who, engaging in illegal activities, have a place to return from prison); a family is therefore composed of people living together, not necessarily related by blood (so it is not a model of a large family), in a tight and crowded environment, often with cohabitants and animals,
- due to dysfunctions, the role of a woman in the Praga environment is particularly important, as she takes over all the burdens of maintaining the family,
- dysfunctional family that cannot solve its problems (material, health, educational) on its own seems to be commonplace. Family dysfunction takes pathological forms, destructive to the community and its individual members. In the background, we usually observe alcohol abuse and alcoholism, co-dependencies, as well as collisions with the law and deep poverty. According to Jerzy Mellibruda, the picture is complemented by the personality traits of the respondents: hypervigilance, compulsiveness, related to experienced anxiety and physical violence, shame resulting in denial and denial (Mellibruda, 2009),
- regular telephone contact is maintained with extended family,
- one escapes from an orphanage to the family,
- one is taken away from a family that fails to fulfill its caring responsibilities.

### 3) work and education

- school is not a popular institution, neither children nor parents can smoothly cooperate with it; conflicts with teachers, missing school classes, dropping out of the education system are common (some of my respondents have not completed primary education),
- the most frequently undertaken paid activities are unskilled work, based on primarily physical strength, usually at construction sites (some people specialize – e.g. as electricians); the profession of a chef is also popular among the young generation; women mainly clean, some work in the kitchen. No one (literally) thinks about running their own (legal) “business”, at the same time, many enter into companies related to illegal activities. Respondents generally openly admit to stealing and engaging in theft; they start their criminal career with petty thefts and end with plundering expeditions to various parts of the country (which sooner or later leads to prison).

### 4) free time

- in principle, a better name for the category would be “time that seems free”, because in the Praga subculture everyone knows everything about everyone else and everyone feels constantly watched, so there are no moments free from observation on the one hand, and people watching on the other. Praga has also developed forms of spending time together, resembling local institutions, intended for specific groups:
  - The institution of the **blanket**: several small children are placed on a piece of cloth spread directly on the ground, sometimes even on the sidewalk next to the street, with a few toys; they are supervised remotely. Babies and mothers seem to really like this form; other children are always welcome to join in.
  - The institution of **bench**: a type of closed backyard club, connecting older children and adults, with free admission but zoning restrictions; there is an initiation into the secrets of neighborhood life as well as gradual training in the profession of thief, drug dealers and illicit drugs (for those willing – and there are plenty of them – participation in activities considered “serious” it is a kind of ennoblement); important socialization processes take place on the bench.

### 5) fun and fighting

- alcohol and aggression play an important role in games as a popular way of expression, established as habitual behavior (Albert Bandura and Richard H. Wolters, 1968) wrote about aggressive acculturation. This is reflected in numerous fights. Solidarity in a fight, standing on the side of a friend (or friend) or family member is an obligation regardless of being right; a fight is

traditionally part of the Praga landscape and is part of the district's legend, according to which you could always get hurt in Praga,

- a fight creates a cult of heroism, “fighters” tell legends about their exploits, which often adds color to meetings over alcohol.

## 6) aid and mutual subsidiarity are absent topics

- however, there are unexpressed forms of help: homeless and deprived by alcoholism expect absolute, unconditioned help, especially from family; on the other hand, help in moving heavy things, renovating or furnishing the apartment is a natural, obvious and immediate thing among the “bench” society; still, the word “help” itself is rarely used in Praga.

## 7) alcohol and other stimulants

- the omnipresence of alcohol means also the universality of alcoholism with all its consequences (health and mental problems, aggression, violence, addiction and co-addictions, family breakdown). Non-governmental organizations, encouraged by the city authorities, are trying to address the concentration of alcohol-related problems; at the same time though, the supply is still growing – as well as a dense network of alcohol trading shops operating 24/7,
- other illegal drugs are also present in large supply in Praga, in particular the extremely popular marijuana, as well as various types of legal highs and stimulants with known (such as amphetamine or ecstasy) and risky, experimental chemical composition (e.g. skunks and various tablets or traditional *datura* seeds known throughout Poland as *hashish from Targówek* and sold on the OLX platform),
- illegal trade in these substances is common (in doorways, at the bazaar and delivered to a selected address, performed by locals but also by Belarusians and Georgians for their own minorities users.

## 8) violence

- apart from traditional fights, domestic violence against women and children is common; they are the ones who talk about it most often; in their relationships, violence is inextricably linked to the alcohol problem,
- alcoholic fate is a subject to acceptance or denial – or to strong resolutions to change their own lives for some young people. Victims of violence often carry their helplessness towards perpetrators into their later lives, becoming defenseless against subsequent acts of violence.

## 9) crime and imprisonment

- earning a living through criminal activity is widely accepted; one steals to meet minor needs and to provide food for himself and his family,
- children (who are not subject to the justice system) are encouraged to commit crimes, which favors their early specialization in the thieving profession,
- serving a prison sentence is part of the life history of people from Praga's enclaves of poverty, in the history of families, it is a socializing motif (taming the conflict with law). People from Praga are serving sentences for theft, burglary, robbery, illegal psychoactive substances trafficking and murder. Prison ritual and prisoner's honor leave their mark on the character of the Praga subculture: similar rules of respect, fighting for one's rights, and revenge apply the law of talion, i.e. the principle of "an eye for an eye".

## 10) feeling poor

- is the subject of emphatic denials; only some recall the shortcomings of their childhood, especially hunger. People from Praga do not like to talk about jealousy and shame, they prefer wealth and comfort (as they imagine them).

The material collected in the interviews is the basis for obtaining cognitive results, allowing to draw final conclusions about the existence of a culture (or sub-culture) of poverty in Warsaw's Praga district, which is self-reproducing in intergenerational transmission. The result is not only an enumeration of various problems related to the respondents, but also an outline of the characteristics of the Praga underclass (as some people prefer to call the culture of poverty) which determines its durability. In addition to the mechanism of cultural inheritance – family model, personality, life choices – the durability of the Praga subculture is also determined by factors such as "cultural institutions" established by local custom and maintaining social bonds (blanket, bench), which is facilitated by drinking alcohol together and sharing extreme experiences.

When talking about the existence of cultural distinctiveness in Praga, we point to its features such as isolation and exclusion. This distinctiveness is emphasized by borders maintained on both sides, from the inside and outside. There is a clear separation between the cultural mainstream and the field of isolation and marginalisation. The Praga culture of poverty self-isolates by refusing contact with strangers, emphasizing aversion to everything external, by systematically refusing to participate in cultural event (theater, film, music) and limiting itself to entertainment related to the culture of poverty (street rap) and widespread media advertising. There are also external signs of belonging here (the dress code and a rule of inconspicuousness can be easily associated with uniformisation, despite clearly recognizable signs of material status). From the outside, the dividing line is created and maintained by institutions such as schools and offices, which take part in exclusion processes and legitimize them.

## Conclusions

To summarize the research, I would like to once again recall the Tarkowska's indication that in post-state government environments, the inheritance of the cultural profile is primarily of a structural rather than cultural nature, as evidenced by historical continuations. The transition from the situation of farm workers, hired agricultural workers experiencing traditional peasant poverty, to state farm workers demoralized by the lack of work discipline, and finally to the deceived inhabitants of rural slums, in a state of civilisational collapse was not yet enough to develop properties that cemented the community and shaped attitudes. She did not diagnose the properties of culture of poverty in former PGRs. However, as research has shown, the Praga culture of poverty proves such properties.

Kazimierz Frieske would notice here primarily marginalization mechanisms, describing social adaptation to difficult living conditions (Frieske, 1999), however, the Praga subculture maintains traditions whose origins are of a different kind. Obviously, Praga has been an "inferior" district throughout history, subservient to left-bank Warsaw, sacrificed in wars (until the Warsaw Uprising) and has remained an area of exclusion until now. However, Mary Douglas (1991) encourages the analysis of separate cultural categories in the area of poverty in connection with the mainstream culture, with which the area of poverty and exclusion is inextricably linked, despite the existing barriers. This will allow us to capture the principles that govern the creation of social divisions. These will be mechanisms occurring on the border of cultures, consisting in the opposition of values and evaluations.

These mechanisms themselves deserve special attention. The rapid pace at which the Mr Gum monument (mentioned at the beginning of the article) was removed before social discussion even developed allows us to assume that the topic raises concerns such as a universal fear of the unknown, experienced in cross-cultural encounters. This fear explains but to a certain extent why the culture of poverty is marginalized (removing it from display is a social technique of marginalization and exclusion). Talking about the culture of poverty in Warsaw's Praga would be a step towards including this culture in the common experience – instead of denial (called repression by psychologists, which is not without negative consequences for the repressor himself). To simplify – and try not to oversimplify – an unconcealed image of what is worth avoiding, i.e. social pathology, can support combating and preventing this pathology. On the one hand, those born into a culture of poverty get more chances for resocialisation through inclusion in the mainstream, which is a faster process than simply waiting for degenerate individuals to extinct (the latter does not have to be effective: after all, reproduction is a feature

of culture). On the other hand, some community forms developed in the culture of poverty seem, from a universal perspective, to be a valuable form of social co-operation and perhaps it is not worth distancing ourselves from them completely.

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### Kultura ubóstwa na warszawskiej Pradze

**Streszczenie:** Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia badanie miejskiej kultury ubóstwa przeprowadzone w latach 2019–2021 na warszawskiej Pradze, będące zwieńczeniem pracy doktorskiej napisanej na APS. Przeprowadzone badania pozwalają lepiej zrozumieć, w jaki sposób podtrzymywana jest kultura ubóstwa, rodzaj społecznej „niepełnosprawności” i jednocześnie społecznej konieczności. Wskazuje na problemy w relacjach między respondentami a ich otoczeniem społecznym, a także na mechanizmy marginalizacji i samowykluczenia. Artykuł składa się z trzech części. W pierwszej przedstawiono koncepcję kultury ubóstwa, w drugiej formę i przebieg badań, a w trzeciej wyniki badań i wnioski.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kultura, kultura ubóstwa, patologia, społeczeństwo, wspólnota, wykluczenie społeczne, formy życia społecznego, siatka/grupa.