

COMMUNIQUÉ

What is happening to the society? 14th Polish Sociological Congress, Kraków, 8–11 September 2011

The 14th Polish Sociological Congress took place from September 8th through the 11th, 2010. The Congress was co-hosted by the Polish Sociological Association along with one of the oldest European universities, the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland.

A total of approximately 1,200 participants, the largest number of participants in the history of Polish Sociological Congresses, gathered in Kraków to exchange their ideas about problems, phenomena, current conditions and future developments of the society. The theme of the conference, coined by Jerzy Szacki, “What is happening to the society?,” perfectly reflected the discussed problems and general mood of the sociological dialogue within the conference.

The main framework of the Congress was designed by the Program Committee, chaired by Marek Ziółkowski, together with Krzysztof Frysztacki and Jacek Wasilewski. The Committee supervised the Congress’s theme and program, the topics of the main sessions, the selected working groups, ad hoc, and special sessions, including poster sessions.

Maria Flis, Dean of the Philosophy department at Jagiellonian University, was the chair of the Organizing Committee, which consisted of twelve sociologists from the Kraków’s Jagiellonian University, University of Science and Technology, Pedagogical University and the University of Economics. Other organizers included those of the previous Congresses in Zielona Góra and Poznań, and a representative of the host of the next Congress in 2013, at the University of Szczecin. Paulina Polak worked as the Congress secretary and main local executive organizer.

A large number of undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral students took part in the event, many of them presenting their research results and sharing their ideas in the main Polish sociological forum. More than twenty students from Jagiellonian University and the University of Science and Technology worked as volunteers in order to provide additional help to the congress Organizing Committee.

The Congress was opened on Wednesday, September 8th by the head of the Organizing Committee, Maria Flis, and Piotr Gliński, President of the Polish Sociological Association. Following their short addresses, Karol Musioł, Rector of the Jagiellonian University, warmly greeted all of the academics present at the University’s Auditorium Maximum.

The President of the Polish Sociological Association called for a minute of silence to honor the memory of the Patron of the congress, the late President of Poland, Lech

Kaczyński. The current President of Poland, Bronisław Komorowski, also Honorary Patron of the congress, sent an amiable and warm welcoming address to all participants. In his letter, read by Marek Ziółkowski, the President stressed the importance of sociological reflection in the light of contemporary global, national and local developments. Although he could not personally attend the Congress' opening ceremony as he was engaged in the agenda of the 20th Economic Forum in Krynica, he declared esteem and cordiality for all of the sociologists present. Similarly, a congratulatory letter sent by Barbara Kudrycka, Minister of Science and Higher Education and member of the Honorary Committee of the Congress, was read to all the participants.

Piotr Gliński took the stage once again to present his welcome speech, in which he elaborated on the Congress theme "What is happening to the society?" He pointed out the weakening of social ties, growing cultural divisions and their role in progressing social disintegration. He then moved on to discuss the condition of Polish sociology, indicating problems spanning from deteriorating teaching standards, to large areas and aspects of social life still left unexplored. He also expressed his regret that sociology does not occupy a proper place in debates in both, public and political life. On the one hand, he suggested that quasi-sociological commentaries and social polls take the place of proper sociological reflection while on the other hand, empirical and theoretical sociological knowledge does not influence or find its place in governmental initiatives and projects, as well as in power structures. He defined the role of sociologists as aids and experts in policy-making, and reform processes as indefinite and incidental. He argued that this collaboration should take the form of an established debate and cooperation of experts and politicians involving documents concerning state development. He also expressed his concern with sociology's responsibility for the public sphere and public matters, especially in the time, as he emphasized, of institutional crisis of democracy, and called for more involvement by sociologists in public debate.

Special guests who presented short introductory addresses included Vil Bakirov, President of the Sociological Association of Ukraine, Valeriy Mansurov, President of the Russian Society of Sociologists and Ishwar Modi, member of the ISA Executive Committee.

Finally, Claus Offe of the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin elaborated on the problem, place and future of progress in contemporary world in his lecture "What, if anything, may we mean by social and political 'progress' today?"

Thursday, the second day of the Congress, started with the first of three plenary sessions, "Order or disorder? The creation of social order," chaired jointly by Andrzej Rychard of the Polish Academy of Sciences and Jagiellonian University's Krzysztof Górlach. Jadwiga Staniszkis of the University of Warsaw, began by discussing the epistemology of order and the problem of understanding order and disorder, depending on its conceptualization. Marek S. Szczepański, of the University of Silesia, concentrated on social, cultural, economic and ecological transformations that local and regional communities have been undergoing in the last two decades. He insisted that both may still constitute important categories and units for sociological thought. David Ost, of Hobart and William Smith College, explored various social orders pro-

duced from different class arrangements in different post-communist countries, while Radosław Markowski, of the Polish Academy of Sciences, discussed the influence of politics, political systems and political actors upon social structure—the model of welfare state, social stratification, human aspirations, their attitudes, beliefs and values.

Two parallel symposia followed. The first one, chaired by Jarosław Górniak (Jagiellonian University) and Andrzej Kojder (University of Warsaw), dealt with the condition and perspectives of Polish sociology. Piotr Sztompka (Jagiellonian University) elaborated on the possibility of “Polish sociology,” stating that the only way to create a national sociology is to use local cases and speak about local problems in a universal language and way that can be commonly understood. Mirosława Grabowska (Social Opinion Research Centre and University of Warsaw) critically reviewed the current condition of empirical research in Poland, while Krystyna Szafraniec (Nicolaus Copernicus University,) talked about how (and to a lesser extent why) sociologists are trained in Poland. Many of the attendees looked forward to Jerzy Szacki’s presentation, however unfortunately he was not able to take part in the session.

The problem and role of sociology became the topic of a heated discussion during the session between presenters and the audience exchanging statements and opinions about Polish sociology, as well as about interactions and “flirting” by sociologists with those holding power and governmental agendas. The majority of participants favored more of a traditional and independent non-political stance towards the role of sociology and remained reluctant toward sociologists who acted as more or less politically involved experts.

The other symposium was jointly organized by Krystyna Slany (Jagiellonian University) and Kazimierz M. Słomczyński (Polish Academy of Sciences). Irena E. Kottowska of the Warsaw School of Economics considered structural changes in family and household living arrangements as components of the general dynamics of social structure. In his presentation, Henryk Domański (Polish Academy of Sciences) focused on a “broken” social structure, showing its empirical indicators in three distinct realms—barriers of intergenerational mobility, contracting marriages and keeping social contacts; income distribution; and attitudes resulting from norms and values. Anna Titkow (Polish Academy of Sciences) considered gender as articulation of existing rules constituting the sense and scope of differences between men and women, and hence determining cultural relations and status of men and women. She described gender inequalities within the analytical categories in the public and private spheres, conflicts along the gender line, values encompassed in public discourse and the cultures of masculinity and femininity. Finally, Jarosław Górniak showed links between social capital and social structure after 1989. The axis of his presentation was the question of whether processes within the relations of social capital and social structure shall increase polarization within the society, or rather be conducive to its growth and cohesion.

Friday’s plenary session, chaired by Grażyna Skapska (Jagiellonian University) and Rafał Drozdowski of the University of Adam Mickiewicz, focused on old and new forms of power and socialization. Mirosława Marody (University of Warsaw) showed

that social forms based on interpersonal relations, and not the state or collective decisions, constitute reference points and the very fabric of the emerging new society. For example, taking the recent “dispute over the cross” outside of the presidential palace in Warsaw, she showed that new non-hierarchic groups emerge in Polish society and remain, even despite territorial distance, very efficient in fighting for their particular and very specific goals. Jacek Raciborski (University of Warsaw) in his presentation about the state and the people argued with Mirosława Marody claiming that today the state is more powerful than ever, which is exactly what the people want it to be. In the same session Marek Czyżewski (University of Łódź) concentrated on the role of social context and power in discourse analysis, while Małgorzata Fuszara (University of Warsaw) took a more gender-oriented perspective to talk about power and power relations.

Sessions on the economic crisis and culture were held in the second round of parallel symposia. Firstly, Lesław Haber (University of Science and Technology) and Maciej Gdula (University of Warsaw) chaired a discussion encompassing problems of society, economy and crisis. Danuta Walczak-Duraj of the University of Łódź presented her view on how work and labor are currently perceived in Poland. She stressed changes in the perception of work and the problems resulting from these developments, such as incompatible perspectives of labor market, as well as different, often conflicting outlooks of those involved in moderating institutional labor market arrangements. Barbara Gąciarz (University of Science and Technology) presented the problem of inefficient state and enterprising society. Based on empirical research of local self-government administration, she presented factors conducive and adverse to the role of Poland in global economy, focusing on the problem of centralization and decentralization of power in the light of public administration reforms. Sławomir Partycki, of the Catholic University of Lublin, discussed peculiarities of the recent financial crisis, showing its global macro and micro-economic sources and social consequences. He showed the global crisis as a process of pulling down barriers, causing deep changes in all areas of social activity—in the multifaceted transformation of a global society. Jarosław Urbański also addressed the complex problem of the global financial crisis and its social effects, showing conflicts behind the economic recession.

At the same time Marek Krajewski (Adam Mickiewicz University) and Andrzej Piotrowski (University of Łódź) chaired a symposium on new mechanisms of producing culture. Krzysztof Abriszewski (Nicolaus Copernicus University) analyzed creative adaptations of individual life projects. Using Adorno and Horkheimer’s notion of cultural industry, he showed its main mechanisms by looking at the ways in which music lovers and collectors cope with a radical technological change of music distribution—from traditional (records or CDs) to digital copies. Alek Tarkowski (University of Warsaw) discussed how in the last two decades technical development and digitalization have created new patterns of cultural participation. He pointed out radical increase and divergence in the circulation of cultural content and its channels of distribution, but also the democratization of cultural creation. He posited that these new ways of cultural participation and creation should be perceived as a form of a cultural

social movement. Finally, Jan Sowa (Jagiellonian University) pointed out negative tendencies in the functioning and creation of culture by NGOs and speculated about possible alternatives both within the already existing system and in the new ways of financing the sphere of cultural production.

The third and last plenary session jointly chaired by Aleksander Surdej (Economic University) and Tomasz Szlendak (Nicolaus Copernicus University) involved discussions surrounding the general theme of the interface of society and economy. Michał Boni, head of the Board of Strategic Advisors to the Prime Minister Donald Tusk, discussed the geography, perspectives and development strategies for Poland in the following twenty years, elaborating on the governmental “Poland 2030 Report.” He showed the geographic distribution and polarization of development, divisions between cities (metropolis) and rural areas, the young and the old, and the ways in which these discrepancies could be overcome. Krzysztof Rybiński (Warsaw School of Economics) elaborated on the place and value of economics in today’s world, pointing out that it does not follow actual global changes and instead gives inadequate and conflicting theoretical recommendations. In his comparison of economics and sociology, the former proved to be using wrong goals and measures, and lacked both correct theoretical framework and data. Ryszard Szarfenberg (University of Warsaw) spoke about social policies in economies with open boundaries. Edwin Bendyk, of Collegium Civitas and the weekly *Polityka*, took on an ambitious, yet risky task, of sharing his reflections on the society of the future. In his presentation, he referred to the risks, uncertainties, but also the predictabilities, of a global network society. He also discussed the challenges posed by technological development and new forms of state, as well as public and private spheres of life.

The closing session was a panel discussion chaired by former ISA President, Piotr Sztompka (Jagiellonian University) and featured contributions from the current President, Michael Burawoy, Valeriy Mansurov, President of the Russian Society of Sociologists, ISA’s board member Ishwar Modi and President of the Congress’ Program Committee, Marek Ziółkowski. All these prominent sociologists discussed the place of sociology and problems of society in today’s globalizing world.

The Congress’ final lecture was given by Michael Burawoy of the University of California, Berkley, who passionately presented his concept of public sociology. He promoted an approach to sociology that transcended academic discourse and engaged wider audiences, such as the public (media audiences), policy makers, silenced minorities and social movements—local, regional and global. He hoped to revitalize sociology by engaging its empirical methods and theoretical insights in public debates, which would give direction, legitimize, and stimulate.

A total of 81 working groups were held in five rounds on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Within these, a whole plethora of sociological problems were discussed. Among the many ideas discussed, the main themes included power, politics, civil society, social change, social structure, poverty, social exclusion, labor, industrial relations, regions, local communities, problems of urban and rural life, sociology of law, anthropology, culture, media, social memory, social identity, migrations, globalization, family, religion, morality, social control and methodology of social studies.

Many new themes and issues have been established and discussed in sociological discourse in recent years. Since the last congress in 2007, and clearly in line with recent global trends in sociological research, new themes encompassing aspects of everyday life, such as emotions, lifestyles, gender, intimacy, the body, and cultural and sexual minorities have notably established their presence in Polish sociology.

Three so-called ad hoc sessions were also held parallel to regular working groups. Two were focused on the recent developments following the tragic plane crash in Smoleńsk in April 2010. Piotr Gliński held a forum on social reactions to the accident, while Jacek Wasilewski's session concentrated on political outcomes of the event. Additionally, a special session celebrating the work of Janusz Mariański (Catholic University of Lublin) in the field of sociology of religion was held at the Jagiellonian University's Institute of Sociology.

Five poster sessions were also held, with authors present, ready and eager to discuss their work with the public.

A number of accompanying events were also held. Junior sociologists benefited from a special meeting with the ISA President Michael Burawoy, who answered questions and participated in a discussion about the current state and prospects of sociology. A half-day symposium on anti-Semitism, Holocaust and Auschwitz in social science research, organized by the Jagiellonian University's Institute of Sociology, Department of Jewish Studies and the Galicia Jewish Museum, took place on Thursday. Waldemar Rataj and Jacek Kurczewski opened a round of meetings with their session on "Sociology of Reconciliation," organized by the Oświęcimska Academia and the Chair of Sociology and Anthropology of Customs and Law at the University of Warsaw.

Entertainment was provided Thursday evening for those who wished to participate in the official Congress banquet, held in the 16th century picturesque Pałac pod Baranami, located right in the Market Square. After a concert given by a local klezmer band, guests enjoyed their snacks and dinner. Socializing and dancing lasted until the early morning. On Friday, all participants could benefit from an invitation to an opera arias concert in the recently built Kraków Opera.

The Congress closed on Saturday afternoon with a speech by Piotr Gliński, Maria Flis and Marek Ziółkowski, who thanked all of the participants and organizers. Their warm words and pleased faces seemed to express and confirm that the 14th Polish Sociological Congress was, once again, a success.

More details on the Congress, including lists of sessions, program and pictures are available at www.zjazd14.socjologia.uj.edu.pl.

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