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Poland's Development Model at a Crossroads—A Voice from the Perspective of Feminist Ecological Economics

The text of the "Poznań Declaration"—formulated during the 11th Congress of Polish Economists in Poznań, in which I also had the pleasure of participating—correctly identifies the exhaustion of Poland's existing development model: one based on cheap labor, cheap energy, and the absorption of external technologies, and rightly calls for its transformation. However, from the perspective of feminist ecological economics (a session devoted to feminist economics was held for the first time at this event), which treats the economy simultaneously as a system embedded in the biosphere and grounded in the sphere of social reproduction, this diagnosis remains incomplete. The solution proposed by Marian Gorynia, Łukasz Hardt, and Marek Kośny—namely, innovative, capital-intensive growth with high productivity—reproduces the very assumption that I challenge in this response: that well-being can be separated from the invisible care work that sustains it and from the physical limits of nature. Below, I first identify points of convergence, then gaps, and finally propose an alternative set of postulates from the perspective of feminist ecological economics.

Points of convergence in the Polish context

I agree unreservedly with several of the document's theses. The reference to the social market economy as the foundation of development, and the emphasis on rebuilding trust in institutions (postulates 1 and 2), are well placed. I also share the call for a responsible green transition (postulate 6)—with the caveat, to which I return below, that it cannot be subordinated solely to the condition of "not reducing competitiveness." The diagnosis of the threat to digital sovereignty is sound; the Polish Economics Network[1] has been drawing attention to this same issue for several years. Finally, the currently stalled Poland Development Strategy to 2035[2] may be regarded as an appropriate starting point for a long-term strategy.

Two theses, however, require correction in the diagnosis itself. First, the alarm over a deficit of 7.2 percent of GDP is exaggerated: Poland remains one of the EU member states with the lowest debt-to-GDP ratios, and the problem is not the deficit per se, but the structure and quality of expenditure. Second, the postulate of "fiscal responsibility" (postulate 5) rings hollow given that, in the same document, the authors advocate a substantial increase in defense spending—a tension that is left unresolved.

Yet our most important point of convergence concerns the "economy of moderation" (postulate 7), though in my view it stops halfway. The postulate of moderation and sufficiency must be emphasized far more strongly and stated explicitly: what is at stake is degrowth as an orderly departure from the imperative of growth, a concept also being developed today in the Polish context (Hickel, 2020; Łapniewska, 2025a).

What is missing

The fundamental question the document overlooks is: convergence—toward what? The entire narrative takes growth and catching up with the West as goals that require no justification, whereas feminist ecological economics asks what constitutes a good life within planetary boundaries and whose labor and whose environment make such growth possible (Raworth, 2017). This shift in perspective reveals further omissions.

First, the care economy is entirely absent from the document, which considers only paid-labor productivity and GDP, ignoring unpaid care and domestic work, without which the market economy could not

[1] Polish Economics Network (2025), Open Letter: Digital Sovereignty & Digital Tax, https://plse.org.pl/kluczowy-moment-dla-cyfrowej-suwerennosci-plse-podpisala-list-otwarty-w-sprawie-podatku-cyfrowego/.

[2] The text of the strategy is available at: https://www.zpp.pl/storage/library/2025-09/9242e12fbfa17ed9927f0ec333dee54a.pdf.

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function at all[3]. This is most clearly visible in the framing of the demographic crisis: the decline in the fertility rate to close to 1 is presented as a supply-side and fiscal problem, for which the proposed solution is to "substitute capital for labor." In fact, it is above all a signal of a crisis of social reproduction—of care overload and the unequal distribution of responsibilities between the sexes (Łapniewska, 2017).

Second, gender is entirely absent from the text. Neither the gender pay gap, nor the gender care gap, nor the pension gap appears; inequalities are analyzed exclusively along the urban—rural and intergenerational axes. Missing is a call for collecting sex-disaggregated data and for using gender budgeting as a permanent instrument of economic policy (Łapniewska, 2018).

Third, the document speaks of "economic freedom" and the strengthening of entrepreneurship (postulate 9), yet does not raise the question of the conditions attached to public support. Since it is the state—as Mariana Mazzucato has shown—that socializes the risk of the earliest phases of innovation through grants, tax relief, guarantees, and R&D funding, there is no reason for the resulting profits to be privatized. Public support should be tied to a share in future returns (equity stakes, warrants, revenue-dependent return clauses, retention of a portion of intellectual property created with public funds, and reinvestment of returns into a public innovation fund) (Mazzucato, 2016).

Fourth, the green transition has been reduced to energy efficiency and emissions, with no consideration of justice or gender. Missing are discussions of energy poverty, energy democracy, and energy cooperatives—in which, as research on the Polish photovoltaic boom demonstrates, the distribution of benefits and decision-making power is not gender-neutral (Łapniewska, 2026). Also absent are the concepts of planetary boundaries and strong sustainability: the condition of "not reducing competitiveness" is, in essence, a declaration of weak sustainability, whereas ecological economics defends the inviolability of biophysical limits (Łapniewska, 2025b; Martinez-Alier, 2002).

Fifth, the document fails to recognize the commons or the need for the decommodification of certain spheres, such as care, water, and health, despite invoking the social market economy (Ostrom, 1990). It also overlooks the dimension of spatial justice: the response to the peripheralization of rural areas should be polycentric development and support for smaller centers, rather than growth concentrated exclusively in metropolitan poles[4]. Finally, the postulate of economic education (postulate 10) should be complemented by a commitment to theoretical pluralism—openness to heterodox, ecological, and feminist economics, rather than the neoclassical monopoly that has dominated Poland since the 1990s.

A declaration from the perspective of feminist ecological economics

The following postulates do not replace the eleven points of the "Poznań Declaration" but rather reformulate and supplement them where they are silent on care work, gender, and the limits of nature.

1. From convergence and growth towards sufficiency

The goal of development policy should be well-being within planetary boundaries, not GDP growth as an end in itself. The reference point is degrowth understood as sufficiency and the deliberate reduction of material and energy throughput—a shift toward a different, more worthwhile way of life.

2. Recognition and redistribution of care work

Unpaid reproductive work must be made visible in national accounts (satellite accounts, time-use surveys) and supported by investment in care infrastructure (childcare facilities, long-term care, and public services), treated on a par with physical infrastructure. The fertility crisis requires a response grounded in gender equality, not transfers alone.

3. Gender as a category of economic policy

Sex-disaggregated data, gender budgeting, and measurable targets for closing the pay, care, and pension gaps should become standard practice.

4. A just energy transition

The transition should encompass the combating of energy poverty, energy democracy, and the promotion of cooperatives, with gender equality in access to benefits and decision-making, rather than being subordinated to the condition of not reducing competitiveness.

5. An entrepreneurial state that shares risk and reward

Since the state socializes the risk associated with innovation, it should participate in the profits through equity stakes, return clauses, intellectual property rights, and a public innovation fund—the question is

[3] Unpaid reproductive work as a condition for the functioning of the market economy is highlighted, among others, by: (Waring, 1988; Folbre, 2001; Power, 2004).

[4] Polycentric development and support for smaller centers in response to the peripheralization of rural areas are highlighted in "Poland Development Strategy to 2035".

not "whether" to support entrepreneurship, but "on what terms."

6. An economy embedded within planetary boundaries

The guiding principle should be strong sustainability: the inviolability of biophysical limits, the protection of biodiversity and ecosystem services, and a circular economy, with the doughnut model as a framework linking the social foundation to the ecological ceiling.

7. The commons and decommodification

Certain spheres—care, water, and health—should be removed from the exclusive logic of the market and managed as commons, based on sharing and self-governance.

8. Spatial justice and polycentricity

The development strategy should respond to the peripheralization of rural areas through polycentricity and support for smaller localities, rather than by strengthening metropolitan centers alone.

9. Measures of well-being beyond GDP

The basis for evaluating development should be indicators of well-being, health, time, and environmental quality (beyond GDP), including the recognition of unpaid work in satellite accounts.

10. Pluralism and heterodoxy in economic education

Economic education should reach beyond the neoclassical monoculture and encompass ecological, feminist, and institutional economics, combining critical thinking with a commitment to equality and environmental responsibility.

Conclusion

The "Poznań Declaration" is a valuable contribution to the debate and, in many respects—the social market economy, digital sovereignty, the critique of polarization, and the idea of moderation—converges with the sensibilities of feminist ecological economics. Its limitation, however, lies in its conceptual framework: as long as we measure well-being by growth and treat care work and nature as free resources that feed the economy, we will keep reproducing the model whose exhaustion the document itself accurately identifies. Shifting the center of gravity toward sustaining life—human and non-human alike—is not an abandonment of economic realism, but a deepening of it.

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