

COMMUNIQUÉS

13th Polish Congress of Sociology Zielona Góra, 13–15 September 2007

13th Polish Congress of Sociology organized by the Polish Sociological Association was held in Zielona Góra, a small town with a population of 117,000, 70 kilometres off the Polish-German border. The Congress took place in Zielona Góra University, the result of 2001 fusion of the Higher Pedagogical School and Zielona Góra Polytechnic. Content-related matters lay in the hands of the Programme Committee established in May 2006 by the Executive Board of the Polish Sociological Association. Professor Janusz Mucha, long time member of the Polish Sociological Association, Chief Editor of *Studia Socjologiczne* and director of the Institute of Sociology at AGH University was appointed its chairman. The theme of the Congress was “What Unites Us, What Divides Us.”

The Congress inauguration was attended by President of the Republic of Poland, Lech Kaczyński, whose speech referred to the beautiful pages of Polish sociology, its interwar achievements scored by Florian Znaniecki and Bronisław Malinowski, both working abroad. He reminisced about Maria Hirszowicz, who died in July this year; he had attended her sociology classes when himself a student. He recalled Stanisław Ossowski as a man of great prestige, going beyond his particular domain of knowledge. He regarded Jan Szczepański's chairing of ISA in the '60s and Piotr Sztompka's in 2002–2006 as upholding the international status of Polish sociology. The president spoke about the absence of sociology in Polish universities and its return there after 1956, of sociologists' criticism of the reality around them, and of studies published in the '60s, which were read and criticised in turn by the then authorities. Things were similar in the '80s. The president recalled a report written five years after August 1989, showing critical attitude of the authors towards communist reality. He considered it an important achievement of the group. “Following the transformation,” he said, “sociologists faced other vital tasks, of coping with a reality which knew no precedents. Nowhere else in the world an attempt had been made at launching market economy via political decisions.”

The next speaker was the chairman of the Polish Sociological Association, Piotr Gliński. He said, that sociology used to be an elitist course of studies for young people with great intellectual expectations, and could be studied at just a few universities. At present it is a major course of education in eighty high schools, and like in any mass phenomenon, its quality has been adversely affected and teaching standards have suffered. He did not actually say so, but he did ask if this was an unequivocally bad situation. He also pointed out the causes of this phenomenon: democratisation of

higher education, the price of coming back from a civilisation coma but also, phenomena like rush of technologies, materialisation, commercialisation and consumerism. The audience was particularly agitated by what the speaker said about a decline of the intelligentsia ethos of sociologist's profession and especially used terms "dictatorship of ignoramuses" and "democracy of ignoramuses."

The description "democracy of ignoramuses" sparked some controversies among the listeners and President Lech Kaczyński asked permission to speak. First, he announced that having attended congresses of various professional groups, he had never heard such a critical judgement of his own group as he heard in the Polish Sociological Association Chairman's speech. Second, the elites in power today were primarily of intelligentsia lineage, and he rather objected to labelling them "the dictatorship of ignoramuses."

Piotr Gliński also spoke about sociologists changing their professions, about their part in laying the groundwork for non-governmental organisations in early 1990s. He also mentioned the alarming phenomena of declining ethical standards, plagiarism and the fact that sociologists do not show enough interest in these problems. He described Polish absence in international and European research grants, the lack of meaningful syntheses and works by younger colleagues being a weakness of Polish sociology. He also said that the Polish Sociological Association had always been a mainstay of liberty, ever careful to preserve its non-political character.

Rector of the University of Zielona Góra, Czesław Osekowski, Mayor of Zielona Góra and ISA Vice-Chairman Michael Burawoy also spoke at the inaugural session. Michael Burawoy told the audience about his contacts with Polish sociology, his reading, years ago, the work *Polish Peasant in Europe and America* by William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, and Włodzimierz Wesolowski's books on social classes. The Congress was an occasion for a direct meeting of the two gentlemen. Michael Burawoy recalled also his personal contacts with Piotr Sztompka, who in the '80s, had shown him round Kraków and he mentioned some developments which had made him choose Hungary rather than Poland for his research site. He talked about his interest in the post 1989 change in Central and Eastern Europe, and intellectuals' part in steering history into a concrete direction. He regarded the Polish President's presence there as a sign that contrary to what Piotr Gliński had said, sociologists did have an influence on those in power, and that both sides, authorities and sociologists were taking part in public debate.

The first plenary session which took place directly after the inauguration was entitled "The Collective Good and Political Culture." Addressing the congress were Andrzej Waśkiewicz (University of Warsaw), Marek Czyżewski (Łódź University) and Rafał Drozdowski (Mikołaj Kopernik University) who spoke of the common good category as an issue of normative democracy theory, a Polish version of democracy and spontaneous dismantling of the idea of common good. The session had been prepared and led by Mirosława Grabowska (University of Warsaw) and Grażyna Woroniecka (University of Warsaw and College of Informatics and Economics TWP in Olsztyn).

The second plenary session was held in the afternoon and was entitled "The 'Better' and the 'Worse' in Contemporary Polish Society." Papers were presented by

Kazimierz M. Słomczyński and Krystyna Janicka (both from Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of Polish Academy of Sciences and Zielona Góra University), Elżbieta Tarkowska (Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of Polish Academy of Sciences,) and Ewa Rokicka (Łódź University). The first paper dealt with social structure dichotomy and the deepening of those differences in Poland. The second paper described Polish poverty. The author of the third one wrote about the risk of inheriting social inequalities in Europe. The proceedings were prepared and led by Wielisława Warzywoda-Kruszyńska (Łódź University) and Jarosław Górniak (Jagiellonian University).

The second day of proceedings began with four parallel symposiums. One of them was dedicated to borderlands and migrations in contemporary Europe. The symposium “Borderlands in Contemporary Europe” had been prepared by Maria Zielińska (Zielona Góra University) and Sławomir Łodziński (University of Warsaw), and papers were read by Joanna Kurczewska (Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences), Marek Kupiszewski (Central European Forum of Migration and Population Research), Klaus Boehnke from Jacobs University of Bremen spoke on behalf of two co-authors (Anna Mielczarek-Żejmo, Zielona Góra University and Daniel Fuss (University of Bremen).

The second symposium prepared by Anna Giza-Poleszczuk (University of Warsaw) and Krzysztof Zagórski, (Public Opinion Research Centre) was dedicated to opinion polls and commentaries. Under discussion were: social roles played at present by sociologists, their impact on social self-knowledge and the shape of current public discourse. Jan Poleszczuk (University of Warsaw) read a paper on community of knowledge and communication rituals. Michał Wenzel (Public Opinion Research Centre) spoke of the cognitive role of dynamic research, and Stanisław Jędrzejewski (Lublin Catholic University) spoke on media consumption research and media receivers.

The third symposium, prepared by Kaja Gadowska (Jagiellonian University) and Cezary Trutkowski (University of Warsaw) dealt with the individual-community relation. Grażyna Skąpska (Jagiellonian University) discussed constitutional community, and Marek Ziółkowski (Adam Mickiewicz University Professor and Senator of the Polish Republic)—individualism and community activities.

The fourth symposium, prepared by Barbara Fatyga (University of Warsaw) and Tomasz Szlendak (Mikołaj Kopernik University) debated the issues of consumption and life style. Barbara Łaciak (University of Warsaw) spoke of patterns shown and implemented at the transformation period. Wojciech J. Burszta (SWPS) (Higher School of Social Psychology) read his paper on how the forty-years-old counterculture is being “eaten up.”

The later hours of the second day saw primarily proceedings of thematic groups but also special and poster sessions. As part of accompanying events, two meetings with authors of recently published works were held. The meeting with Piotr Sztompka, dedicated to his book *Zaufanie—fundament społeczeństwa* [Trust. Foundations of the Society], published by “Znak” Publishers, was hosted by Grzegorz Miecugow from TV station TVN. A meeting with David Ost and his book *Defeat of ‘Solidarity’* was conducted by Lech Szczegółka, a political scientist from the Institute of Sociology, UZ.

The third day of the congress saw twenty six topic groups and two special sessions debating from morning till lunch. Proceedings of the last plenary session, the Round Table session entitled "Towards New Forms of Social Life," began at 4 pm in a hall filled with the Congress participants. Włodzimierz Wesolowski (Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences), organiser of the session, invited Barbara Fatyga (University of Warsaw), Andrzej Rychard (Polish Academy of Sciences), Paweł Śpiewak (University of Warsaw), ISA President Michel Wiewiorka and Piotr Sztompka (Jagiellonian University) to read their papers.

A special session of European Sociological Associations prepared and led by Joanna Kurczewska (Polish Academy of Sciences) and Natalija Pohorila (Ukraine) with participants Christian Fleck (Austria), Michal Illner (Czech Republic), Michael Burawoy (ISA) Pal Tamas (Hungary), Walerij Mansurov (Russia), Janusz Mucha (Poland) was held for the first time in Sociological Congresses in Poland.

Plenary sessions, four parallel symposiums and discussions in 60 thematic groups were the principal events of the Congress. In their reports on the proceedings of their thematic groups, the organizers emphasized high factual standards of speeches and discussions, and they added that members of the meetings declared their aspirations for further research.

Chairman and vice Chairman of the International Sociological Association, Michel Wiewiorka and Michel Buravoy, were guests of the Congress. The Congress was also attended by guests from Bulgaria, Canada, Germany, Russia, Slovenia, the USA and Great Britain. They were primarily members of three English-language groups, prepared by Jolanta Perek-Białas (Jagiellonian University) with Andreas Hoff (Oxford University); David Ost (Hobart and William Smith Colleges) and Juliusz Gardawski (Warsaw School of Economics).

It is noteworthy that so many students and postgraduate students took part in the Congress.

One of the Congress's attraction was its timing: it was held during the Days of Zielona Góra, the traditional grape-gathering festival; there had been vineyards around Zielona Góra up to the World War II, and wine had been made there. The town and the Wine-makers Association have been trying to restore the wine-making traditions in the town and region for more than a dozen years. Since the Congress was occurring during the grape-gathering celebrations, Bacchus with his courtiers arrived as a guest at the sociologists' banquet; the mayor gives him the keys to open the town "gates" during the festival week.

The Congress was summed up and declared closed by the Chairman of the Polish Sociological Association Piotr Gliński. He thanked members and organizers, emphasizing the good atmosphere of the Congress.

At present, work is in progress of compiling a post-congress volume.

More on 13th Congress of Polish Sociology on www.zjazd-pts.uz.zgora.pl