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INTRODUCTION: DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE

This book is about dynamics of the social structure during Poland's transformative years, that is, from the end of the state socialist era to the near present. Social structure has three main dimensions. One, social structure is a system of large, interrelated, and relatively stable social groups that defines the main setting where fundamental social processes occur. Two, it is a normative pattern of behavior that sets limits on thought and action that cannot be changed by isolated individual actions (Rytina 1999: 1802). Three, it is both the system of social categories of the population and the institutional framework in which individuals and groups strive, conflict, and cooperate.

During social change, a given system of population categories, groups, and institutions can suddenly end; their existence during the transition era can be out-of-step with the new system. Dynamics of the social structure thus produce tensions and conflict between people, groups, and institutions. The idea of dynamic social structure implies that structures are both stable and changeable. The case of Central and Eastern Europe, with Poland as a prominent example, demonstrates that even during radical social transformations, the key social and economic phenomena of the social structure – such as labor markets and employment relations, and perceptions toward allocation of economic resources and justifiable levels of inequality, among other things – are major forces that continue to stratify society (albeit in new forms, duration, and magnitude).

Theories of societal transition must address the question of how specific segments of the social structure react to social change and how the social

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structure influences this change. These theories depend on empirical evidence.

The Polish Panel Survey POLPAN, 1988–2013

The empirical foundation of this book stems from analyses of the Polish Panel Survey. POLPAN, as it is called, is a series of integrated surveys based on face-to-face interviews conducted every five years since 1988 with adult residents of Poland. By 2013, POLPAN has become the longest continuously run panel survey in Central and Eastern Europe that focuses on changes in social structure and has individuals as the units of observation. POLPAN offers the unique opportunity to assess the extent of *within-person* variation (i.e., the change within people over time) in relation to the *between-persons* variation (i.e., differences between people over time) for a period spanning 25 years. Thus, it provides the necessary dynamic framework to properly understand the functioning of social structure – that is, how individuals influence social structure while being influenced by it.

POLPAN integrates the rich tradition of Polish sociology (represented by Stanisław Ossowski, Julian Hochfeld, Jan Szczepański, and the research program of Włodzimierz Wesołowski) with the classical empirical research on social structure in Poland (by Włodzimierz Wesołowski, Adam Sarapata, Stefan Nowak, Stanisław Widerszpil, Jan Małanowski, and Michał Pohoski), discussed in Wesołowski and Słomczyński (1977). For the far-reaching analyses of POLPAN 1988–2013, the studies conducted in the 1970s and 1980s (by Krzysztof Zagórski, Marek Ziółkowski, Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński, and Jacek Wasilewski) are of great importance, as indicated in Tomescu-Dubrow et al. (forthcoming).

This theoretical base informs the key topics that POLPAN covers, including respondents' occupational careers, decisions on education and ongoing training, perceived sources of success in life, views on the role of the state and economic transformations, and many other aspects of Poles' adaptation to social change. With POLPAN, researchers can test hypotheses about the impact of social resources and psychological characteristics on individuals' economic biographies. Moreover, it is possible to examine how these very resources and attitudes impact peoples' achievements and their placement in the social structure.

The research design of, and the methodological changes to POLPAN over the years facilitate such analyses. 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; 2,259 were successfully interviewed. In each of the consecutive five-year waves we aimed to reach the core panel. For an adequate age balance, since 1998 we have supplemented the core panel with additional subsamples of 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 original sample in 1988, we successfully increased the total number of individuals who participated in the last wave of POLPAN to 2,780, out of whom 2,283 had been previously interviewed at least once. Figure A below presents respondents' histories of participation in the survey.

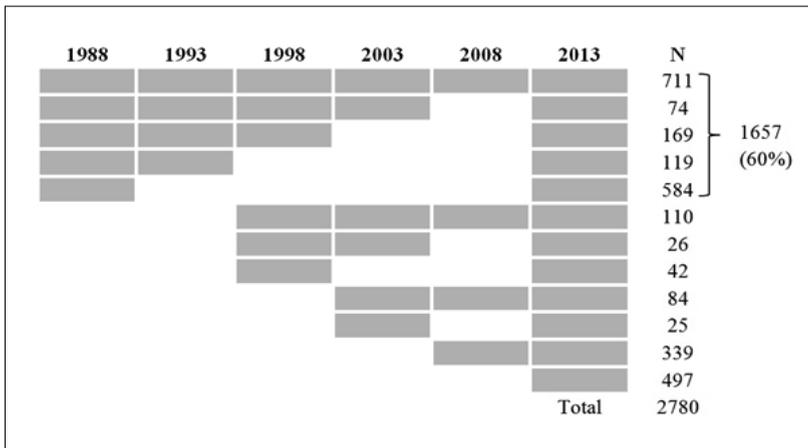


Figure A. POLPAN 2013: Histories of Participation in the Survey

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To date, there is no other research worldwide, in which life histories of individuals from a nationally-representative sample of adults would be collected for such a long time span, reaching 25 years, while also opening the possibility of panel research on the renewal samples of the young. We also note that scholars can use POLPAN for cohort analyses, thanks to the expanded samples of young respondents.

Four Keys to Social and Economic Transformation of the Social Structure

This book explores four main social and economic phenomena that, across nations, are fundamental to radical transformations of the social structure: labor market processes, precarity, processes and mechanisms of inequality, and perceptions of allocation, attainment, and inequality. Taken together, they are keys that have unlocked societal transformation in Poland.

The first are **labor market processes**. In “Occupational Careers: From Simple to Complex Approaches,” Slomczynski, Sawiński, and Tomescu-Dubrow study dynamics of individuals’ jobs in Poland, focusing on both structural opportunities and individual determinants. Their chapter is rooted in the idea that occupational trajectories characterize social inequality – such as scores on the socio-economic index (SEI) – in a dynamic manner. In their analyses the authors use CONVERTER, which is a special software program designed for use with POLPAN. It transforms the records of jobs a particular person holds from a floating time form (consecutive jobs) to fixed time points (calendar years).

The next chapter, “International Experience and Labor Market Success,” by Tomescu-Dubrow, is about the nexus of globalization, Poland’s post-1989 transformation, and the labor market. In the wake of a globalizing economy, employers across Europe are looking for that “international experience” element in the resumes of job applicants. Working or living abroad gives people skills and knowledge that businesses can use as they look for new markets and opportunities across the world. International experience seems like a good investment, but to date empirical studies on its relationship to income and upward mobility are few outside of the USA. In examining relative income gains, Tomescu-Dubrow finds that Poles who went abroad, even for as little as two months, have a higher income than those who did not go abroad, other things equal. In terms of occupational mobility, above and beyond the

effects of age, gender, and education, having international experience boosts the odds of becoming an employer or entrepreneur.

The second major phenomenon, strongly connected with the first one, is **precarity**. Precarious work, according to Arne Kalleberg (2009: 2), is “employment that is uncertain, unpredictable, and risky from the point of view of the worker”. Empirical research has shown that the state of precarity characterizes Western labor markets since the 1970s (see also Standing 2011). The three chapters in this section demonstrate that precarity has come to characterize Poland since the 1990s, when the Communist Party’s policies of full-employment and state-centralized economy came to a sudden end.

In “The Transition to Insecurity: Employment Dynamics and Its Socio-Demographic Differentiation,” Mikucka describes the dynamics of interrupting and resuming employment in Poland from 1988 to 2008. Mikucka focuses on the sharp drop in employment stability following the end of communism, and explores gender differences and differences between age and educational groups in employment stability and in returning to the labor market after job interruption. She finds that the post-communist transformation brought unprecedented employment instability; after the systemic change the risk of interrupting paid work grew about tenfold. While women in Poland do not suffer from a higher risk of interrupting work than men, once women do interrupt their work, it is more difficult for them to resume employment.

In “Employment Instability Revisited: Are ‘Trash Contracts’ Affecting Long-Term Career Trajectories?,” Kiersztyn uses a novel instability indicator that takes into account the length of workers’ consecutive employment spells: respondents are considered to be in unstable employment if they had not held a single regular job lasting three years or longer within a ten-year period. The findings suggest that employment relations in Poland are generally stable and a comparison of instability rates between ten-year periods (1993–2003, 1998–2008, and 2003–2013) shows that there was no substantive growth in the incidence of employment instability. As Mikucka found, precarity is an employment condition that is unequally distributed across the population. Kiersztyn showed that unstable work histories are more frequent among individuals with the weakest position on the labor market: the least educated, in low-level occupations, and in secondary-sector industries (trade and personal services, unskilled manual jobs, and skilled manual labor in the construction and manufacturing industries).

After examining long-term employment instability, Kiersztyn then addressed the precarity-related problem of low wages. In “Staying at the Bottom: Low Pay Persistence during the Post-Communist Transition,” Kiersztyn analyzes changes in the persistence of low wages in Poland over 25 years. Being in a low paid job increases the odds of being in the same situation five years later. While upward mobility rates among initially low paid workers were higher during periods of economic prosperity, the persistence of low pay remained substantial.

Labor markets and precarity are two major forces, but there are other processes and mechanisms that stratify the social structure. The third major phenomenon of this book concerns **processes and mechanisms of inequality**. In the chapter, “Friendship Patterns and Social Inequality,” Domański and Przybysz explore whether significant changes in friendship patterns took place over time and to what extent they were followed by social openness in marital choices. Among other questions, the authors wanted to know whether there is variation in homogamy for acquaintances with the same education and occupational category. They found that in 2008, the strength of the association between respondents’ occupational categories and their friends was lower than in 1988. Even lower was the association between occupational categories of husbands and wives. A decline in the strength of the association was paralleled by decrease in both friendship and marital homogamy, with the most remarkable decline taking place in the category of higher managers and professionals.

Computing and internet technology are rapidly reshaping society, and one way it does so is through occupations and the labor market. In “Diminishing Returns: The Decreasing Relevance of the Digital Divide in the Context of Occupational Differentiation,” Green and Kryszczuk analyze correlates of access to, use of, and skills with, personal computers (PC) and internet tools by employment status (employed vs. unemployed) and occupational category. They find a narrowing digital divide in that all categories of the social structure increasingly adopt PC and internet technologies. In 1988, the percent of PC owners was close to zero; twenty-five years later, 83.4 percent of POLPAN respondents reported owning a PC. However, the divide still exists, as there are small but lingering disparities by employment status and occupational category. The unemployed are slightly less likely than the employed to own a PC. Moreover, internet use at work has yet to diffuse across all occupational classes. Over 85 percent of managers, professionals, technicians and clerks, and owners

used the internet for work, while slightly over half of service workers, manual workers and farmers did so. The digital revolution is shaping Polish society, but it is, as of yet, an unfinished revolution.

The fourth major phenomenon concerns the **perceptions of allocation, attainment, and inequality**. In “Popular Assessments of Earnings in Various Occupations: Images of Justice and Trends in Consensus,” Karpiński examines trends in consensus in the evaluation of fairness of earnings. He finds that individual assessments turn out to be fairly consistent with one another, though, surprisingly, consensus is greater in assessments of occupational earnings than in that of occupational prestige. Consistency in earnings evaluation increased from 1988 to 2003. With respect to fairness, low-status occupations are more likely to be perceived as increasingly under-rewarded and high-status occupations as increasingly over-rewarded.

The next chapter complements this study by centering on the acceptance of income inequality. “Preferred Levels of Income Inequality in a Period of Systemic Change,” by Kołczyńska and Merry, is in the context of growing economic inequality in Poland and abroad. Poles tend to accept higher levels of income inequality over time, and this rise changes in accordance with actual and perceived dynamics in the earnings distribution. In line with previous studies, higher preferred levels of inequality are reported by men, those with more education, and those with higher incomes.

As is evident from the previous chapters, social groups vary in their assessment of what occupations earn and of preferred levels of inequality. In this sequence of studies, Kunovich’s “Perceived Unemployment: The Sources and Consequences of Misperception” deals with how groups assess – or, rather, misperceive – the level of unemployment. Kunovich finds that, on average, people overestimate the extent of local unemployment. These misperceptions are related to personal resources, cognitive ability, and a heightened awareness of unemployment. Regional economic conditions influence people’s perceptions. On average, perception errors are smaller in regions with higher unemployment. Misperceptions of unemployment levels are consequential as they lead to changes in people’s economic and political attitudes.

If success is a structural condition – one can be successful on the labor market, in income attainment, and other realms of social and economic life – social groups differ in how they perceive the causes of success. In the chapter, “Perceived Determinants of Success: Factors and Dynamics of Change,” Baczko-Dombi and Wyszulek use POLPAN to understand

the social bases of perception of success over the last 25 years. In this timeframe, POLPAN asked respondents to state their opinions about the role of such factors as: ambition, knowing the right people, hard work, good education, good luck, innate abilities and talents, political influence, and coming from a rich family. From a battery of POLPAN items, the authors created two different sets of characteristics that influence success: (1) a meritocratic dimension (meaning that success in life is connected with hard work and good education, together with ambition and innate abilities and talents); and (2) a dimension associated with the family and friends (family, acquaintances, people with influence), supported by a “good luck” factor. The authors find that the endorsement of both dimensions of success vary between social groups. Support for the meritocratic dimension increases with education level. Support for the “family and friends” dimension decreases with higher social status and income, although it increases with the age of respondents. Belief in the meritocratic dimension of achieving success is the highest among groups that benefited the most from Poland’s transformation, particularly among the expert and managerial classes. Social groups that “lost” during the transformation, such as skilled and unskilled workers, were less likely to believe success is meritocratic.

Conclusion

This book brings together different perspectives on how key social and economic phenomena – specifically labor market processes, job precarity, mechanisms of inequality, and perceptions of allocation, attainment, and inequality – have unlocked societal transformation in Poland after 1989. While each chapter deals with its own well-defined research problem, they share a common theoretical premise, namely that the structural location of an individual impacts their participation in the distribution of “rewards” or, in other words, the stratification position of the individual. In studying the factors that shape the social strata, all authors give due attention to the role of family background, the course of education, one’s position on the career ladder, the place in a hierarchical system of jobs, and the rules governing the distribution of goods and values. They all rely on the Polish Panel Survey POLPAN for empirical analyses.

Generally, all indicators of allocative effectiveness deal with lowering the level of ascription – that is with lowering the impact of demographic

and social-origin characteristics. In analyzing research issues about old and new elements of social structure, one can focus on the impact of ascription. Indicators of distributional effectiveness refer to the relationships between individual investments and rewards. Chapters in this book suggest that during the post-communist transition, the level of meritocracy increased. Interestingly, this is not what many Poles themselves believe, especially those who, as a result of radical social change, lost the benefits that they received from their communist-era structural location. The value of analyzing attitudes stems from objective indicators of social structure that do not necessarily match the perceptions of common people. POLPAN allows for both kinds of analyses, and the integration of the two.

The work presented in this book stands on the shoulders of the international social science community. It builds on the previous research on social structure, and on the articles and books that feature analyses of the Polish Panel Survey POLPAN. A number of books using POLPAN data 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 publications that includes *Social Patterns of Being Political: The Initial Phase of the Post-Communist Transition in Poland* (2000), *Social Structure: Changes and Linkages: The Advanced Phase of the Post-Communist Transition in Poland* (2002), and *Continuity and Change in Social Life: Structural and Psychological Adjustment in Poland* (2007). These books showcase the great variety of topics that researchers can delve into using POLPAN, such as political attitudes and behaviors, social conflicts, religion, and health, among others (for a longer list of topics, see Slomczynski et al. 2015).

This volume also connects directly to those books featuring POLPAN data that focus specifically on social and economic phenomena of the social structure – labor markets, occupational careers and mobility, economic and educational attainment, economic inequality, and social class. Among them is *Sociological Tools Measuring Occupations: New Classifications and Scales* (2009), on the measurement of social class, occupational standing, status, and position within the stratification system. This book provides quantitative scales of occupational prestige and socio-economic status as well as scales of skill requirements and work complexity. Two substantive works also belong to this line. One is *Open for Business: The Persistent Entrepreneurial Class in Poland* (2005), which documents and explains the endurance, development, and

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patterns of recruitment into Poland's entrepreneurial class from state socialism to the post-communist era. The other, *Dynamic Class and Stratification in Poland* (forthcoming, CEU Press), is about long-term changes to the social structure and presents the thesis that class and stratification should be always treated as analytically distinct, though related, phenomena. The book you are now holding contains further explorations of this rich line of research on socio-economic phenomena of the social structure in Poland.