How can we understand what poverty, deprivation or social exclusion have meant in Russia during the political and economic upheavals of the past decade? The international debate reveals many disparate understandings of the poverties, deprivations and exclusions in societies around the world. This chapter aims to outline them to enable them to illuminate the findings of this study of Russia, in particular the way in which the social construction of ‘poverty’ depends on cultural history and social context.

The variety of national meanings of poverty cannot be read off from national statistics of income distributions or the like. Its social meanings and the specific resources needed to avoid it have to be studied and understood in their national or local context and manifestations. The research reported in this book suggests that historically Russian poverty may not be as susceptible to the same assumptions about its forms and meanings as those which drove the sociological or social policy analyses of poverty and influenced their dominant ideas and methods in western European countries. There is an apparent contradiction between societies whose moral value systems traditionally endorsed economic independence, with its corollary of treating the economic dependence of poverty as a moral failing, and Russian society which, we are told here, traditionally condemned wealth and did not despise poverty. In Russia, poverty was perhaps not the moral issue attracting opprobrium and inducing shame to the same extent which it was in western Europe, but rather a matter of ‘getting by’ materialistically. The focus on power over material resources which goes with individualistic approaches to poverty has to be complemented in the Russian context by greater attention to the social resources of mutual assistance and other forms of social capital which have long been more relevant there as resources to combat material deprivations and allow social participation. Only when these issues have been clarified can the next steps be taken, whether they are for quantitative statistics and qualitative data which can be meaningfully compared internationally, or for national policy measures to address the distinct national or local conditions.

The international literature on poverty, deprivation, social exclusion, and the scale and intensity of their complex consequences, as well as income and resources, is more than a century old and gigantic in scope and extent. The conceptualisations and definitions of poverty developed differently, often in dialectical modes, in different countries during the 20th century according to the perspectives of the prevailing research pioneers who articulated them and the influences of the dominant ideological and policy concerns on which they were focused. The intellectual history of the
variety of approaches remains to be written. As a result, many different discourses, concepts and definitions, themselves associated with varying and often disparate purposes for seeking poverty measures (Veit-Wilson 1998; 2000), compete with each other globally without being distinguished according to their applicability to the issue in hand or taking account of the decisive contextual and cultural differences. Those purposes include the desire of social scientists for accurate and reliable social criteria with which to map the tolerable and intolerable in societies, and the demands of policy makers for politically credible tools with which to plan and operate income maintenance systems. These two disparate aims may be in conflict when scientists want measures which are reliable even if not precise while politicians want measures which are precise even though they may not be scientifically reliable. Different methods are needed to develop each of these kinds of measure, and they are judged by different criteria of acceptability and use.

This chapter focuses only on the issues raised by the study of poverty from a sociological perspective, and not those raised by the demands of social or economic policy. It can do no more than offer a condensed resumé of some issues pertinent to the research reported in this book, and to do so must start from first principles.

Needs, deprivations and poverties.

At its broadest, we are concerned here with the poverty which the World Bank economist Martin Ravallion described as existing “in a given society when one or more persons do not attain a level of material well-being deemed to constitute a reasonable minimum by the standards of that society”. (Ravallion 1992). If we are to confront the real issues here, the first thing to note is that this does no more than describe the phenomenon in a direct manner, following Stein Ringen (1988) – poor people are those who demonstrably do not attain a certain socially-prescribed level of well-being. The concept of poverty here lies in grasping the meaning of the abstraction ‘well-being’ and its absence, from which this definition can be derived. The concrete meanings of the abstraction can only be understood by examining the social and contextually-located construction of the reasonable minimum, in this case in Russia in the 1990s, including descriptions of the lifestyles below and above it and the factors which enable these lifestyles to be identified. The causes of the failure to attain the minimum are again another distinct matter.

These distinct aspects – concepts, definitions, identifiers, descriptions and causes – are very often confused with each other in common talk about poverty. Productive analysis is vitiated by failure to recognise and use the appropriate aspect. Further, Ravallion refers to material well-being and it aids clarity to try to distinguish this from looser approaches to poverty which extend even to individual intangibles such as alienation and anomie. David Byrne, in his valuable analysis of social exclusion (Byrne 1999), quotes the distinction which Alan Walker makes,

… regarding poverty as a lack of the material resources, especially income, necessary to participate in British society and social exclusion as a more comprehensive formulation which refers to the dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society. (Walker and Walker 1997 p 8; original emphases.)

This chapter focuses on the issues surrounding this approach to poverty and resources, in ways which allow application to any society, especially that of Russia, while subsequent chapters address the complex variety of forms of social exclusion and their consequences. The two subjects are clearly related and intertwined, in that similar resources may be relevant in both cases, but the focus of the first is on the distribution of necessary resources and their lack, while the second is concerned with wider issues of political and social forces and relations, and of individual and collective behaviour and integration, which may extend far beyond the ranks of the poor. To take an example, in largely marketised economies such as those of western Europe and USA, lack of money is the chief cause and identifier of the condition of poverty; indeed, some usages treat the expressions as synonymous. On the other hand, a person may be rich but nevertheless socially excluded if they

belong to certain categories discriminated against because of ethnicity, religion or gender. Contrary to common assertion, these conditions are not causes of poverty in themselves, nor are the categories such as unemployment, old age, single parenthood or lack of education or occupational training which are often simplistically asserted to be ‘causes of poverty’ or even as indicators of social exclusion. The fallacy of assuming they cause poverty can be exposed by noting that they are often found among the rich, but they may empirically be found to be causes of social exclusion when other countervailing factors fail to compensate as wealth often does. The reason for the simplistic assertion is no doubt the reluctance of politicians to address the policy implications of the lack of income flows which are commonly associated with these characteristics – rich unemployed people have stocks of convertible assets and resources besides flows of earnings or pensions. The cause of poverty, as well as a way of defining it, is simply a lack of appropriate resources to gain access to participation in society according to prevailing standards; the condition of poverty is “an enforced lack of socially perceived necessities” (Mack and Lansley 1985 p 39). The lack of the specified resources may identify those in poverty, either directly (deprivation indicators) or indirectly, by proxy (incomes demonstrably too low for participation). The consequence is then Ravallion’s description above. Nevertheless, those who continue to identify concepts of poverty with the idea of social exclusion, whether in the weak sense of being unable to participate or the strong sense of being prevented from doing so by the forces which ‘shut people out’, may find it useful to think of poverty narrowly as ‘market-based exclusion’. The reasons why money and similar fungible resources are lacking may include the discriminations which are the material of the analysis of social exclusion.

**Causes and conditions -- the chain of human needs and resources.**

Resources for what? Observing the unproductive babel in the poverty debate, Hans-Jürgen Andreß expressed astonishment at the common omission of an answer and, after distinguishing between the individual and the collective aspects of poverty, quoted Georg Simmel who, writing a century ago, correctly identified the indispensability of an objective in the definition. Andreß concluded that “Poor is that person whose resources do not satisfy their needs” (Andreß 1998 p 1) and observed (p 4) that “Resources per sé do not have an intrinsic value. Only if one uses them for certain purposes that have a certain value are they useful”. As S. Dubnoff pointed out (Dubnoff 1985), the question of how much income is enough can only be answered in terms of enough for what, for whom, and who says, and to these three questions one must add, for how long? The same four questions must be asked of every assertion about needs, the resources to meet them and their adequacy, noting especially the critical role of the observer’s perspective in affecting the answers to the questions.3

The nature of the needs which the resources are intended to satisfy may be as broad or narrow as the context of the debate sets, and Andreß discusses, for whatever reason, a rather limited and static view of needs which implies closure on others or on temporal change. A pre-requisite for a more informed analysis is clarity about the totality of human needs over time and the range of resources which are required to meet them. We can then narrow down and distinguish which of these resources are the focus for analysis and action. I shall therefore omit rehearsing the volume of previous argument about human needs, often framed on the basis of a specific social problem rather than a total social analysis, and instead offer the following brief but all-embracing definition of human needs based on a clear objective.

‘Human needs’ means the full range of intangible and material resources that are required over time to achieve the production, maintenance and reproduction of the fully autonomous, fully participating adult human in the particular society to which he or she belongs. The most basic needs every human has are the intangibles of having a society to be a recognised member of (which has its own collective needs for resources to sustain its continuity), and meaningful and supportive social and

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2 These characteristics are found even among the British Royal Family – the black swan disproving the hypothesis that all swans are white, to follow Karl Popper’s view of science.

3 This is why all questions about the meaning of poverty must include the answers of those who are experiencing it or have done so, as well as the answers of those who are not poor about what they would consider poverty if it applied to themselves and not only to other people.

4 For detailed scholarly discussions of issues surrounding the question of human needs, see for instance Doyal and Gough 1991, or Ware and Goodin 1990, as well as Springborg 1981.
individual relationships throughout life within it. Material resources may support the physical organism but it is the full range of social and psychological resources which are required for the experience of humanity.\(^5\)

This statement about human needs is not a matter of dogmatic belief. If contested, the argument must be in terms of what is empirically verifiable about all human societies and the resources required for societies to exist and continue, and for individual humans to grow and flourish in them. It must not be about what someone elsewhere (whether in space, time or social status) thinks is necessary or redundant among those resources (the political fallacy). There is an important distinction, often overlooked, between the social scientific approach of *discovering* empirically the full range of what is needed, and people's ordinary approach of *prescribing* normatively what ought to be needed (from some subjective point of view and usually drawing on a far more limited knowledge of the range in answer to a specific problem). Social science provides findings which are reliable but not precise (they fall within ranges of reliability), while policy makers want answers that are precise even if they are not reliable. This confusion between the empirical and the normative has seriously hampered the proper discussion of the subject of human needs, whether collective or individual.

The list of all the tangible and intangible resources required over a life span or even longer to enable a human being to become and remain a fully autonomous and participating adult member of his or her specified society would be a long and detailed one. It would be made even more complex if one includes what is required to provide and maintain the spatial and economic context in which that society continues and reproduces itself.\(^6\) The numerous human societies exist under widely differing geographical, environmental and ecological conditions and have always each defined what they mean by full adult social participation in different ways. Abstract definitions of needs are therefore no guide to what is required in specific social contexts. This is what is meant by saying that, in concrete reality, human needs are always relative to the society, time and place in which they are expressed, and depend crucially on the observer who expresses them.\(^7\) The specific resources required to meet needs inevitably vary by social context, time and feasibility. It is an empirical question whether what western sociologists have discovered or specified as household and personal needs are the same or different in Russia. What may be included in the inventory of necessary resources is discussed later in this chapter.

Where the resources are lacking or are withheld, then the needs may not be met and the individual or group can be described as deprived, in poverty, in terms of that society and its definitions of needs. This is similar to Peter Townsend’s classic definition of poverty –

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5 This fundamental point is often forgotten by those who try to specify human needs starting with material resources such as food or shelter, as if these were the most basic in defining and maintaining *humanity*. The subject is too large for debate here, but evidence can be drawn from the behaviour of humans under extreme conditions, where psychological needs (identity and community) are often treated as being at least as important as physical ones, and sometimes more so – see for instance the literature on the Soviet gulags, and also in the sociological literature Allardt 1975; Doyal and Gough 1991 pp 35-36; Yeates and McLaughlin 2000 p 61.

6 On a global scale and over a global period of time, humans seem now to be acting in ways which obstruct their need for a supportive renewable environment, and human society is therefore at risk of eventual extermination. Before that happens, many individual generations will pass through their entire life-spans, so the discussion of fulfilling their needs can continue on that basis while the underlying conditions for future lives are being negated. To focus on one aspect of needs over time does not mean denying that there are others equally important on some other time-scale – the individual choice of what to do is based on temperament and ideology, as well as the contextual exigencies of the problem faced.

7 This point is often misunderstood by those who think that ‘relativity’ means purely subjective opinions or distributive percentages. In fact, their assertions about ‘absolute’ needs are often nothing more than expressions of their own relative and subjective views. A scientific observer might discover that in a given social context a certain resource is an ‘absolute’ necessity to achieve the desired social objective, but over time and in other contexts the form of that specified resource might change, relatively.
People are relatively deprived if they cannot obtain, at all or sufficiently, the conditions of life – that is, the diets, amenities, standards and services – which allow them to play the roles, participate in the relationships and follow the customary behaviour which is expected of them by virtue of their membership of society. If they lack or are denied resources to obtain access to these conditions of life and so fulfil membership of society they may be said to be in poverty. People may be deprived in any or all of the major spheres of life – at work where the means largely determining position in other spheres are earned; at home, in neighbourhood and family; in travel; in a range of social and individual activities outside work and home or neighbourhood in performing a variety of roles in fulfilment of social obligations. (Townsend 1993 p 36; emphasis added.)

This is not the same wording as Townsend’s earlier and widely quoted definition of poverty, which referred to resources being so seriously below those of the average that the poor “are, in effect, excluded from” participatory lifestyles (Townsend 1979 p 31). This exclusion is a consequence of lack of resources. The European Commission version of 1984 defines the poor as persons whose resources are so limited as to exclude them from participation, and here exclusion is again a consequence of lack of resources. Later uses of the term exclusion seem to imply that it is a causal condition in which people possess negatively evaluated behavioural characteristics which exclude them from participation (the weak version, which Ruth Levitas (1998) sees as a moral underclass discourse) or lead them to be excluded by those with power to do so (the strong version). It matters whether exclusion is a cause or a consequence since it affects the policies which may be adopted to combat it, such as augmenting the resources lacked in the case of poverty (what Levitas sees as a redistributive discourse), or altering the characteristics in the case of those perceived as being deviant. Integrating the excluded (Levitas’s third discourse of exclusion) could in theory be just as much a matter of distributing resources as of altering behaviour, but governments reluctant to do the former focus policies on the latter instead. It remains an empirical and contextual question which would be more effective. Townsend later reformulated the earlier wording to that quoted above, perhaps to remove the ambiguity about the use of the word exclusion.

While the concepts of poverty and social exclusion may be distinct, there is much overlap, and research findings are equivocal on whether people in poverty are socially excluded in the sense of being different from those not in poverty. Van den Bosch’s review of international poverty research in Europe came to a similar conclusion to that reported in this book about Russia, that –

In my view the defining characteristic of the poor is that they have a material standard of living that is socially regarded as unacceptable; the poor do not share any other characteristic or combination of characteristics that distinguishes them from the non-poor. The poor are not necessarily excluded in the sense of having low status or being restricted in their social contacts. They cannot be identified on the basis of behaviour, or any other observable characteristic only. (Van den Bosch 2001 p 412)

Townsend uses both ‘conditions of life’ and ‘resources’ as requirements to meet needs, but we must note that meeting needs is a sequential process, a chain, in which a specified resource enables people to achieve a condition of life which is itself a resource to meet another need, and so on to the total life experience. Is an adequate diet (or an education or good health, or any other examples like them) a need, a resource or a condition of life? It is commonly used as all of these, and whether it is perceived as one or another depends on its position in the analytical chain in which the usage arises and not on any inherent quality in the concept as such. Arguments about needs frequently confuse concrete examples with abstract categories. If we try to analyse statements about individual needs, we find that the abstract needs underlying them can all be classified into either physical or psychological domains, and each of these can be divided into two – the nutrition and environment of the physical organism, and the two domains of psychological needs which have been variously called identity and

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8 Chris Whelan remarked that his research in Ireland into the relationship between concepts of social exclusion and the evidence of the maintenance of social contacts (which the loose usage of exclusion assumes are at risk of loss) showed that there was “almost no relationship, except that if you look at the unemployed you will find that they, if anything, have even more social contact than everyone else” (in Yeates and McLaughlin 2000 p 69).
community, or being and belonging. But the concrete examples always and inevitably relate to how such needs are experienced in culture, time and place, and usually draw on more than one classificatory domain. To take two simple examples, in most human societies, eating (nutrition) is carried out according to cultural conventions involving relationships (belonging), while clothing, which provides the personal portable environment appropriate to climate and the community’s culture, expresses identity needs and endorses status. If the ‘right’ clothing helps someone to get a job, is it a physical need or a cultural resource?

Analysis therefore requires specification of the objective and of the chain of intermediary resources by which that objective may be met. Relationships are invariably among the resources humans need to meet the end objective suggested above (starting with parents or their adequate substitutes to provide physical nurture and primary socialisation to every child born), but as this chapter focuses on poverty in the distributional rather than relational sense (which can be social exclusion), they will be referred to only as relevant in that context. Relationships are also important because in societies the needs and goals, even if unconscious and unvoiced, are inevitably collective, and thus the resources individuals need have to be collective as well as individual. The dynamic chain is apparent in all analyses of human needs and the resources which meet them, whether the resources are individual or collective, interpersonal or intrapersonal, material or mental (or tangible or intangible). Against this background, the arguments about the social policy tactics of meeting certain needs in cash or in kind, or about the value of human or social capital in meeting collective or individual needs, are, at an analytical level, merely abstracted reflections of the social realities; they are not substantive factors in themselves. To treat them as ‘real’ isolates them statically and risks closing off the possibility of dynamic lateral thought about alternative solutions in social practice or policy to the problems of unmet needs. The scholars’ aspiration to achieve valid abstract generalisations has been the curse preventing their insights from adoption by politicians who want contextually concrete answers to currently salient problems.

However fatuous it may be to try to impose consistency on the multiplicity of uses of the terms in the poverty debates, we could nevertheless describe the condition of all unmet need as deprivation, and the cause of this condition as the lack of relevant resources. A narrow, policy-oriented meaning of poverty then treats it as the special condition of lack of appropriate distributed money resources in marketised economies. A broader approach to poverty which overlaps with the meanings attached to the term social exclusion would see it in one of two ways. The strong approach sees it as the condition of lack of social integration (unmet needs for belonging and – as some would argue – behaving socially), whose cause, as Townsend pointed out (quoted above) is denial of the resources by power holders. The weak approach sees it as the individual’s lack of their own functional resources such as personality characteristics, personal claims on others in networks of relationships (social capital) or impersonal purchasing power to gain participation in and recognition of community membership. At each step a condition of met or unmet need is also a cause of the next condition, and such analytical chains weave, dividing and merging over time, longer than the individual life-span if a viable society is to be maintained. The common social policy-oriented analyses chop such chains into short lengths concerned only with some politically significant events within which some section of the population suffers unmet need – which can of course include majorities of the population, not just

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9 Erik Allardt similarly classified needs into ‘having’ (the physical needs), ‘being’ and ‘loving’ (belonging) (Allardt 1975).

10 The failure over time to satisfy psychological needs for identity and belonging lead to many pathological conditions, including those labelled anomie and alienation.

11 Any impression to the contrary may arise where observers’ and commentators’ ideologies are individualistic, and/or the focus of attention or agenda for political action has been on dealing with deprived individuals rather than collective causes of their deprivations.
minorities, suffering unmet needs according to the majority’s own standards. Nor are these matters as simple as common presentations imply. The majority’s unmet needs may include the psychological need for security against perceived threats from minorities. But these same minorities may themselves also have unmet needs, both material and cultural, some of which they interpret as requiring threatening behaviours to acquire from others or to retain the resources to meet them. Examples in western Europe include not only the high profile but low risk of crime or terrorism, but also the low profile and high probability of unmet collective needs for social security which are threatened by the refusal of rich minorities, usually corporations but including individuals, to share resources to increase collective well-being. No element of social analysis of the distribution of resources to meet anyone’s needs or of the relationship of any sections of a population to the whole can fail to raise political questions about their counterfactuals.

Poverty types and discourses.

The ways in which the whole subject of poverty is discussed powerfully affects the ways in which it is conceptualised, defined and measured, and the policies which are posited as combating it. This goes beyond mere clashes of scientific paradigm to deep-seated and long-lasting modes of thought, articulation and action. Paul Spicker elaborated eleven clusters of meaning surrounding varying definitions of poverty (Gordon and Spicker 1999 p 150), but such clusters may not be as good at capturing the complex dynamics of usage, with its overlaps and exclusivities, as the concept of discourses does, in the sense of discourses which Michel Foucault developed to explain the history of thought about sexuality, madness or crime. Research into the ways in which the governments of ten countries conceptualised and dealt with the ideas of poverty and need in their income maintenance policies suggested that some seven distinct discourses of poverty were in use in the 1990s (Veit-Wilson 1998; 2000). Four discourses might be called humanistic in that they addressed human behaviour and what structured it. These were approaches embodying assumptions about (1) social and political structures and systems, (2) about behaviours, (3) about social exclusion, and (4) about inequalities. Three discourses were asocial in that they were not concerned with empirical evidence about human behaviour and the distribution of resources but with addressing poverty in formal and abstracted modes of definition or measurement, (5) by statistical distribution, (6) by theoretical economistic models, and (7) by legal status. In the field of cross-national comparisons of poverty, these three asocial discourses currently reign supreme in articulating measures, in the form (5) of household incomes below some decile of the median, (6) of GDP per head, and (7) of social assistance benefits and recipients. But none of these explain anything about the meaning of poverty in any country, which is perhaps their attraction to politicians and global officials.

This chapter refers to the complex question of disparate discourses only because agreement on the identification of resources appropriate to meeting human needs depends on prior agreement on the discourse appropriate to the analysis of the unmet need, the poverty, deprivation or social exclusion in question. Thus in a world in which all and every definition of poverty is inevitably relative, the traditional demand for ‘absolute’ definitions and measures is found only among those using the economistic discourse which believes that ‘man lives by bread alone’, or at any rate that minimal material resources are all the poor need. They assume that meeting the economic need for the reproduction of human labour power requires no more than what Seebohm Rowntree described as an income sufficient for ‘merely physical efficiency’ (Rowntree 1901), his Primary Poverty measure which was in fact devised to show the public that many full time working class earnings were too low even for physical needs. A century later, such discourse users still compose dietaries and household budgets for this wholly asocial level of living – asocial because the great many studies of real people in poverty show that at such income levels they put as great or greater priority on maintaining their social and psychological need-metiong activities (spending on belonging and being) than on their

12 The deplorably common confusion between the analytically normal (distributive positions related to a statistical mean or median), and the normatively acceptable, leads some commentators to believe, wrongly, that the majority of a population cannot suffer poverty according to the values of that society. But it is of course wholly possible that the majority’s standards of what is tolerable are not achieved by that majority – the research in this book suggests that Russia in the 1990s may be a case in point, and also that populations may change their expectations and values in the direction of what is realistically feasible now rather than what used to be achieved (see also McAuley 1996; McAuley et al 1998; Mikhalev 1998). These are exercises in the study of relative deprivation (Runciman 1966), where the key issue is the status of the reference groups or ideas being used and not the objective situation as such.
physical needs. As Townsend put it, reviewing the evidence from decades of research, “… a lot of people, when their incomes are halved, do not surrender some of their social obligations to their families, to their workplaces, to their neighbours and so on” (in Yeates and McLaughlin 2000 p 61). Modern minimum subsistence budgets of this kind tell us nothing about a society and its standards of minimum welfare, still less about what it really costs to take part in society at a minimum level of decency, but they do say a lot about the stratified and asocial beliefs of those who compose them. Examination of who continues to use subsistence approaches shows that it is chiefly governments who wish to massage their poverty rates downwards and the economists who serve such governments in their attempts to set minimum incomes at the lowest plausible limits. The same is true in the UK, at least for the use of statistical definitions of poverty, since what little and dated empirical evidence there was suggested that household incomes needed for minimally adequate participation were at higher levels than the 60% of median household incomes (adjusted for household size, composition and equivalences) taken as a statistical poverty measure (Townsend 1979; Waldegrave and Frater 1996).

The term ‘absolute’ poverty nevertheless has such lasting rhetorical power, as shown by the support which Amartya Sen gave it (Sen 1983), that it was adopted by the United Nations Development Programme in the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration, and even relativist pioneers such as Townsend have become persuaded to use it on expedient and pragmatic grounds. The UNDP agreed statements which set out the whole of poverty, described later as ‘overall’ poverty, and within that a more limited subset of conditions which it labelled ‘absolute’ –

Absolute poverty is a condition characterised by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to social services. (UN 1995 para 19.)

Some of the abstract categories here would be included in traditional definitions of absolute poverty, although supporters of minimum subsistence budgets would rarely agree on how much money was needed in modern industrial states with marketised economies to pay for the necessary minimum of health or education. It is notable that there was international agreement that access to information (part of belonging) was a human need, and that social services were an essential resource to meet some of these needs, implying collective government action rather than merely individualised charitable or marketised solutions. These assumptions would not have been included in any discourse of absolute needs in the past.

The UN’s description of poverty overall, which precedes the description of absolute poverty quoted above, is very broad, starting with the statement that poverty has many manifestations. Those mentioned include all the usual physical and social deprivations and pathological conditions which individuals suffer from, but extended to “unsafe environments and social discrimination and exclusion”. It makes a salutary point to rich nations that poverty –

occurs in all countries: as mass poverty in many developing countries, pockets of poverty amid wealth in developed countries, loss of livelihoods as a result of economic recession, sudden poverty as a result of disaster or conflict, the poverty of low-wage workers, and the utter destitution of people who fall outside family support systems, institutions or safety nets. (UN 1995 para 19).

It goes on to describe many of the groups who are especially vulnerable to poverty and exclusion, though, as suggested above, vulnerability must not be confused with causation. Research at the Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research at the University of Bristol showed that if poverty is defined in the UN terms, then not only this broad picture of poverty but even such ‘absolute’ poverty can be found in the UK (Townsend et al 1997; Gordon 2000(a)). The value of the UN approach is that it proclaims international agreement on the scope and variety – and social relativity – of the subject, but by conflating the individual with the collective, the deprivations with the conditions and the characteristics, the lack of resources with political acts, it offers little more than

13 An example can be found in the briefings on poverty measures given by UN agencies (UNDP 1999).
a conceptual palette from which any kinds and colours of pictures can be painted. It tries to encompass everything within one term but thereby prevents it from having any explanatory power or policy orientation. If we want clear diagnosis of social problems to allow effective policy formation to combat them, we need a coherent analysis, not a list of everything that could be understood by the term.

If there is to be progress in this large and diffuse subject, we must delimit the field in which we aim to work. To restrict the meaning of poverty to the material deprivations which have the consequence of hindering if not preventing people from meeting their human needs as specified above (for healthy individual development and social participation in the full expected range of social activities and personal developments over the life-span), will allow us to concentrate on the battery of different kinds of resources which can then be seen to be necessary to combat those deprivations.

Resources to meet material needs.

‘Material needs’ is a simple phrase but covers a complex field. The problem of specifying them is exacerbated by the absence of a clear boundary between poverty meaning the lack of material resources necessary to participate in society, which is a social matter, and the social exclusion to which lack of material resources may contribute. ‘Material needs’ is not a matter of the ‘merely physical efficiency’ which Rowntree described in order to show incomes were too low for social participation. We are inevitably talking about the individual’s power over resources required to participate at what society defines as minimally decent levels, and this must include the social and psychological aspects of being and belonging as well as of the physiological aspects of nutrition and environment. The further complication is that the resources themselves, in the chain of cause and condition, may be social and psychological, as shown by the Russian research findings reported here. Personal characteristics and social networks (social capital) are both indispensable in the chain of acquiring economic resources even to meet physical needs.

The long-standing focus on money incomes in poverty research has hampered the search for and an understanding of the very wide range of other resources needed in the chain towards meeting human needs. This narrow focus had good reason: it reflected political not scientific concerns. The impetus for the research into what is the minimum necessary level of personal disposable incomes came from policy concerns about the levels of wages, taxable capacity, and social security and social assistance benefits in largely marketised modern industrial states. This research continues to be required, especially against the claims of politicians over more than a hundred years that it is behavioural failure and not lack of money which causes the problems of deprivation. Finding out what is the need for money when all else is held constant has driven the policy-dominated poverty research agenda. It could be argued that in poverty debates the development of the broader discourse of social exclusion in the last two decades of the 20th century was a response to political resistance to this preoccupation with cash incomes alone as much as to its narrowness.

A step towards a broader scientific analysis of the underlying deprivation problems in order to identify the range of required resources was suggested not only by Peter Townsend and his research team’s work in the 1960s (Townsend 1979) but also by Sen’s development of the concept of capabilities (Sen 1983). Both of these emphasised the role of social objectives in the identification and analysis of relevant resources in social context. For instance, implementing the abstract capability of ‘mobility’ may need a great many different kinds of individual and collective resources depending on where it occurs on the globe and the capacities of the individual concerned. The capability of ‘access to clean drinking water’ could be met by individual purchasing power if a supply is available in bottles or by payment (or tax) for piped water, but only if the collective capitalised resources of collecting and purifying it, as well as bottling or piping, are already available in situ. The focus on capabilities as intermediary objectives on the chain is important but does not avoid the continuing need to identify the resources which are required to achieve each stage in the chain. In each social context, analysis has to consider what are the relevant and appropriate resources, and in largely marketised economies where many needs can be met by spending money, sufficient money in the form of personal disposable incomes continues to be crucial.

In the broader connection, the University of Bristol team has developed methods by which the generalisations of the UNDP’s approach to absolute poverty can be operationalised, that is, turned into a check list of seven situations and experiences, scaled over a four-level range (mild; moderate;
severe; extreme), against which specific social conditions can be measured (Gordon et al. 2003 p 8 table 2.1). These seven factors are food, safe drinking water, health, shelter, education, information and basic social services. The form which the ‘food’ category takes refers to the nutritional adequacy of the available diet, in quantity and content, but not to costs and affordability. ‘Water’ refers both to the cash costs and to access, while sanitation refers only to access. ‘Health’ means treatment for ill-health and covers both costs and access. ‘Shelter’ covers condition, amenities and overcrowding but not cost to households. ‘Education’ brings in ‘lack of resources’, which might mean parents’ or communities’ ability to pay fees or collectively to make provision, as well as exclusion because of discrimination. ‘Information’ is partly a matter of affordability and partly of political control. Finally, ‘social services’ is taken to mean health and education provision and involves questions of access and standards, rather than the availability and cost of treatment or schooling.

This simple list shows that a wide range of resources would be required to escape from absolute poverty. It is the product of one approach, and others might take a different view, but as it is a pioneering attempt to concretise the UN’s abstract idea of absolute poverty, it is important as a starting point. Simply in this formulation, the necessary resources include government provision of appropriate education and health facilities in accessible places, and collective provision of clean water and sanitation facilities. Shelter implies either collective provision of housing or the household disposable income to pay for it, and information is mainly a matter of paying for equipment, except when governments curtail access to it or the printed media. But in general the resource chain here treats indirect cash resources as secondary to the question of whether the direct primary resources are available at all in the places where they are needed. This is an important reminder that personal disposable cash incomes are merely proxies giving access to marketed goods, services and experiences which meet needs, and if the resources are not marketed then cash is useless. Indeed, on the human needs scale there are many psychological resources (such as intimate personal attachments) which European values emphasise should not be marketed, or where ideology and political contingency create arguments about where the boundaries between commercial and kinship responsibilities lie. A topical example in many countries is personal care for those with dependency needs, whether the normal dependencies of childhood or the abnormal dependencies of disability (often wrongly described as being the dependencies of old age, where that is not the cause but the occasion of the disability).

Whatever the breadth of the field of resources which social science can illuminate, social policy concerns are generally much narrower. Though they are not the chief focus here, we have to consider their insights because they have driven much of the debate over what material resources are relevant and need to be measured. For example, in reporting on its aim of determining the taxable capacity of individuals in the UK, a minority of members of the Royal Commission on the Taxation of Profits and Incomes wrote in 1955:

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\text{In fact no concept of income can really be equitable that stops short of the comprehensive definition which embraces all receipts which increase an individual’s command over the use of society’s scarce resources – in other words, his ‘net accretion of economic power between two points of time’. (RCTPI 1955 p 8.)}
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This is similar to Richard Titmuss’s formulation of income as “power over resources through time”. Townsend’s analysis of what aspects of income were involved in determining an individual’s achieved level of living in the UK gave a list of resources (Townsend 1970 pp 24-25) which, somewhat expanded, consisted of the following elements. All of these can be recognised in the Russian research findings reported here, though their relative values to the households surveyed may well differ substantially from those found in the UK or other countries.

**Personal income in cash:**

(a) current cash income from all sources, such as earnings, rents, dividends, interest, pensions, social security and social assistance payments, other cash benefits, fiscal (tax) allowances;

(b) ownership of stocks of assets which can become a source of flows of income in the present or future, and/or may be treated as security for loans giving income in the present. These include tangible assets such as land and property, bank deposits, stocks and shares, but note that they also include intangible but fungible assets such as educational and skill qualifications, knowledge and
other forms of human and cultural capital – even personal characteristics may be fungible capital if there is a market for them.

**Personal income in kind:**
(c) occupational (employer- or enterprise-provided) benefits in kind having a cash value, such as pension rights, sick pay schemes, health insurance and care, stock options, transportation, housing, education and training, child care and allowances, meals;
(d) social welfare benefits in kind from both statutory and non-governmental sources but having a net cash value beyond any costs or charges, such as education and training, health services, housing, personal social services, transport;
(e) private income in kind, such as the value of all kinds of production and transfer of goods and services between people, kinsfolk, neighbours, friends and so on, which are not marketed but are similar to marketed resources, for example, foodstuffs and meals, personal care, gifts of all sorts, holidays.

**Impersonal income:**
(f) Environmental standards, meaning the value to individuals of the quality of locality and housing, as well as all other aspects of environmental conditions, transport services, safety and other aspects of working conditions, both material and social/psychological.

**Social capital.**

The resources listed in (e) above are a reminder that the concept of social capital is relevant to the sociological analysis of poverty, even if it is disregarded in policy formation for income maintenance. Like the subject of poverty, there is a vast literature on this concept, which has become more popular since it was taken up in the context of the ideological debate over the balance or substitution of civil institutions for those of the state (Puttnam 2000). But the earlier use of the idea of social capital referred not to citizen involvement or the role of the state but to a productive resource, like economic and human capital, “making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible” (Coleman 1988 p 98). This sociological account of social capital locates it in relationships of trustworthiness and trust in groups, and shows how it “can be combined with other resources to produce different system-level behaviour or, in other cases, different outcomes for individuals”, and further that it produces value “… for those actors who have this resource available and … the value depends on social organisation” (ibid. p 101).

James Coleman’s account of “Social capital in the creation of human capital” contrasted it with what Mark Granovetter called “‘the undersocialised concept of man’ that characterises economists’ analysis of economic activity” (quoted in Coleman 1988 p 97) in a critique of individualistic and self-interested accounts of human behaviour typical of classical economics. However, as these economistic asocial discourses continue to dominate the globalised debate over poverty, it is salutary to be reminded that it is sociological concepts, not economic ones, which are at issue in analysing poverty here, even if the terminology of capital appears superficially similar. The concept in use is only as good as the evidence which supports it, and the research reported here suggests that Russian poverty is inexplicable without it. The capitalised asset is the potential for support or access to material resources offered by the network of trusting relationships, which in the Russian case seem at times to be crucial.

Nevertheless, the concept should be used with caution, since social capital may not be fungible in the absence of material capital. Help has to be repaid eventually in some form or another, and people who cannot reciprocate even favours may find that in certain situations the fund of social capital in their networks is not inexhaustible. Further, stocks of capital have to be built up, and this is no less true of human and social capital. Time is a key dimension: this research shows that settled residential communities are the implicit bank in which social capital can be invested and grow, for it is no instantly liquid resource like cash. As reported here, social and political stability is a prerequisite for the establishment of these social networks over time, so that the social capital can be drawn on when needed later. Those people who are isolated socially or far from their natural networks, such as ethnic Russians in Ossetia, are then liable to be more deprived.
Time as a resource.

Having enough time for all the normally prescribed and desired activities is often noted as an essential resource in quality of life discussions. But while it may not have received the attention it deserves as a relevant resource in the poverty literature, the sociological or economic treatment of time is far broader and equally relevant. Earning a living, cultivating a food plot, caring for children and other dependants, keeping social relationships intact, all need and take time, and in modern industrial societies such activities frequently demand more time than people have available, and the needs compete with each other. Marketised solutions relieve some problems if incomes are sufficient to pay for the services needed (for instance food or child care) and if they are available within affordable reach, but other aspects of these resources (such as personal relationships) are not interchangeable with services or treated as marketable. Like incomes, the social capital resource may provide alternative solutions to some shortages of the time resource. Time is thus an element in the chain of resources to meet needs to create conditions under which further needs can be met.

Such lists of need-meeting material and social resources can naturally be amplified and condensed according to the focal interests and objectives of the exercise, so there is nothing authoritative about them. The test of their validity is their ability to encompass what the empirical research finds to be the factors affecting real people’s levels of living. Further, in real life they are often embedded in other social institutions and rituals, so that examining what is being mobilised or transferred for use or to meet needs over time can be a complicated and difficult activity. In this field, the international macro-measures of poverty are of little use to the sociological analysis of human poverty and are not discussed here. In considering resources some poverty analysts use narrowly economistic approaches but most would agree with Gordon that “The concept of resources can be considered to encompass elements of human capital and therefore can be even wider than even a broad concept of income” (Gordon 2000b pp 39-40). In the mean time, Townsend’s (augmented) list above is a useful summary list of the resources we should look for in marketised industrial societies including Russia, and an indicator of related other resources such as human and social capital which may be relevant in context.

Resources and measures.

Much poverty research has been carried out from the perspective of the social policy interest in better income maintenance and other social services to alleviate and prevent poverty. In general, this approach assumes that the focus must be on those aspects of poverty which can be directly affected by government policy, and not so much if at all on those which depend on traditional and informal social institutions less amenable to purposive change from outside. Thus it has often focused on measuring how much personal disposable income is needed not to be poor in a given society, using a variety of direct and indirect methods to arrive at what the adequate level of living is for which the income is needed. The chief measures have therefore been financial, rather than graded on the complex inventory of resources which use of Townsend’s model would suggest. Some methods have tended to assume that all other resources apart from money incomes are held constant, and this often includes both the nominal right to welfare benefits, rather than the actual value of benefits which have been available and obtained. Such assumptions seem to be problematic in the Russian context. Wages, self employed earnings and pensions may still be the most significant income source but their payment may be irregular, and the difficulty of estimating the value of the wide range of other resources complicates the picture as a whole (Mikhalev 1998 p 363).

In the social policy approach it is not always clear whose normative standards of a minimally adequate level of living are taken as the poverty standards. Social assistance benefits, in those countries which have them, may have been set on the basis of what politicians think can be afforded and at levels below the lowest wage rates, neither of which may bear any relationship to evidence of what is needed to avoid poverty in those countries. If the idea of need has been raised at all, it may reflect ideological notions of the lowest level of living which politicians or their officials consider sufficient for poor people, rather than the views of those who have to live at such levels. There is therefore little point in examining social assistance benefits as such unless one wants to understand political conditions in a country. Similarly, statistical measures of inequality, measures based on
formal constructs such as the food share of expenditure or other ‘s-curve’ statistics of consumption\textsuperscript{14},
tell us little about the realities of deprived and excluded lives, but a great deal about the ingenious
methodologists who devise them and those who sponsor such efforts.

On the other hand, empirical sociological approaches can be divided into those which
approach the question of the whole society’s minimally acceptable level of living directly or by proxy
(for a discussion of the meanings of direct and proxy, see Ringen 1988 and Veit-Wilson 1987). The
direct methods are epitomised by the deprivation indicator approach originally developed by the Abel-
Smith and Townsend research team (Townsend 1979) and adapted by Joanna Mack and Stewart
Lansley (1985) as well as by Björn Halleröd (1997). Essentially, the method hypothesises a list of
culturally specific necessities, both goods, services and life-experiences or capabilities, and surveys
the sample population to see what degree of assent there is to the proposition that these are necessities
which nobody should be without. The survey population responds both about its views, whether or not
it wants the items and whether or not it can afford them if it does want them, and gives details of its
household incomes. The researchers then test statistically at what levels of enforced deprivation of
socially-defined necessities there is a correlation with household income or with other sets of
resources as well, or in some surveys with household expenditures. This direct method has been the
basis of the methods used in the Russian poverty research reported here. The version of the method
currently used by independent researchers in the UK is explained by Gordon and Townsend (2000).

The indirect methods are those where attitudinal surveys into the subjective meanings of
household income levels are taken as proxies for the adequacy of the levels of living which they can
support. These methods are associated with the Universities of Leyden (where they were developed in
the 1970s) and Antwerp where they were augmented (Van den Bosch 2001). While politicians treat
attitudinal research in general with great respect, for some reason they have great reservations about
studies like these, perhaps because they may suggest that income maintenance levels are too low. This
has not always been so – Dutch research in the 1970s and 1980s found the minimally acceptable
household income levels below what the Dutch government was paying in social assistance (Goedhart
et al 1977; Muffels et al 1990). Later researchers in Belgium who found considerable dissatisfaction
refused to treat the survey responses as a ‘true’ poverty measure, preferring to use the social
assistance level as ‘real’ poverty (Deleeck et al 1992 pp 37-38). This exemplifies the fallacy of
assuming the policy-oriented researcher knows best, since in such issues it is the population as a
whole which sets the standards of acceptability of the levels of living and who therefore knows best if
its incomes achieve them (Van den Bosch 2001 p 406).

A hybrid of these approaches is that developed at the University of Loughborough (see
Middleton 2000) which uses ‘focus groups’, intense and iterative small-group qualitative discussions
to establish the range of necessities for minimally acceptable levels of living for households of
specified types, and their aggregate costs. In effect, this combines the deprivation indicator, attitudinal
and budgeting methods in a productive but research-intensive manner to find and test minimally
adequate income levels. Its findings are scientific in that they are empirical, testable, replicable and
refutable. Against this, the traditional budget methods such as those used by the Family Budget Unit
in the UK (Bradshaw 1993) are based on evidence from the deprivation indicator surveys but
augmented by expert normative judgement about the requirements of households containing
individuals of varying age and sex. Such normative judgements are then converted into the
conventional resources shown by standard household surveys so that they can be included in the
budgets, but they must always be open to inspection and revision in the light of change in both
scientific knowledge and conventional living patterns.

\textsuperscript{14}The food share or Engel approach takes, in typical examples, the proportion of average total household expenditure on
food (or sometimes other essential utilities as well) as the basis for a calculation which multiplies the assumed cost of a
minimum dietary (and essential utilities) by the same coefficient as the food share in the average household (allowing for
size and composition). This method, which was used by Orshansky for the US ‘poverty line’ in 1965, has a certain
political plausibility, but as Townsend pointed out there is no reason why the food share in a low income household
should be the same as in an average one, and the dietary costs in this approach might not be socially acceptable. See
Citro and Michael 1995 for a recent study of a modified version of these methods for US government use. The ‘s-curve’
method examines statistics of elasticity of demand for ‘basic’ consumer goods and services and makes informed
judgements about the income thresholds at which hypothesised basic needs seem to be satisfied. The aggregation and
triangulation of such data is then taken as an indication of the minimum net incomes needed for a low level of living.
Taking account of time introduces a further dimension into these poverty measurements when used to count people in poverty. There are two problems. One is that if there is movement into and out of poverty as measured by one or another of these methods, larger numbers of people experience such poverty over time than can be counted at one moment by cross-sectional statistics. Such differences can be very important not only to accounts of the experience of deprivation and poverty but also to the design of effective income maintenance systems. They also have implications for policy makers, in countering the stratified assumptions of a static ‘them and us’ social structure, in favour of the dynamic ‘risks for all’ situation. The other problem is that if resources are taken to be not only current flows of income but also stocks of tangible and intangible assets, then (as Gordon pointed out, 2000b) account must be taken of the situations in which people have low income flows but adequate asset stocks, or adequate income flows but low asset stocks. Such marginal situations are found in poverty research and reflect the dynamics of change, and they too can change as the assets deteriorate but cannot be replaced from the inadequate incomes, or as the adequate incomes complete the asset stocks. Sociological accounts of such dynamic situations are both a stimulus to better methodological development and a rich source for deeper understanding of the realities of deprived lives, to set beside the accounts in this book (Leisering and Leibfried 1999; Walker 1995).

These studies aimed to describe the dynamic experience of poverty in length as well as depth, quite apart from seeking the income boundaries between deprivation and minimal adequacy as the studies described them. Such ‘poverty line’ boundaries are more commonly found to be fuzzy indeterminate bands between high probabilities of correlation between multiply deprived levels of living and low incomes on one side, and little correlation between few if any deprivations and higher incomes on the other, rather than precise delimiting markers which are likely to be no more than averages found, not predictors of deprived outcomes.15 These findings are therefore illuminating but sometimes frustrating for those trying to set income maintenance levels, even if much research has hoped to offer criteria by which to judge the adequacy of these systems. On the other hand, they are central to studies aiming to discover the range of resources and their levels over which people need to have power in order to avoid poverty and enable social participation as society identifies it. That is what the research reported in this book on the meaning and nature of poverty in Russia aims to do.

Conclusion.

This chapter has set out some of the issues surrounding the idea of poverty and the resources which are needed to combat it. It has raised questions about studying the standards used to understand what poverty is in any given society at a stage in its development, and reported on methods of investigating the patterns of living in that society and what it sees as the features of the participatory lifestyle which would be the opposite of deprivation, exclusion or poverty. In discussing the nature of the resources needed over time to take part in society decently, it has distinguished between the narrow and immediate concerns of both governments and social scientists to identify and count people in poverty and to evaluate their income maintenance systems, and the much broader perception which people in the wider population hold of the resources necessary over time in their pursuit of dignified lives in their own communities. The research into the nature and extent of poverty and exclusion in Russia reported here shows that key resources lie in traditional and reliable community relationship ties and networks and not in ephemeral money alone, even while having a secure source of enough money income remains indispensable to avoid deprivations and market based exclusion – a ‘both/and’ and not an ‘either/or’ situation. The research illustrates the fragility and fluidity of the chains of resources needed to achieve desired ends, so that it becomes hard to see what is the cause, the condition or the consequence, each of which demands resources and risks deprivations, and where deficiencies in one may be compensated by another, or may not. The picture is far more complicated than the common political simplifications sometimes suggest. But if we keep the various separate factors clearly in mind, we can see in greater depth the realities of the struggle of people in Russia against the vicissitudes which the great changes of the 1990s forced on them, and understand better the changing meaning of poverty to them and the nature of the range of resources which they need mobilise to fight against it, whoever and wherever they are.

15 In identifying poor households by appearance, Rowntree noted a similar point a century ago (1901 pp 116-117).
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