

KAZIMIERZ M. SŁOMCZYŃSKI,
ILONA WYSZULEK
AND IRINA TOMESCU-DUBROW

INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND THE LIFE COURSE

This volume is devoted to the analysis of social inequality in Poland over the period 1988–2013. Its purpose is to shed light on causes and consequences of processes of differentiation that occurred in modern Poland, from the last years of state socialism, through the post-communist transformation, the country's accession to the European Union, the 2008 global economic crisis, and up to the near present. In doing so, this book aptly complements our earlier volume on *Dynamics of Social Structure: Poland's Transformative Years* (Słomczyński, Tomescu-Dubrow, Życzyńska-Ciołek and Wyszulek eds. 2016). Both volumes are based on analyses of the Polish Panel Survey POLPAN. The context of Poland's transformation and the availability of this unique panel survey constitute a great opportunity to study social inequality and the life course.

Social inequality is a defining issue of our time and a fundamental topic in sociological research. Individual chapters discuss the theoretical premises their analyses build on. Here we emphasize an important principle the so-called Warsaw School developed for studying social structure and inequality: social class and stratification are distinct, albeit related, elements of the social structure.¹ Social classes are defined as groups that control various social resources important for the functioning of the capital, and labor and consumption markets. They form the ground where

¹ The Warsaw School, founded by Włodzimierz Wesółowski and continued by his collaborators, incorporates neo-Marxian and neo-Weberian approaches (cf. Słomczyński, Tomescu-Dubrow and Dubrow forthcoming).

social groups evolve, and within this process individuals acquire social and cultural identification. Their relevance for determining life chances depends on the socio-economic and political systems.

Life course research is also important to this volume. According to Karl Ulrich Mayer, it has varied meanings and approaches, ranging from processes of development from one life stage to another, to the outcomes of institutions and social policy, and to the somewhat vague “mere empirical connectivity” (Mayer 2009: 413). A common thread is that individuals and groups are best understood when key parts of their lives are studied and included in models that account for their behavior and attitudes. Social inequality, being a defining phenomenon that influences all behaviors and attitudes, is crucial to our understanding of the life course. At its empirical heart is longitudinal research, and at its best this type of research is carried out using long-term panel data.

This volume explores different aspects of social inequalities and their consequences for the life course of individuals. Class structure and social stratification have a dynamic relationship and impact people throughout their lives. To map evidence through time, high quality longitudinal panel survey data are essential. This is why all chapters in this volume feature the Polish Panel Survey POLPAN.

The Polish Panel Survey POLPAN, 1988–2013

The Polish Panel Survey POLPAN is the longest continuously run panel survey in Central and Eastern Europe that focuses on changes in the social structure and has individuals as the units of observation. It is carried out by the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences, in cooperation with researchers from other Polish and international academic institutions. POLPAN is a series of integrated surveys based on face-to-face interviews conducted every five years since 1988 with adult residents of Poland (Słomczyński, Tomescu-Dubrow, Życzyńska-Ciołek and Wyszniak eds. 2016).

In 1988, the initial survey was conducted on a national sample representing Poland's adult population (aged 21–65), with $N = 5,817$. In 1993, this sample was randomly reduced to 2,500 individuals, of whom 2,259 were successfully interviewed. In each of the consecutive five-year waves the goal was to reach the core panel. To ensure an adequate age balance, since 1998 the core panel is being supplemented with additional

subsamples involving young cohorts. Thus, POLPAN 1998 collected information from 1,752 men and women interviewed in 1988 and 1993, as well as from a new sample of 383 people aged 21 to 30 in 1998. In 2003, panel respondents represented 87% (N = 1,474) of the full sample (N = 1,699), while the renewal sample equalled 225 respondents aged 21–25 years. POLPAN 2008 interviewed 1,805 respondents, of whom 581 were newly added individuals aged 21–25 years, while the rest (N = 1,224) participated in at least one previous panel wave.

In 2013, the main stage of POLPAN covered 2,196 people, of whom 1,699 had participated as respondents in earlier waves, and 497 represented the young generation, aged 21 to 25. Following intensive efforts to reach all respondents who belonged to the 1988 original sample, the total number of individuals who participated in the 2013 POLPAN wave is 2,780, out of whom 2,283 had been previously interviewed at least once.

POLPAN covers a variety of key topics. These include respondents' socio-economic characteristics, together with self-reported information about spouses' and parents' demographics, respondents' occupational careers, life-style choices, and opinions on political, economic, and social issues, among others. It is worth noting that recent waves of POLPAN include a 10-item subset of the nonverbal Raven test, which captures intellectual flexibility, as well as respondents' self-evaluation of health (Nottingham Health Profile). In sum, the data are well-suited for analyzing various dimensions of social inequality throughout the life-course.

The panel character of the data offers scholars the possibility to study not only differences *between* people or social groups, but also changes *within* them over time. For example, researchers can examine the impact of social and intellectual capital on individuals' economic, political and cultural biographies, or analyze the extent to which individual acts and choices, reflected in their biographies, are shaped by structural conditions.

Structure of the Book

This book is divided into seven parts that address important aspects of peoples' life course: electoral behavior, representation and governmental effectiveness (Parts I and II), political knowledge, attitudes toward inequality and images of justice (Parts III and IV), and other elements of the life course, including religiosity, education and skills, and health issues (Parts V to VII). Commenting on the content of this volume, we follow this division.

Social Inequality in Political Life

The first two parts of the book engage with core issues of political sociology, namely, the social bases of politics. Implied in this fundamental idea is that social divisions, cleavages and inequalities translate into political interests, organization, and conflict. In this vein is the study of political engagement. Active citizen participation in politics has been recognized by many scholars as the key to building a high quality democracy. Studies dating from the 1960s focused on electoral behavior, while recent studies show a shift from this traditional type of political participation to informal political involvement or to general alienation from political processes (e.g. Putnam 1993, 2000; Ekiert and Kubik 1998; Norris 2002). Although the topic of political participation received a lot of academic attention in established Western European democracies, there is a need for new studies on particular mechanisms behind the political participation in Central and Eastern Europe.

Part One of this volume is about social structure and *electoral behavior*. In the chapter “Class Voting in the Polish Parliamentary Elections of 2011,” Michał Kotnarowski examines the extent to which voters’ socio-economic status influences how people vote. Using the framework of class voting theory, he hypothesizes that both electoral participation and particular party choice is related to current occupational position. Specifically, Kotnarowski expects that in the Polish parliamentary elections of 2011, skilled professionals, skilled service workers and people employed in managerial positions voted for the *Platforma Obywatelska* (Civic Platform, PO), while low skilled manual workers, members of the non-skilled service workers and people on retirement supported *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice, PIS). In testing the hypothesis, Kotnarowski uses different occupational categories and scales developed by Domański, Sawiński, and Slomczynski (2009). Kotnarowski finds that every measure of socio-economic status has a highly significant effect on vote choice in the Polish parliamentary elections of 2011, with the strongest relation observed for broad 14 occupational categories and a detailed occupational prestige scale.

Gender is a major dimension of social inequality. In her chapter, Sheri Kunovich explores how gender impacts voting behavior. Based on evidence from Western democracies, she tests the hypothesis of a *gender gap*, according to which women in Poland voted at lower rates than men at the beginning of the transition to democracy but this difference

disappeared over time. Findings show that, controlling for family structure, socio-economic resources, religious attendance, and political interest, women were less likely to vote in 1989 and 1991 but more likely to vote in 1993 in comparison to men. After 1993, there were no significant differences between women and men in voting. However, as of 2007, Kunovich finds that such factors as marital status, children, and work hours impact the likelihood of voting in the case of women but not in the case of men. These findings align with those for other European democracies.

In Part Two, the chapter “Do Political Parties Represent Women, the Poor, and the Elderly?” by Joshua K. Dubrow explores the relationship between party image on one hand, and attitudes towards democracy and democratic engagement, on the other. Party image is an individual-level subjective evaluation of a party’s position on particular issues. Dubrow analyzes the extent to which political parties in Poland in 2008 are perceived to represent women, the poor and the elderly. Together, these evaluations of particular party images can be seen as the reflection of the subjective evaluation of the entire party system. Dubrow measures the extent to which an individual believes that at least one of the ten parties analyzed represent these disadvantaged groups. The key finding is that the overall image of the party system, with respect to representing disadvantaged groups, has a significant impact on attitudes towards democracy and intention to vote. An astonishing fifth of the population does not know where the four major parties stood on policies toward women, the poor, and the elderly.

In the next chapter Ilona Wyszulek analyzes changes in how people evaluate the government’s effectiveness to fight corruption. The chapter highlights the dynamics of corruption perceptions in Poland and investigates the characteristics and political attitudes of those who are unsatisfied with the government’s efforts. The relationship between corruption and institutional trust receives special attention. Wyszulek shows that, despite the economic and political changes during the post-1989 transformation, including changes to the ruling parties in power, at any given time Poles consider the government to be very corrupt and ineffective in fighting corruption. In 2013 there is a positive correlation between low level of political trust and negative perception of the government’s corruption-fighting effectiveness. As compared to the young, older respondents tend to perceive government as less effective in fighting corruption.

Political Knowledge and Attitudes, Images of Social Justice

Part Three of this volume deals with political knowledge, attitudes and images of social justice. The chapter by Robert Kunovich and Sheri Kunovich focuses on respondents' political knowledge and interest in politics. In the main, they examine the extent to which political knowledge leads to changes in political interest, support for basic democratic principles, and political alienation. Their focus is on how gender influences these relationships. The authors measure the key concept, political knowledge, with 2003 items that ask respondents whether particular political parties are in the governing coalition at that time. Findings show that there is no gender difference in the effect of political knowledge on the change in political interest and the level of political alienation. Both men and women who had higher-level political knowledge in 2003, continued their interest in politics in 2008 to a similar extent and were less likely to be alienated from politics. However, there was a gender difference in the effect of political knowledge on changes in attitudes: women with higher-level political knowledge became less democratic while for men this effect was not present.

After the 1989 political and economic break with the Soviet Union, the next major geopolitical move in Central and Eastern Europe was joining the European Union (EU). In her chapter, Nataliia Pohorila, analyzes the basics of this critical period in Poland's transformative years. The primary concern of her chapter are Poles' economic and cultural attitudes to the EU accession. Pohorila hypothesizes that attitudes to accession, before and after it happened, are influenced by geographic location, age, occupational status, and political interest. The research reveals that the hopes for positive effects of Poland's entry into the EU prevail among younger cohorts living in urban areas, especially in Poland's western regions. High interest in politics and low statist welfare expectations were also significantly associated with positive attitudes to the EU accession.

In Part Four, Zbigniew Karpinski's chapter focuses on *do-earn* and *should-earn* questionnaire items that capture the subjective evaluations of actual and just earnings in a set of occupations. He argues that studying the patterns of non-response can help us understand better the cognitive and social processes influencing responses to the *do-earn* and *should-earn* items. He discovers that "missing" responses – such as *don't know* or *refused to answer* – are associated with social distances between the

occupations under study and subjects' own occupations. An important conclusion of this chapter is that ignoring non-response may bias the estimates of inequality, so that the analyst may misinterpret respondents' perception of the depth of earnings inequality.

Social inequality manifests not only in perceptions of earnings, but also in peoples' attitudes toward policies for economic redistribution. Kinga Wysieńska-Di Carlo and Matthew Di Carlo use the 2013 POLPAN wave to address the following question: Which individual characteristics influence preferences regarding the state's role in reducing income differences, providing jobs, setting income limits, and caring for the retired population? The authors examine the idea that rational calculation, according to which people seek to increase their chances of avoiding contributions while maximizing their benefits, influences their attitudes toward the state's role in welfare and economic redistribution. Their findings suggest that education and income are strongly and consistently associated with redistribution preferences, with higher-educated, higher-income workers being significantly less likely to support redistribution. Labor market position also maintains a significant association with redistributive preferences, even when captured with a manual *versus* non-manual sectoral distinction. There is also a strong, consistent relationship between welfare attitudes and subjective (self-identified) social position.

Reflections of Inequality in the Life Course

Social inequality carries through all stages of the life course. The next parts of this book look at the mechanisms and social determinants of individual religious behavior, education and skill attainment, and health issues. Paweł Grygiel and Grzegorz Humenny examine the patterns of change and stability of participation in Sunday Mass among Polish Catholics. Using the panel structure of the data, Grygiel and Humenny perform latent growth analysis to capture the change over time between persons and within the same person with regard to going to Church. The results show that, overall, there is a slight decrease in church participation, with the largest change observed between 1988 and 1993. The authors reveal three trajectories of religious participation among Polish Catholics: one is represented by the group with high initial (i.e. 1988) attendance levels and stability over time (about 50 percent of respondents); the second refers to the group with slightly lower initial level of attendance that decreased even more over time (about 30 percent); the third trajectory is

that of the group with very low levels of initial church attendance and the most rapid decrease (about 20 percent).

While religiosity in Poland is declining, it remains, for most Poles, a key aspect of the life course. In "Is the Church a Source of Social Capital? Religiosity and the Size and Quality of Personal Networks," Oyindamola Bola inquires about the extent to which attending services of the Catholic Church improves respondents' social capital. Bola looks at both the size of personal networks and the quality of those networks. Her measure of the quality of personal networks includes, among other things, responses to the questions whether family and friends are able to spend a lot of time with you, to take care of your needs, find out how to solve a difficult legal or administrative matter, or lend you a significant amount of money. The results indicate that church attendance does increase the size of Poles' social networks, but the effect is weak. At the same time, Bola finds that it has a weak negative impact on the quality of peoples' social networks, net of other factors, including number of friends.

In her chapter Anna Kiersztyn is concerned with the increasing skill mismatch and overeducation of Poles, and examines the extent to which labor markets can accommodate the growing number of college graduates in Poland. Kiersztyn examines three hypotheses: (a) overeducation is driven by structural factors, educational expansion especially; (b) skill mismatch is short-term and characterizes primarily the beginning of peoples' careers (i.e. career mobility hypothesis); and (c) the mismatch between school attainment and job requirements is due to the heterogeneity of human capital among workers with the same level of education. Results lend strongest support to the first hypothesis. Given the stability in education-job mismatch over time (more than half of those working in jobs below their level of education remained in that situation five years later), Kiersztyn rejects the career mobility hypothesis. The third hypothesis receives little empirical support: neither achieving a high Raven test score during the POLPAN interview, nor having a diploma in the field of technical or life sciences offer meaningful protection against overeducation.

Complementing research on changes to education requirements in Poland, "Structural Determinants of Foreign Language Skills," by Olena Oleksiyenko and Ilona Wyszulek, centers on the case of growing expectation of foreign language skills and changing preferences in foreign language education. For example, the authors show the predictable shift in foreign language preferences from Russian to English. In the context

of the European Union integration and a series of education reforms in Poland since 1988, the authors examine the extent to which Poland's educational emphasis on multilingual skills development fosters inequality. They find that the likelihood of knowing foreign languages among the younger cohorts in Poland strongly depends on the socio-economic position of parents, place of residence, and gender.

Countries of the European Union are facing a rise in both overweight and obesity² and a rapidly aging population.³ Małgorzata Mikucka, the author of both chapters of Part Seven uses POLPAN to explore these critical health issues. In "Overweight and Obesity across the Social Structure" Mikucka finds that 42 percent of adult men and 28 percent of adult women are overweight, and 10 percent of both women and men are obese. Her study also shows that, in Poland, overweight and obesity are not a product of material disadvantage, but rather the strongest association is with age and marital status. The study also shows a clear relationship between obesity and negative assessment of one's physical health and reduced physical abilities. Meanwhile, overweight is associated with better mental health and lower propensity for emotional and sleep problems.

"How Do We Age? The Health of Elderly Men and Women" addresses the aging crisis. Elderly Poles are defined here as those past their sixtieth birthday. The description of a general health situation of elderly is complemented with an analysis of factors that correlate with their health situation, including improvement or deterioration. Among those factors, Mikucka concentrates on various elements of location in the social structure (education, household income, employment status) and social support (marital status and the number of friends). The findings reveal significant social inequalities in the health situation of elderly in Poland. Both physical and emotional aspects of health problems are strongly related to the level of education, income and self-assessed social status. Mikucka raises concern about the performance of the health care system in providing information and access to services for elderly people from different social strata.

² According to a white paper from the European Union (2007: 2), the "last three decades have seen the levels of overweight and obesity in the EU population rise dramatically."

³ According to a European Commission report (2015: 2), "The demographic trends projected over the long term reveal that Europe is 'turning increasingly grey' in the coming decades."

Conclusions

This book adds substantial knowledge to the series of research on the Polish society gained on the basis of the Polish Panel Survey POLPAN. The intensive theoretical, methodological, and empirical work that POLPAN facilitated over time enabled us to put together two edited volumes on Poland's 1988–2013 transformative years. The first volume is *Dynamics of Social Structure*. The second, *Social Inequality and the Life Course*, is the one you hold in your hands.

This edited volume brings together analyses on key issues in social inequality and life course research, dividing it into two main fields. One field is the analysis of political life, and the second deals with social inequality in the life course. Although each chapter in this book deals with a different research puzzle, they all share the same interest in explaining how social inequality as the context of everyday life interacts with characteristics of social structural position, shaping peoples' behaviors and attitudes. Building on theories developed in Europe and the United States, researchers test hypotheses and come to some surprising conclusions, while capturing the specificity of the Central and Eastern European experience.

Many of the works gathered in this volume received recognition and interest in Poland and abroad already prior to this book, as authors developed the ideas presented here in international academic conferences. The variety of academic institutions in Europe and the United States that authors hail from highlights the broad interest in studying social inequality, and demonstrates that the relevance of the Polish Panel Survey POLPAN goes well beyond the country boundaries.

This book builds on the research on political sociology, social inequality, and life course research that appear in the general social science literature and which features analyses of the Polish Panel Survey POLPAN. A number of POLPAN papers were published in Polish in the 1990s during the height of the post-communist transformation. Since 2000, there began a line of English language POLPAN books that includes *Social Patterns of Being Political: The Initial Phase of the Post-Communist Transition in Poland* (Slomczynski 2000), *Social Structure: Changes and Linkages: The Advanced Phase of the Post-Communist Transition in Poland* (Slomczynski 2002), and *Continuity and Change in Social Life: Structural and Psychological Adjustment in Poland* (Slomczynski and Marquart-Pyatt 2007). In addition, two special issues of the *International Journal of*

Sociology were published on POLPAN: *Structural Constraints, Gender, and Images of Inequality* (Slomczynski and Tomescu-Dubrow 2012) and *Sociodemographic Differentiation in a Dynamic Perspective* (Slomczynski and Tomescu-Dubrow 2013). These books and journals showcase the great variety of topics that researchers can delve into using POLPAN, such as status attainment and social mobility, political attitudes and behaviors, social conflicts and images of inequality, marital and friendship patterns, religiosity, and health issues as well as many others. The current volume integrates and expands empirical research on many of these problematics.