

From the Editor

The year 2009 was a unique for Poland; we have been celebrating 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the World War II, that has finished the existence of the Second Polish Republic, as well as 20th anniversary of the establishing of the Third Polish Republic. It is also a year of the 20th anniversary of the systemic change. We have been moving from one anniversary to another, e.g. from the anniversary of the Round Table Agreement and the first free elections of June 4th, 1989 to the anniversary of the formation of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's Cabinet, and lately 20th anniversary of the initiation of Leszek Balcerowicz's Plan, all that preceding the fall of the Berlin Wall in December the same year.

So, this is a year of constant celebration of achievements of the last two decades, not only in public debate, but also in social sciences, humanities and—obviously—in sociology (what was indicated by exceptionally high number of conferences, symposia and workshops, both of a national and international character, that would be difficult to list here).

I have no doubts that the reasons for celebrations are well-grounded in sociology as well, however this collection of articles written by well known and recognized sociologists of a younger and mid-generation prepared for publication in this issue of *Polish Sociological Review* does not aspire to be a part of the above mentioned festive summaries. Why?

Above all, it is still too early for such summaries, especially for those of an academic character. The time perspective we adopt for the analyses of a polymorphic Polish reality appears to be too short. It seems to me that neither Polish society, nor Polish culture are well diagnosed by Polish sociologists and representatives of the other social disciplines. On the other hand we also lack satisfying theoretical language, that would allow us to describe this reality as a whole, and explain within the framework of Polish sociology or on its borderlands.

This issue is not an attempt to answer the question if the promises of pluralism, democracy and prosperity formulated by politicians and ideologists in 1989 were fulfilled. Even more we would like to avoid the elements of settling accounts, with the Polish reality, Polish sociology and its authors, as well as the assessment to what extent their diagnoses were appropriate.

While preparing this issue we have realized how much still needs to be done in Polish sociology before credible explanation of the reality that we see as “long here and now” will be possible. Dealing with the processes and phenomena of the last two decades made us understand that we are participants of a semantic revolution that takes place not only in the public debate but also within sociology and related disciplines. We also understood how important role in the process of building civil society, that was enhanced (not initiated) in 1989, plays the experience of the “Solidarity” movement. In short, working on the material enclosed in this volume turned our attention to the fact that we are only at the stage of searching for the adequate ways of describing and explaining the reality of the past few decades.

Intentions of publishing this collection of papers in a special for Poland year as 2009 is, were much more modest. By doing this, the authors as well as editorial team, wanted to stress that that dealing with various dimensions and elements of social reality of the past twenty years, whether from the perspective of getting out of the communism, or the perspective of joining the EU structures, is a part of everyday work of the Polish sociologists.

Therefore the papers published do not deal exclusively with political scene of the Third Polish Republic, and do not present the opinions of intellectual and moral authorities. The papers focus on the social subjects variously located in the social and spatial structure of the Third Republic, as well as on bigger and smaller social processes that indicate the degree of Polish backwardness or Polish modernization.

These articles were collected to demonstrate the everyday academic interests of Polish sociologists related to the reality in which they participate in various roles. Comparing to the last issue of *Polish Sociological Review* devoted to Chinese social transformations, this one is Polonocentric. Its main subject is Polish society of the last twenty years analyzed in broader and shorter time perspective, as well as in comparative perspective with other countries.

I would like to stress again the fact, that also as a demonstration of academic interests this issue has rather modest aims. As a whole, this is not a purposeful voice in a meta theoretical discussion about an appropriate project of analysis of the developmental and structural peculiarities of the last two decades. Certainly such a project is needed, however discussion about it should take place in a less festive atmosphere. What we need to do at the moment is to collect partial answers to fundamental sociological questions. In other words, the papers collected in this volume are not focused on the comprehensive reconstruction of the Polish social revolution and the “broad transformation.” They also do not give answers to the questions about the role of the broad social theories in analyses of the Polish case; they do not criticize nor support the transitology; and they also do not pretend to represent a holistic approach to transition “from communism to democracy and market economy.”

What we wanted is to present how complicated the last Polish social experiment is and what are its peculiarities. (This is why the article on “Solidarity” movement, and how Polish sociologists were trying to approach this phenomenon was also included).

In the papers collected in this issue we wanted to reflect on various social dimensions of the process of deep and long-term transformation. Our intention was to reconstruct them from the point of view of structures and institutions as well as culture and social identities.

It is possible to state, that these papers say much more about the society than about the state. The authors deal with many kinds of collective behavior, social and mental structures (e.g. structures of emancipation) in order to understand how Polish society was adjusting to liberal democracy. In other words the aim was to thoroughly diagnose social sources of backwardness as well as modernization and ask important questions about imagined and real legacy of realistic socialism.

Last but not least, I would like to reveal one more reason of publishing this issue of the *Polish Sociological Review*. I hope that it will encourage the readers not only from Poland, but also from other countries with political experiences similar to Polish ones, to take part in a discussion about the last twenty years. We would like to encourage not only historians (that could compare two periods of 1918–1939 and 1989–2009) but also sociologists and representatives of other disciplines to conduct comparative research on logic of system transformation of the post-communist countries.

Generally speaking, this collection of articles was not meant for those who have the tendency to inflate Polish national self-assessment because of the achievements of the last twenty years. However this is also not a reinforcement for the pessimists for whom the last two decades were a “road to nowhere.”

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