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Guest Editors' Introduction: What Have We Learned from the Study of Social Change in Poland?

Poland is a critical example for studying how a nation and society changes during systemic transformation from a directed to a free market and from a dominated to an open society; it is also a central case for studying the variety of social barriers and costs attending transition (Klonowicz and Wieczorkowska 2002). This and the next two issues of the *International Journal of Sociology (IJS)* present recent Polish social scientific works on social change in Poland. These studies in sociology, social psychology, demography, and criminology focus on the rapid transition from communism to democracy and capitalism in Poland during 1989–2002/3, document trends in sociopolitical, economic, and social changes ongoing in the society; they

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also detail sociopsychological mechanisms of adaptation to these new conditions. In this introduction, we summarize the individual articles for all three issues of the journal, and then draw on those articles to provide a broad provisional answer to the question asked in the introduction's title.

The Articles

In the first article presented in this issue, "Political Elite in Transformation: Unexpected Dimensions of Formation and Activity," Włodzimierz Wesolowski portrays the functioning of the Polish political elite and discusses the consequences of the intellectual elite's distance from political engagement. He notes, in particular, that the political elite has produced fewer positive outcomes between 1989 and 2003 than was expected at the beginning of that period. Wesolowski considers the lack of sufficient progress in privatization and development of democratic political culture to be among the most salient disappointments of this period, themselves reflections of the poor performance of elites and their organization. Worse, the Polish democratic system runs the risk that its pathologies will endure.

In "Unexpected Traps of the Demographic Transformation," Janusz Reykowski discusses the society's disappointment with the reality of democratic transformation and the importance of noting discrepancies between this reality and Polish society's former hopes and expectations about freedom, justice, truth, sovereignty, and improvement in living standards. Reykowski suggests that society's disappointments are shaped by a predominant, and naive, theory of democratic transformation that focuses more on expected values than on appropriate social mechanisms. He emphasizes, in particular, the importance of two changes in mechanisms. The first one is a shift from a predominantly political to a predominantly economic form of social control. The second, concerning the rules of political contest, requires political victory to emerge from competition in a free voting procedure, not, as in the previous system, by the delegation of power from the "top down." A substantial part of Polish society is not satisfied with either the new system's rules or its outcomes. Reykowski concludes by asking whether these disappointments were not themselves historically inevitable, or what might have been done otherwise.

One possible reason for society's disappointments is discussed in the next article. Lucyna Kirwil shows in "Changes in the Structure of Crime During the Transition Period in Poland" that one inevitable cost of Poland's systemic transformation has been an increase in crime, a general brutalization of life, and an increase in feelings of insecurity. The increase in crime, in particular

among juvenile and female populations, might be interpreted in terms of a shift in opportunities created by changes in the economic and justice systems, as well as in terms of a sociopsychological response to increasing competition in Poland. However, she argues that one might also interpret the very dramatic increases in crime indexes, particularly violent crimes, as a kind of vicarious or postponed social revolution, in opposition to the peaceful accord that ended the system in 1989.

In the last article in this issue, "Individual Differences in Adaptation to Social Change," Grazyna Wieczorkowska and Eugene Burnstein suggest that processes of adaptation to social change as a whole need to be analyzed in terms of general strategies people use to make choices or set goals in various domains of life that undergo sudden changes: a dramatic increase in number, variety, and quality of choices, mainly in careers, education, services, and consumer goods. They show that people use two strategies in general, serving different aspects of adaptation to social change during Poland's system transformation. The interval strategy is characterized by low discrimination in choices and high will to accept a wide range of possible goals, while the point strategy is typical of high discrimination of choices and rejection of many goals as not satisfactory. These strategies are associated with various patterns of adaptation to social change: people who use the point strategy adapt better under the condition of limited resources, while people using the interval strategy adapt better under the condition of many resources. The authors demonstrate some consequences of usage of these different strategies by an unemployed population.

In the first article of the next issue of *IJS* [Social Change in Poland (II)], "Demographic Processes Before and During the Ongoing Transition in Poland," Marek Okolski offers important data and a convincing account of them in which he suggests a return of demographic trends, after 1989, to an earlier course of development apparent before World War II. He explains how these changes are also a direct adaptive response to drastic social change, both of which are shaped by Poland's openness to cultural change imported from the West.

In the next article, "The Negative Social World: The Polish Culture of Complaining," Bogdan Wojciszke explains how the Polish culture of complaining functions in the individual and collective adaptation to social change. He emphasizes that a culture of complaining thrives in contemporary Poland because it serves an important function of social bonding. He suggests that the culture of complaining may be a factor that actually inhibits social changes in Poland and hampers individual adaptation to them. He demonstrates that complaining leads among other things to a belief in the negativity of the social

world and an unjust world in particular. These beliefs and attitudes may constitute a kind of “negativity trap” that makes it difficult to adapt to social changes, and in turn, on the individual level, forms emotional and motivational deficits in individuals, and on the societal level, blocks the development of a new ideology that could legitimate the new system.

Janusz Grzelak’s article, “Social Motivation: Are We Better Now Than We Were Then?,” starts with the statement that various economic and political domains of Polish life in systemic transformation are saturated with corruption, immoral practices, and selfishness accompanied by pessimistic social moods. He asks whether and to what extent democracy and free market economy have changed the internal structure of an individual’s motivation. Simply put, are Poles more selfish than they were before 1989? Or might we look more carefully at instances of prosocial behavior, and reconsider the conditions under which prosocial behavior takes place in this new Polish society? Grzelak provides evidence that between 1994 and 2001 both selfish (individualistic) and prosocial orientation in Poles increased, however, the latter develops more profoundly.

In the third issue [Social Change in Poland (III)], the authors go beyond the analysis of changes observed between 1989 and the present in Poland and make some suggestions on possible directions of social change in the near future.

Renata Siemienska’s article, “Winners and Losers: Gender Contracts in the New Political and Economic Situation,” analyzes trends in the conceptualization of women’s and men’s roles as well as their behaviors in both public and private spheres. This period of transformation has brought new challenges and gains for both genders, but there are new gender discriminatory practices, in both personal and public lives, that produce apparent losses specifically for women in this period. The author explains the conditions of these transformations, and suggests possible futures for women and men in the continuing transformation of Polish society.

Another article, “Conspiracy Stereotypes of Jews During Systemic Transformation in Poland,” by Miroslaw Kofta and Grzegorz Sedek, summarizes research on the conspiracy mentality during this period of systemic transformation in Poland. Studying the conspiracy theories of Jews in particular, the authors draw the conclusion that these theories probably stem from a worldview reducing social reality to a Darwinian picture in which groups fight for power through secret, deceptive, and highly coordinated activities. Despite the transformations in Poland’s economic, demographic, and political processes and the country’s entry to Western transnational political structures, this conspiracy mentality endures among a portion of the Polish population, ready for appli-

cation to new subjects, and for renewed consequence in shaping Polish social change.

Finally, in “The Dynamics of Societal Transition: Modeling Nonlinear Change in the Polish Economic System,” Andrzej Nowak, Robin R. Vallacher, Marek Kus, and Jakub Urbaniak describe a dynamic model of social change that focuses more on bottom-up processes in society, in particular on the spatial ecology of business development. By attending to emergent forms of social organization and entrepreneurial innovation, Nowak and his colleagues argue that we could design more effective policies to facilitate new attitudes and constructive behaviors in society. While attending to existing changes, their model is directly relevant to those who would facilitate more productive and positive Polish social change.

The Implications

We titled our introduction with a question: What have we learned from the study of social change in Poland? It is impossible to answer that question exhaustively in this special collection of articles, much less in this introduction. However, we believe that it is quite useful to review recent work by some of Poland’s leading social scientists in order to consider not only what we might learn about the specific social conditions they research in Poland. We also think it is productive to move beyond the more ambitious task to consider how these particular studies help us understand Polish social change more broadly. Apart from these two quite laudable goals, we think it is important to consider how these analyses of Polish social change might lead us to reconsider how to think about social change more generally. After all, the end to communist rule in Europe and succeeding efforts in building markets, democracy, and international regimes that extend across the continent became elements critical to the larger sense of social change at the turn of the millennium. If globalization was not built on communism’s collapse, it certainly gained momentum by tearing down the walls that divided Europe. It is entirely reasonable, therefore, to look once again toward Polish society and social science to consider their relevance to a time when the uncertainties of global terrorism, rather than the confidence accompanying the putative end to history, shape our global imagination. Inspiration for that new fractious world certainly resides in the articles presented here, which cumulatively move beyond transition.

From plan to market and from dictatorship to democracy became a mantra in the analysis of the past decade’s postcommunist social change. Many analyzed and shaped social change within that narrative, while others criticized

the teleological thinking that constituted the problematic. Indeed, the contest within what Kennedy (2002) has called “transition culture” was part and parcel of its vibrancy—which reforms should be introduced first? How much shock can the system absorb? Which agents will assure democracy? How need attitudes change? While especially focused on the postcommunist world, this new approach to social change—individual or national adaptation to systems beyond direction—seems to characterize not only transition but also the preferred orientation toward globalization, both in terms of globalization’s principal advocates (e.g., Friedman 2000) and its critics (e.g., Bauman 1998).

In many ways, the articles presented in this collection extend that social science of transition, for they augment some of that period’s important research and debates. But as one looks across them in cumulative rather than particular terms, one begins to wonder whether they really are of a piece with that past era, or they anticipate a new era of social science suitable for a world of contingency, complexity, and particularity.

There are, of course, some parts of transition culture that remain inviolate in this work. For example, movement “West,”¹ recently culminated with accession to the European Union, is rather taken for granted in this collection. While there is considerable research on the processes and implications of Poland’s joining Western multilateral organizations, Polish social scientists generally take the geopolitical shift as something desirable if not also an evolutionary necessity. Likewise, while the debate about unemployment or regional inequalities might focus attention on new institutional mechanisms to regulate the market, the importance of markets in allocating goods and services is a domain assumption for most Polish social science. Even democracy, while certainly plagued with corruption and administrative incompetence, remains something to improve rather than an anachronism.

Beyond these relatively familiar elements of transition culture, demographic changes are almost uniformly positive and thus reinforce the positive normative valence of transition. While there has been a decline in marriage rates and increase in out-of-wedlock births, life expectancy and other indicators of health have improved rather dramatically (see Okolski in the next issue of *IJS*). Looking across all these domains, then, one might say that transition has either been realized, or remains intact with its *telos* still dominant. Poland even looks comparatively good across the postcommunist world (Svejnar 2003).

However, transition culture is also fraying. The dominant cultural motif organizing opposition to the communist system—the struggle for freedom—hardly provides inspiration much less satisfies analysis in these times. During late communism, one might have viewed the second economy, independent associations, the underground press, independent labor unions, religious re-

sistance, and nationalist movements all as manifestations of the struggle for freedom and evidence of the superiority of civil society's organizing principles over state domination. Now, however, with freedom assumed, the very sense that organized these disparate phenomena in a common framework fails before a broader malaise over the irrelevance of intellectuals, the pervasiveness of corruption, and the triumph of pessimism in everyday life. Indeed, instead of a struggle for freedom animated by hope, social scientists find a tale of woe punctuated with just a few caveats that offer focus points for possible positive intervention.

To be sure, there are growing inequalities in Polish society, and these are especially evident in terms of gender. While the forced and false gender equality imposed under communist rule has given way to quite explicit male dominance in economic and political terms, there are also important political shifts apparent in the younger generation that suggest a brighter and more real foundation for gender equality (see Siemienska in the third special issue of *IJS*).

The culture of complaint, alienation, and disappointment also register quite loudly, but in a different key than that heard in communist times. Perhaps cultures of negativity in both eras have some of the same functions; after all, complaining does now, as it presumably did then, create stronger bonds among Poles within primary social relations (see Wojciszke in the next issue of *IJS*). But today, these negative attitudes are complemented by a new strategically focused behavior, obliged by the measure of choice and intensification of time introduced by market conditions (see Wieczorkowska and Burnstein in this issue). In addition, there may not be as many prosocial initiatives today as there were decades ago, but there are still a few, especially in relatively trusted institutions (see Grzelak in the next issue). Nevertheless, institutional trust seems to decline apace as pessimism becomes ever more pervasive.

Polish social scientists have registered an exceptionally and increasingly negative assessment of social change among Poles. In 1997, about 28 percent of the population thought there were more benefits than losses in the years since communism's end; in 2002, however, there were only 14 percent who felt that way. More people think they have lost, rather than gained, in the years since 1989: in 1997, 37 percent of the people focused on what they had lost, and in 2002, nearly 60 percent of people thought they lost more than they gained (see Reykowski in this issue). Given Poland's relative success in comparison to other postcommunist societies (Svejnar 2003), this pessimism is a bit of a mystery that needs to be explained and addressed. Why are Poles so negative about a process of social change that is relatively successful, and certainly grounded in a freedom that twenty years ago would have been hard to imagine? Are Poles simply wrong, or are they looking at changes that most

social scientists focused on transition overlook? In a curious about-face, violence might itself be the key.

Kennedy (2002) argues that the focus on transition's goals in markets, democracy, and national independence overlooked one of the most important qualities of communism's end—its peaceful quality in the communist world's northern European rim. The Polish Round Table negotiations of 1989, for example, can be studied in terms of not only who won and who lost, but also how they structured radical but peaceful change. This quality of 1989 is yet to be sufficiently appreciated, or at least understood fully.²

This emphasis on the peacefulness of change masks, however, the development of a more violent culture on the Polish streets, outside politics *per se*. With an increase in total number of crimes, and a dramatic increase in violent crime generally and juvenile and female violent crime in particular (see Kirwil in this issue), it is wrong to say that transition, especially after 1989, has been peaceful. The violence averted in negotiated revolution is instead found in the violence of civil society itself, where citizens prey on other citizens at unprecedented levels. While all-too-sober realists might rationalize this worsening trajectory by noting the commonality of this kind of behavior in open and free societies, it also occurs at a time when crime rates are declining in other open and free societies. Poland, in this sense, is getting worse in comparison to other countries as well as in comparison to its own past.

Surely not everyone is directly affected by these crimes, but the explosion of violence and corruption marks a critical shift in the culture of social change in Poland. It is difficult for Poles to see themselves moving together toward a common future, even if their society continues to move West in geopolitical terms. Consequently, Polish social science must increasingly attend to the differentiation of society, not only in terms of social groups but also in the variety of social spheres or fields of action in Bourdieu's terms.³ This social science must develop a sense of social change, if not also a more general theory, that can account for these radically inconsistent trajectories in health and crime, wealth and poverty, and economic conditions and attitudes toward change, something transition culture is itself notably unprepared to engage. Although it is risky to identify any general orientation when it is only in the process of formation, we are tempted to identify the emergence of a new theory of social change around what one could call "pragmatic functionalism."

On the one hand, such an approach draws on functionalist traditions in order to identify specific subsystems of personality and attitudes, behavior and interactions, and institutions and resources, all across particular arenas of social life, in order to explain how each of these fields is reproduced and changed over time. Both Marxism and transition culture have sought prime movers and

explanation across institutions of behavior, but in this case of radical incongruity, it becomes appealing to focus on particular dynamics within those distinctive spaces, not only to explain their dynamics but also to anticipate a more desirable functionality. The articles in this collection clearly have that very institutional focus and future functionality in mind, but when read together and considered as part of a larger culture of social inquiry, they offer something even more.

Each author appreciates how institutionally specific approaches typically fail to address how apparently distant patterns influence the reproduction and transformation of those social arenas. Furthermore, when so bound in analysis, these authors recognize how intervention thus conceived is at best piecemeal, focused on intra-institutional dynamics rather than linkages across fields of action. It is not now apparent that Polish social science has a new approach to finding this linkage across the larger system, although the discussion is clearly on the table, simultaneously animated by a remarkable openness and curiosity about how connections across fields of action, especially in the address of social problems themselves, might be addressed. The dynamics of the discussion has several important vectors, of which the following are certainly elements.

First, it is not clear which fields of action are most important. On the one hand, it is obviously important to focus on the functionality of those parts of the system that apparently drive social change. The sociology of elites, once considered passé in an increasingly social historical sociology, is indisputably central to transition culture and its contests. However, most of transition culture focused on these agents as expressions of larger world historic transformations, rather than as embedded in their own fields of action, cursed by the dysfunctions of their field's structure.⁴ This more focused approach seems especially appropriate given the ways in which Poland's relatively unstructured and unfocused political field (evident in recurrent party reconfigurations, fluidity in parliamentary composition, indistinct political programs, petty rivalries, unstable cabinets, and extensive corruption) has itself led to relatively ineffective policy making and political practice. Wesolowski's work on the dysfunction of the political field (in this issue of *IJS*) suggests a prime mover in Poland's own despair, given the ways in which apparently competent elites produce ineffectual legislation, making populists on left and right, fueled by conspiracy theories of all sorts (Kofta and Sedek in the third issue in this series of *IJS*), look just as able as their better read and more compromising compatriots. Indeed, it is hard to find ways to deal with Polish negativism when those who are supposed to produce hope themselves fertilize the fields of discontent with their products.

Second, Wesolowski's emphasis on dysfunction suggests an important shift away from transition culture's focus on design.⁵ By focusing on the unintended consequences of apparently rational action, this approach to social science finds the unexpected outcome to be as important, if not more important, than the proper structure, leading to a different kind of question: How can the analyst, and how do actors, adjudicate among apparently conflicting imperatives, contradictory expectations, and conflicting allegiances? In a certain sense, perhaps, transition culture trapped its own agents with expectations greater than they could manage. Heroes were aplenty in the struggle against communism, but transition doomed the heroic to failure. The sociology of social change for this era thus needs to do without heroes, or at least find responsibility to reside in the recognition of mistakes, and the capacity to make amends. We might even say that the analysts and movers of social change need an attitude adjustment. It is not obvious, however, that we can find the right attitude in everyday transition culture.

Consider, for instance, the very strategy Wiczorkowska and Burnstein (in this issue) describe in everyday life. Not only do consumers and producers face even denser information environments, filled with complex choices at every turn. Policy makers and political elites do, too, but is the point strategy that is so successful for consumers and producers equally useful for leaders in a world where transition's master narratives have given way to the contingencies and uncertainties of a global system animated by floating currencies and mobile terrorists? We must wonder, as this collection invites us to consider, whether the incompetence of authorities is not only a matter of system dysfunction, but also something that has to do with their awareness of the conditions surrounding their obsessions. This is especially apparent when it comes to the production of violence, especially if an apparently ungrounded malaise is our concern.

Kirwil's analysis (in this issue) suggests a crisis in the making, not only for the trajectories of violence she identifies but also for the ignorance of the problem it suggests. Too many elites, both political and academic, refuse to recognize the importance of crime's escalation not only for the criminal and the victimized but also for the larger definition of social change after communism's collapse. Might we say that the brutalization of everyday life is itself a source of the malaise shaping broader Polish attitudes toward change? Are those the new grounds for Polish negativity? That might be the answer, but it also might be too simple, especially when it falls in the hands of those who will seek scapegoats for the problems facing Poland. After all, the search for root causes of violence invites a focus on the perpetrators, rather than the communities that nurture them or the systems that make their violence appear

reasonable to many. Consequently, we must not only look to criminals, or terrorists, but also consider the larger social conditions in which they are made and of which attitudinal dynamics are central. Here, once again, Polish society and social science provide a critical foundation for understanding social change more globally.

Do attitudes always require a “base” in either an observed or experienced reality? Or might attitudes themselves constitute that base, keeping in mind that it was not class or education but political orientation that itself explained affinities for that world historical social movement of 1980–81? Although worth recalling, it might also be a mistake to go too much to the legacy of Solidarity in these times, for the world is not so clear-cut as that which produced the struggle for freedom. Nevertheless, in a time of terrific complexity, ideologies that make villains apparent and solutions simple become quite seductive, especially when the alternative is malaise.

Indeed, Poland’s very complexity makes the search for thoughtful heroes and robust morality a frustrating enterprise, if not itself also the source of despair. And Poland is not alone. Globalization’s cultural politics are sufficiently contingent, explosive, and uncertain that those who seek to do more than “make do” are likely to be found guilty of incompetence, failure, or even greater sins, sooner or later. The world in the making seems to produce technocratic management that cannot succeed, a heroic vision destined to destroy, and an ethical behavior virtually impossible given the range of unintended consequences and cultural contests animating this world. It is easy to see Poland’s dismay in a global mirror.

It might be better, therefore, to look in that reflection for some of the inspiration Polish social science on social change offers. While attentive to the alienation of Polish publics, it does not reproduce their disaffection. By searching for dysfunction’s explanations and rays of hope in a sea of pessimism, the pragmatism of Polish social science is apparent. And with sufficient imagination, we might, once again, generate an approach to social change appropriate for a new era, even beyond this Polish nation.

In this time of uncertainty and complexity, it is good to have a social science animated by a vision of the good society, attentive to the barriers of its realization, and inspired by the chance that things might just get better. Humility is invaluable in the enterprise, and that is readily apparent. But equally critical are those qualities that produced transition itself. Although tough to find in the world today, hope and openness may be part of that ethos that makes pragmatic functionalism part of a new wave to understand social change. That, at least, is one guide to reading the world across these articles on Polish social change.

Notes

1. For reference to various types of normality in postcommunist social change, of which movement West is just one, see Daina Stukuls Eglitis (2002).
2. For attempts by the University of Michigan to assess, with Polish colleagues, the significance of these events, see www.umich.edu/~iinet/PolishRoundTable/.
3. For elaboration on the sense of field, see Pierre Bourdieu (1991, 1996).
4. In this sense, this work focused on fields bears important resemblance to scholarship directly inspired by Bourdieu and Foucault. See Gil Eyal (2003).
5. This resonates importantly with Ulrich Beck's (2000) work on risk and its utility in understanding globalization.

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