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COMMON SPACES IN THE DAYS OF ISOLATIONISM. OUTLINE OF THE INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH PROGRAMME

"*The touchstone of morality in a global society is leveraging connectedness for utilitarian ends: achieving the greatest good for the greatest number of people*" (Khanna 2016, p. 384).

The specter of isolationism is haunting the world. Manifestations of this trend can be observed in both the international, national and local relationship, and in the sphere of politics, economy and culture. More and more representatives of various social groups, regions and states concludes that their problems can be solved best by separating from others. This tendency manifests itself both in mild forms, such as nurturing and strengthening national identity, and extreme ones, such as religious fundamentalism and terrorism related to it.

The aim of the article is to present the outline of the interdisciplinary research programme, which is supposed to be a response to the isolationist tendencies, as a serious challenge of our times. Three proposals are formulated and justified here. The first concerns research issues. As the subject of the analysis, we intend to make the ability to create good and lasting connections among social groups, cultures, institutions, or-in short- to build and support "common space". The second proposal refers to the way of articulating the indicated issues. It concerns going beyond the narrow boundaries of the disciplines and the creating an interdisciplinary research program. The third proposal relates to forms of research cooperation. We propose to use the already existing contacts and create an interdisciplinary

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research network, as the most adequate to the identified needs, objectives, and, above all, research tasks.

The article consists of three parts. In the first part we characterize the research subject, that is a "shared space" in the context of the isolationist trends present in different spheres of social life in the modern world. In the second part, referring to the common achievements of the researchers who publish in this volume, we formulate a demand to take interdisciplinary research on the ability to create good connections among social groups, communities, institutions. Finally, we propose to carry out the outlined research programme in the form of international, interdisciplinary network of research collaboration.

Why "common spaces"?

The common space is-simply speaking- a place of encounter, dialogue and cooperation. Its existence is an essential condition for the well-being and welfare of communities and individuals. Today, trends can be observed that pose a serious threat to common social space, and cause its contraction. These trends constitute a phenomenon of "isolationism". The term "isolationism" refers here to a wide variety of forms and expressions of aspiring to diversity by social communities, due to the search for solutions for problems which affect these groups. Both phenomena from the sphere of politics and economy or culture can be found to be expressions of isolationism.

In recent years, we have witnessed a phenomenon of isolationism in the activities of governments, political parties and movements. Such trends are also not rare in case of religious movements. Popularity is gained by populist leaders who promise their followers to improve the economic situation, by getting rid of "foreigners", by separating, with visible and invisible walls, from "hostile" environment. The victory of Donald Trump in the presidential elections in the United States in the autumn of 2016 is an important example. One of his flagship ideas was to remove illegal migrants from the USA and the construction of a wall on the border with Mexico.

Under the influence of isolationism rhetoric the UK citizens voted for leaving the European Union. During the referendum campaign migrants were often pointed out as the cause of economic problems, therefore, a series of aggression acts against Poles, and visitors from other countries in the summer of 2016, shortly after the referendum was not a surprise. This example shows how easy the isolationist logic descends down, sprawling in local communities, in daily life, poisoning inter group and interpersonal relationships. Political isolationism is, therefore intertwined with inter group isolationism. The latter one manifests in xenophobia, various forms of exclusion, ethnic

nationalisms, religious fundamentalism and cultural wars.

The contemporary world is characterized by movement of people, cultural patterns, goods, money, which also is connected with negative phenomena and threats. Isolating seems to some people, a way to reduce risk. However, it is a kind of escape, an approach that does not solve problems, but also generates other. Ann Applebaum (2016) points that out, exposing the restrictions and illusiveness of isolationism: "nuclear deterrence requires allies and coordinated responses; barbed wire cannot stop a cyberattack. The small-minded, shortsighted isolationists ignore reason and logic, instead substituting panic and fear".

One of the important reasons for the growth of isolationist trends is the financial crisis of 2008. Considering its social consequences, French sociologist Alain Touraine recognises the need to "rebuild society as a common home on a foundation of an individual subject and his/her relationships with other individual subjects" (Touraine 2013, p. 138). The foundation of this reconstruction should be, according to Touraine, a return to the idea of human rights and respect for his dignity (ibid., p. 17).

Emphasizing the need for a systematic research reflection over defense, creation and development of common spaces in the context of the growing isolationist trends, as quoted above Touraine, we recognize that the starting point should be the recognition of basic, common values. We are in fact witnesses of the weakening and undermining the consensus concerning the axiological basics of social life. The German Chancellor, Angela Merkel found the need for emphasize such attitudes necessary, in the face of the victory of a populist politician in the US presidential election, in the autumn of 2016. Congratulating Donald Trump on his victory, she declared cooperation, but on the basis of common values, which until recently had seemed indisputable, but Trump as a candidate repeatedly questioned them during the election campaign:

"Germany and America are bound by common values – democracy, freedom, as well as respect for the rule of law and the dignity of each and every person, regardless of their origin, skin color, creed, gender, sexual orientation, or political views. It is based on these values that I wish to offer close cooperation, both with me personally and between our countries' governments" (Merkel 2016).

The set the value indicated above is the axiological basis for the concept of "shared space". They are the essential point of reference in efforts to rebuild society as a "common home" (Touraine 2013, p. 138). Common space, as already stated – is a space of encounter, dialogue and cooperation. Speaking of an encounter space, we mean both physical and virtual

space. One of the factors and most important expressions of isolationism, the decay of modern societies to "new tribes"" is such an organization of public space, that hinders contacts between people belonging to different social categories. Pope Francis points out the moral implications of this phenomenon: „This lack of physical contact and encounter, encouraged at times by the disintegration of our cities, can lead to a numbing of conscience and to tendentious analyses which neglect parts of reality" (Francis 2015, p. 35). In the same document Francis gives a kind of praise of cities which are organized to integrate the residents. He indicates the pro-growth aspect of this solution:

"How beautiful those cities which overcome paralyzing mistrust, integrate those who are different and make this very integration a new factor of development! How attractive are those cities which, even in their architectural design, are full of spaces which connect, relate and favour the recognition of others!" (Francis 2015, p. 114).

The second highlighted element of the common space is a "space of dialogue". The deficit of encounters goes hand in hand with the deficit of an authentic dialogue between various communities. An significant example of a breakdown between the leftists and rightists onto "tribes" closed to dialogue is an analysis of blogs carried out by Christakis and Fowler. It turns out that blogs, in which a content of published authors from the opposite camp is quoted or referred to is a negligible minority (Christakis, Fowler 2011, p. 160).

The third manifestation of the common space is a cooperation. It seems particularly important to create conditions for cooperation of people belonging to different cultural and social categories. The issue of exclusion is a good example. Solving the problem mainly with material and financial support does not bring the expected result. Richard Sennett, referring to his own experience, related to the life in slums, shows how important in helping the excluded is to communicate respect through establishing contact and cooperation: "social assistance recipients need stronger ties with others" (Sennett 2012, p. 209). "Participation of the excluded" (Danecka 2014) it's still mainly just a postulate. In the era of isolationism it is preferred to solve the problem of exclusion with measures, which do not take into account the importance of direct contacts and activities.

Instead of striving to enhancing encounters with "others", attempts to create a world solely for narrowly understood "us" can be observed. Instead of an authentic dialogue, being a common search for the truth and solutions to common problems, we see a desire to discredit adversaries. Instead of cooperation, we have an absolute rivalry, which makes most vulnerable

become victims.

In the face of growth of isolationist trends, social researchers' task should be to take a systematic, interdisciplinary study of what people are linked with, what promotes understanding and cooperation between them, what supports the creation and development of common spaces.

Why interdisciplinarity?

Taking interdisciplinary studies on common spaces is justified for three reasons. Firstly, due to the complex, multidimensional subject of the analysis. Secondly, due to the need for integration and cumulation of a distributed research concerning this issue. Thirdly, due to adequate theoretical framework that significantly exceed the boundaries of one scientific discipline. The subject of research outlined above is so complex, that it should focus the attention of ethicists as well as political scientists, sociologists, psychologists and educators. Taking into account the aspect of the evolution of public space and virtual space, a cooperation of city planners and IT specialists is also necessary.

Three essential dimensions of common spaces can be distinguished: (1) the structural dimension, that is, conditions -capabilities and limitations- of access to certain places, conditions for establishing and maintaining relationships in a given space; (2) the symbolic dimension, that is, the meaning which the social actors give to a certain space and the relations established there (3) the institutional dimension, that is, formal and informal rules of using the given space.

Theoretical framework to the outlined issues can be found in the three streams. In the new institutionalism, with particular reference to the concept of social capital. In the network approaches, which partially relate to the concept of social capital, but in many interpretations, extend this framework by far. Finally, in the stream that can be called a "humanistic urban planning". What undoubtedly connects the mentioned theoretical streams is the focus on relationships. Common space, in this approach is a place to connect, develop and contribute to interpersonal and inter-group relationship.

The new institutionalism is the collective name of several theories in the field of sociology, in particular sociology of organizations and law, but also economics, economic history, political science and more. The subject of the analysis of these theories are social and organizational forms taken as a meditative variable, and even as a constitutive element of economic, political or social processes. The approach puts particular emphasis on the role that institutions play in solving fundamental problems by a human (Skąp-

ska 1999, p. 323). From the point of view of the subject matter and purpose of the exploratory analysis proposed here, the new institutionalism is important and interesting for several reasons. Firstly, it highlights the role of institutions and institutionalization, in other words, creating and observing the "rules of living together". Secondly, it is an "intrinsically" interdisciplinary stream (Kwiatkowski 2013). Thirdly, the stream contains studies on social capital, which assume an important role of interpersonal relationships in dealing with individual and common problems. Piotr Sztompka defines social capital as:

"...a network of individual relationships or relationships permeating the community as a specific personal or group resource that is replaceable to other goods and services valued by people, bringing benefits in various areas, and giving its holder additional chances of getting rich and broaden the relationship, and so earning even greater benefits in the future" (Sztompka 2016, p. 285).

A valuable feature of the study on social capital is (1) focus on the relationships among individuals, groups and social institutions; (2) linking the analyses concerning the micro meso and macro social levels; (3) reintroducing to the scientific discourse the issues of values and standards (rules); (4) emphasizing the features that social relationships play in collective actions.

To emphasize the importance of our mutual interdependence and the abundance of everyday interactions, some authors revive the old English term "connexity" to describe "coherent space" (Gilchrist 2014, p. 11). Being in a network of appropriate links (being well connected) is recognized as a source of strength (ibid., p. 12). This thought is the basis for the work on the development of the community that focuses mainly on strengthening and expanding "weak ties" or "bridges" and "links", in the terminology of social capital, particularly in those cases when people have difficulties in encounters and establishing communications (ibid., p. 90).

Social capital literature provides many examples of creating a space for encounter, dialogue, cooperation and development. An interesting example is the research conducted under the auspices of the World Bank (Coletta, Cullen 2000, Dudvick et al. 2006, Grootaert 2001). Inspiration may also come from the studies on the ability of local communities to cope with the effects of natural disasters (Paton, Johnston 2006). The latest work by Robert D. Putnam (2015) is an example of analysis of needs and ways to improve the situation of young people, by strengthening their social relationships.

The network approaches, often associated with social capital, are propo-

sals interesting from the point of view of the search for new interpretative suggestions, including the proper language to describe building common spaces. The author of the study concerning the network approaches in sociology, presents the following advantages of them:

"First of all, they develop very dynamically. Secondly, they are recognized by social researchers, as well as representatives of other fields as being among the most effective forms of dealing with the complexity of the modern world (. . .). Thirdly, some of these approaches have a very high potential for application in practice (which is often made outside academic environment). Fourthly, in many aspects they constitute a clear counterpoint against the standard sociology and its nomenclature, focused primarily on the different types of communities, such as: groups, classes, communities, nations, and so on, and not on individuals that make up networks" (Pietrowicz 2016, pp. 11-12).

We propose initiatives to create space for encounter, dialogue and cooperation in the context of isolationist trends to be recognized as the analysis unit and to be made the subject of comparative research. That means initiatives at a global as well as national, regional and local levels. A project organized in Lebanon called "Common Space Initiative" may be a good example. Organizers characterize its objectives and tasks:

"Common Space Initiative" is a Lebanese independent and inclusive initiative supporting a dynamic of dialogue and consensus building that is based on shared knowledge, and that aims at reaching common understanding around key national issues. By focusing on shared national interests through the creation of safety net spaces, permanent dialogue forums, and joint knowledge creation, our ultimate aim is to promote common values, cooperation and solidarity among Lebanon's different communities" (Common Space Initiative 2016).

Another example which is worth attention and analysis is a joint initiative of Catholic circles and LGBT people under the slogan "Let us offer each other a sign of peace" taken in Poland in 2016. Its primary purpose is to increase the acceptance of homosexual and transgender people among believers (Znaki pokoju 2016). Initiative as a unit of analysis is a large category, and includes both big institutional projects as well as small, informal ones. Such recognition of the issue creates a wide field of research exploration concerning, among other things, motivation, determinants, dynamics of the initiative, social acceptance, factors of success or failure, short-term and long-term consequences.

In Polish sociology, there is a rich tradition of research on antagonism towards foreigners and reconciliation in multicultural environments (Kur-

czewski, Herman 2012). By proposing the issue of "common spaces" we consciously refer to this tradition. The difference is that the mentioned studies were conducted in a different context. Here we are committed to consider the circumstances of a rapid growth of isolationist trends.

Why research network?

Parag Khanna considers "connectivity" as the most important consequence of globalization and the specific feature of the modern world. At the end of his dissertation under the significant title "Connectography", he formulates a kind of manifesto, which considers the desire to weaken limits on the one hand, and to increase the quantity and quality of various connections on the other hand as an essential objective of joint efforts. We suggest launching international, interdisciplinary network of researchers, which would study conditions for the development of common spaces. We recognize that Khanna's postulate aptly expresses the challenges that we identified:
„We need a more borderless world because we can't afford destructive territorial conflict, because correcting the mismatch of people and resources can unlock incredible human and economic potential, because so many billions have yet to fully benefit from globalization. Borders are not the antidote to risk and uncertainty; more connections are. But if we want to enjoy the benefits of borderless world, we have to build it first. Our fate hangs in the balance" (Khanna 2016, p. 391).

International, interdisciplinary network of researchers taking up the indicated issues in a similar manner, would be an appropriate form of cooperation. It should include three levels. The first is the exchange of information, data, publications and discussions concerning the activities in individual centres. The second level is carrying out "parallel" projects. The idea is that researchers in several places lead independent research, but in accordance with rules established jointly, so that it could be possible to compare the results. The third level of cooperation, requiring the greatest commitment and proper coordination, would be making joint research projects. We propose launching a research network under the working name of "Common Space Lab". We propose this network to gather researchers, who share a set of mentioned values, intention to adequately respond to contemporary challenges, interest in the outlined issues, cognitive passion and a will to cooperate.

An important form of cooperation will be a website co-created by the participants of the network, as well as systematically organized scientific seminars. We hope that our initiative will be understood and that it will able to create a cooperation network, which will interestingly and creatively contribute to the development of the research on what unites us, despite

the imposed gaps between us.

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Keywords: isolationism, community, space, social capital, social relations.

The article presents an outline of the interdisciplinary research program. The program is a response to the growing isolationist tendencies. The term "isolationism" refers here to a wide variety of forms and expressions of aspiring to diversity by social communities, due to the search for solutions for problems which affect these groups. Both phenomena from the sphere of politics and economy or culture can be found to be expressions of isolationism. The authors propose to carry out an interdisciplinary, international research on the ability to create good and lasting connections between social groups, cultures, institutions, or "common space" of encounter, dialogue and cooperation.