

The 50th Anniversary of Sociology's Return to University of Warsaw

Sociology in former Soviet bloc countries had a difficult road to go. This was due to Marxist ideology as well as to the character of institutional systems in countries of “real socialism.” The passage to democracy and capitalism was another upheaval for the world of sociology, which had to comply with new expectations and be equal to many challenges. The solemn conference marking the return of sociology to Warsaw University, was held on 19th October, 2007 in the hall of the Old Edifice of Warsaw University Library. The return actually implies the authorities' consent in 1957 (following the 1956 revolutionary anti-Stalinist change) to re-establish sociology as a separate branch of academic studies, banned earlier in the name of ideology. This is way year 1957 is treated as symbolic turning point.

Many guests added splendour to the event and many of them were University of Warsaw graduates. The conference was opened by Director of the Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw, Wiesława Kozek and Vice Rector Wojciech Tygielski who spoke on behalf of Rector Magnificus of the University of Warsaw. He conveyed the Rector's best wishes and emphasized the importance of historical studies of development of each branch of knowledge at Warsaw University.

In the first part of the conference, the history of sociology at Warsaw University was presented by Antoni Sulek and Jerzy Szacki. (Noteworthy, the fiftieth anniversary was marked by the Institute of Sociology book *Socjologia na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim. Fragmenty Historii* [Sociology at the University of Warsaw. Some Pages of History] edited by Antoni Sulek, recommended in this issue of *Polish Sociological Review*).

In his speech delivered at the conference, Antoni Sulek emphasized that the history of Polish sociology reflected all social distortions and system pressures. The history of sociology at Warsaw University dates back to the early days of the Second Republic. In 1919–1931 there was a Sociology Chair in the Department of Law and Political Sciences, set up for eminent law sociologist Leon Petrażycki. In 1921–1935, there was a Social Systems History Chair established for Ludwik Krzywicki. Chairs that followed were included into the Humanities Department—with Culture History Chair created in 1930 (it was assumed by Stefan Czarnowski). 1934 saw the chair renamed as Chair of Sociology and History of Culture, and another Sociology Chair was established—for Jan St. Bystron. At that time Warsaw University conferred the degree of “Master of Arts in the field of sociology;” also conferred were first doctoral degrees. The pre-war achievements of Warsaw sociology were impressive and known out of Poland as well.

After the Second World War, sociology returned to high schools briefly. Sociology Chair was reactivated at University of Warsaw and new institutes and chairs were established. However, it was speedily banned as a “bourgeois science,” useless from the point of view of Marxist theory of social development. Sociologists moved to other university departments, frequently engaging in sociology—only under a different name. In 1952, Chair of the History of Philosophy and Social Idea (Nina Assorodobraj) was established, as was Chair of Dialectical and Historical Materialism, with the Institute of Historical Materialism (Julian Hochfeld).

Sociology as an independent subject of study came back only in the wake of a thaw triggered by the developments in October 1956, with major politicians of the Stalin epoch finally stripped of power. In 1957 sociological section came to life at the Philosophy Department. The Institute of Sociology as an independent institution was established only in 1968—in the far from glorious days of fight against “revisionism” and against Zionism in the sociologist milieu in March '68. The Department of Philosophy and Sociology, which is still in existence, was called into being in 1975.

Warsaw Sociological circles actively engaged in social protests on many occasions, emphasized Antoni Sufek. In 1976, a few sociologists from the Institute signed a protest against Constitution amendments; a Student Solidarity Committee (SKS) came into existence; in 1980–1981 staff and students of the Institute joined the “Solidarity” movement, and some of them were interned and jailed after a curfew had been imposed.

The next speaker, Jerzy Szacki shared his memories as a student and a teacher of many years. He emphasized that if he had had to attend as many classes and lectures as are obligatory for a sociology student today, he would probably have failed to graduate—which sparked enthusiastic response from students. This was so because, in those days, you had to “earn your bread,” which precluded full commitment to sociology. That the Warsaw sociologists had always been “well-mannered people” was their forte, he believed, and high discussion standards united the pre-war sociologist milieu and the most radical Marxists. Which is why—in spite of clashing views—they always thought that debate must go on. The spirit of cooperation was particularly pronounced during the Thaw. Many sociologists had believed that by developing social sciences they would improve the system, admitted Professor Szacki. Sociology was an island of a relatively free debate in the sea of censorship restrictions in the Polish People’s Republic. This was so mostly because after 1956, authorities resigned themselves to the fact that sociology did not need to be Marxist, thereby accepting sociology as a politically neutral science. Sociology’s importance was determined by the usability of methodology and the intensity of international movement, including Western scholars’ recognition of Polish scientists’ achievements.

Referring to the prolific, not only in sociology, revisionist orientation, Jerzy Szacki remarked that the ephemeral quality of revisionist reflection was primarily due to Marxist orthodoxy being considerably watered-down. 1968 was to see the fall of revisionism—again political and ideological intervention decided on banishing a sociological trend.

The second part of the conference did not deal with the history of Polish sociology. Speeches were made by three well-known scholars, presenting views of contemporary sociology of the Polish society.

Marek Ziółkowski (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań) read out his paper: “The Logic of Commodification and the Logic of Welfare Benefits: Controversy over the Duties of State and Citizen.” He made an analysis of commodification of social life, of extension of the number of goods and services which become commodities as one of the characteristics of the post-communist transformation and modernisation in Poland.

Mirosława Marody (Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw), presented a paper “Is Polish Society becoming a Post-modern Society?” and discussed a peculiarity in Poland’s development after 1989. She indicated an intensification of individualisation processes. The Polish society is becoming post-modern. A network society is emerging gradually. The title “peculiarity” stands for the virtual lack of positive appraisal of past achievements in public discourse.

Criticism, unmasking and exclusion of actors predominate. Without axiological discourse, appreciative of the norms of peaceful coexistence, Poland will not fully succeed in transformation.

Paweł Śpiewak, a Warsaw University Professor, “On Deconsolidation of Democracy in Poland,” spoke of social change actors. As he emphasized at the beginning of his speech, his research allowed for his own views as a participant of Polish politics when a Sejm deputy in its previous term. His reflection revealed many structural pathologies of the Polish political scene.

Of the many letters and congratulations sent to the Institute of Sociology, particularly worthy of quoting are parts of a letter from Zygmunt Bauman, connected with Warsaw University from many years: “Dear (young) Friends, when I was of your age I never doubted that I would become an Professor Emeritus at the corner of Krakowskie Przedmieście and Traugutta St. My plans came to nothing. This is one more proof that certainty is illusive in the fluidity of our modern world.

I am happy to have you all come here together to honour the memory of your fathers and elder brothers. Their life was not easy—they were not invited to a TV studio to say which of two silly statements from important people was less silly than the other, and which would be recognized as such the next day by official judges of wisdom.

You are the lucky ones—you are sociologists, soldiers in the age-long war for the right to a life of dignity and free from humiliation. There is no army more noble, nor a war more just. I wish you success with all my heart. [...].”

The conference concluded with a concert and banquet. Talks about sociology and life were long...