PART VI:

CONCLUSION
SANDRA T. MARQUART-PYATT AND KAZIMIERZ M. SŁOMCZYNSKI

PREDICTIONS FOR THE NEXT DECADE

Rather than providing a summary of the empirical findings of each chapter in this volume, in this chapter we seek to provide (1) an overview of social change in Poland that captures the main substantive issues in a way that also reflects the essential frameworks identified in the introductory chapter regarding understanding social change, and (2) an orientation about what the future holds. To this end, we asked each contributor (or lead author of a team of contributors) to this volume to reflect on how they view their work in the broader context of the changes taking place in Polish society and, by extension, social change in general. That is, what is likely to happen in the future with regard to the particular substantive topic about which they have written? While all of the contributors responded to this request regarding future predictions, a time frame was not specified so that social changes could be linked in a broad sense and readers of this work might imagine how these proposed changes will play out in future situations.

In this chapter, we highlight these predictions in the context of how these authors see their work influencing subsequent research. In addition, we describe how the research presented in this volume potentially informs future research, both in terms of additional waves of data collection for the POLPAN study and broader examination of processes of social change, to encompass the wide range of variation that currently characterizes former state socialist countries in East Central Europe.

As mentioned earlier, we have organized this volume around five thematic sections: class structure, occupational careers, and group cohesion;
employment prospects: unemployment and underemployment; economic dimensions of social change; voting behavior, democracy, and democratic values; and institutional attitudes: politics, the state, and the Catholic Church. In this chapter, we further examine these issues through a lens that enables us to consider the authors’ predictions for the future as well as comparative social change in a broad sense. Our comments in this chapter are therefore designed to synthesize the results presented in this volume and the author predictions shown in Table 23.1. To begin, we briefly turn our attention to a number of points emerging in this volume that align with the authors’ predictions and provide a foundation for future research. It is worth underscoring that while class continues to matter, the precise nature of class-based differences on a number of different economic, social, and political outcomes has taken a somewhat unique trajectory relative to previous predictions (and in some respects the predictions made in earlier volumes that have examined this data set).

Differences between various social groups remain prominent in contemporary Polish life. For example, pronounced differences remain between men and women with regard to occupational and status attainment processes, entrepreneurial processes, and political and socioeconomic views. Educational categories and age groups also display some divergent patterns on a number of social, economic, and political issues. It is anticipated that the dynamics related to unemployment, underemployment, and the risk of unemployment will change in response to continued movement toward the capitalist economic model: while to some degree they align themselves with predictions, in other respects they constitute new strata that merit future study.

Related to previous research on winners and losers of the transition process, in a number of ways these groups continue to be relevant, for example, with regard to income inequality, mobility, residing in urban or rural areas, and gender differences on a number of issues. Differences also exist and persist between social categories and households with regard to ownership of personal computers and the utilization and accumulation of consumer credit. Issues of institutional legitimacy remain prominent concerns for Polish citizens and are multifaceted, encompassing corruption involving political institutions, the influence of the Catholic Church, and various aspects of the state such as welfare state provisions and obligations related to providing social safety net programs. While numerous changes can be noted in Polish society, continuity with previous research from this panel survey is also apparent.

Based on the results presented in this volume and the author predictions contained in Table 23.1, we propose seven categories to address in the
following sections: (1) class structure and occupational careers, (2) social groups and group cohesion, (3) employment prospects, (4) economic dimensions of social change, (5) social-psychological dimensions of social change, (6) voting behavior, democracy, and democratic values, and (7) institutional attitudes regarding politics, the state, and the Catholic Church.

Table 23.1. POLPAN Contributors’ Predictions and Assumptions Regarding What the Future Holds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Predictions and assumptions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kazimierz M. Slomczynski, Krystna Janicka, Goldie Shabad, and Irina Tomescu-Dubrow</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>For the coming decade, interclass inequality will increase faster than intraclass inequality, and a stabilization of class inequality can be expected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel E. Lovell</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Continued gender disparities in occupational interruptions are likely to persist and the wage gap will become even more pronounced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazimierz M. Slomczynski and Irina Tomescu-Dubrow</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Closed (strong) network ties and networks with structural holes will have distinct effects on social mobility outcomes; it can be expected that potential bridges in friendship networks will matter not only for income but also for social status in general.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicia A. Weaver</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>An understanding of farm and farmers’ characteristics pre- and post-change is needed for future work as Polish farmers are likely to continue to face hardship in the wake of European Union membership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Osborn</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>The entrepreneurial class, and especially women, will continue to need nurturing, with education as a key for promoting various aspects of capital development, the development of business plans, and compliance with business regulations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henryk Domański</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>With the diffusion of Western values and norms, decreased marriage rates and increased age at first marriage should increase homogamy overall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irina Tomescu-Dubrow</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>For the transition period, individuals’ previous labor market experiences (during socialist times) were vital for understanding later differences in the exposure to the risk of unemployment; changes showing selectivity processes due to emigration and immigration will come to the forefront in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna Kiersztyn</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Underemployment will continue to rise and should be regarded as part of more general changes in the labor markets of European Union countries, potentially becoming the subject of widespread debate and public concern.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michal Bojanowski</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Income inequalities and levels of income mobility may continue to decrease at the household level, though attention to individual income trajectories is also important. Future studies should include both household and individual-level dynamics in order to determine whether urban-rural differences in trajectories persist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Predictions and assumptions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alexis Yamokoski</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>As Poland continues to develop as a meritocratic, capitalist country, the effects of earned human capital will remain strong and the effects of inherited human capital will remain significant but weak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maciej Kryszczuk and Brian E. Green</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>The digital divide will continue to influence Polish life, and historical and contemporary comparisons should be carried out to understand it as a broader force of social change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheri Kunovich</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>With both domestic and foreign credit markets continuing to market products to individual consumers, households are expected to increasingly rely on both long-term and short-term debt to finance their lifestyles; class-based differences are anticipated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel E. Lovell</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>As transition to the capitalist model continues, workers in the future should expect to have greater wage losses for illness as an occupational career interruption.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua Kjerulf Dubrow</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Continuity within the political elite in terms of the ability to hold on to power, and women’s representation is likely to continue to expand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clayton D. Peoples</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>A change may occur in class-based patterns related to voting depending on the stability of material conditions associated with class positions in the emerging capitalist system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra T. Marquart-Pyatt</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Continued development and entrenchment of democratic values is likely to transpire, although anticipated patterns of difference regarding class will likely remain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irina Tomescu-Dubrow</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>The linkage between individuals’ assessments of the socialist regime will become less important as more time elapses since the 1989 systemic change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christy M. Glass and Sandra T. Marquart-Pyatt</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>The legacy of state socialism regarding views of the state will continue and pensioner status will increase in importance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie A. Kistner</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Levels of corruption among Poles regarding political institutions and actors are likely to remain high, although a decrease with regard to the proportion of citizens who see a rise in corruption is anticipated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert M. Kunovich</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>The 2005 parliamentary elections appear to signal a turn to moral values in politics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina V. Xydias</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>In the short term, gendered attitudinal differences, such as those in socioeconomic patterns, are likely to persist.</td>
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</table>
Class Structure and Occupational Careers

A comprehensive description of individuals’ placement in the social structure of contemporary Poland should take into account that sizable segments of the population were eliminated from the economically active labor force. The working class in heavy industry and the farm laborers in state-owned agricultural enterprises were significantly influenced by the transition to a market economy. Entrenchment of part-time employment is accompanied by the growing differentiation of conditions of full-time employment, with increasingly frequent short-term contracts rather than stable or tenured arrangements. Moreover, uneven opportunities in the job market are reflected by an increasing numbers of jobs held by the same individuals.

The changes in the labor market provide a context for occupational careers. The main question for future research would be to examine the extent to which the allocation of people to jobs is based on merit criteria. It has already been demonstrated that Polish society is more meritocratic in the sense that the “net” relationship between intellectual flexibility and occupational status has grown stronger (cf. Slomczynski et al. 1999). Intellectual flexibility together with valuation of self-direction play a pivotal role in the entire process of educational and occupational attainment. It can be predicted that the role of both of these psychological variables for individuals’ careers will increase over time.

Social Groups and Group Cohesion

The question of whether some groups either benefited from the systemic changes or were in a potential position to benefit more readily than other social groups has been a prominent theme in research exploring the phases of the post-communist transition. The research presented in this volume indicates both continuity and change with regard to how social groups have responded to various aspects of change. While differences between groups are notable, they intersect with other group-based categories and identities that indeed paint a complex picture of precisely how social change processes resonate in everyday contexts.

Changes evident in Polish society suggest movement away from the legacy of the communist model, including processes related to meritocracy and status attainment, where marital and friendship patterns intersect in intriguing ways with class and occupational categories. While differences between men and women remain pronounced on a number of fronts, it is proposed that
they will converge at some point as other group-based differences, such as those related to educational outcomes, gain prominence. Farmers retain their unique position relative to other social groups, not only in terms of group composition but also other economic and political outcomes such as voting.

**Employment Prospects**

The dynamics related to employment are multifaceted and complex, as shown in the research presented here that highlighted unemployment, underemployment, and the risk of unemployment, providing a snapshot of the current situation in Poland. Results suggest additional complexities that are poised to continue evolving as the capitalist economic model is further entrenched on a number of fronts, including both institutional and attitudinal contexts. While there is some evidence of continuity with regard to the former state socialist system and the relative placement of *nomenklatura* and workers in heavy industry, today many changes are also prominent in stratification processes. On the cusp of underemployment and unemployment a new class of workers has emerged, and their future prospects are tenuous at best.

As the national economy continues to grow, integration into the European Union is widely believed to be a dominant force in continuing the capitalist model. Skepticism remains, however, for a wide range of social groups as the benefits of the shift are unequally distributed across social life, and spatial patterns may exacerbate existing divisions between regions as well as between urban and rural areas. It is likely that processes of migration and emigration will continue to influence employment prospects down the road.

**Economic Dimensions of Social Change**

As was the case with regard to employment, economic dimensions of social change are also ongoing and complicated to describe, as they intersect with other aspects of change. For much of the 1990s, instead of constituting a monolithic whole, the composition of the economic elite was subject to change, or, as it was characterized earlier, had a revolving door of membership. In a similar vein, income mobility did not stabilize until later in the post-communist transition, though notable differences could be discerned in terms of place of residence in urban or rural areas. With the change from the state socialist economic model to a capitalist system compositional
effects were noted with regard to those households most likely to utilize consumer debt to finance various purchases. At the same time, household ownership of personal computers has grown in recent years, though this trend is somewhat unevenly spread across the general public. While economic growth and wealth accumulation have emerged in the fifteen-year period since the systemic change, the benefits of these economic shifts have not been equally distributed across the population. Such differences are expected to remain pertinent to future investigations, as the movement toward the entrepreneurial capitalist model continues apace.

**Social-Psychological Dimensions of Social Change**

Continuity and change is also apparent with regard to social-psychological aspects of social change related to systemic change and processes of transformation over the ensuing fifteen years. The legacy of the socialist system remains in the hearts and minds of many Polish citizens, although to characterize it as nostalgia is complicated. Links to perceptions of economic, structural, and psychological well-being are likely to continue, although the strength of their link with the previous system may diminish over time.

In the late 1970s it was discovered that in Poland—in contrast to advanced capitalist countries—manual workers revealed a strong sense of well-being while office workers and managers revealed a strong sense of distress. Actually, under socialism, manual workers had a greater sense of well-being than did members of any other employee class. The post-communist transformation in Poland has changed this pattern: manual workers are now much more distressed than experts, supervisors, and members of other social classes. The present-day Polish pattern more closely resembles the American and West European patterns than it did in the 1970s (cf. Slomczynski et al. 1999). It may be predicted that this new Polish pattern will be stable in the coming decade.

**Voting Behavior, Democracy, and Democratic Values**

In terms of political attitudes and participation, the situation of shifting views combined with relatively high levels of expressed involvement over time mirrors the ever-changing political landscape. Class-based voting patterns, processes of similarity underlying vote choice, and broad-based acceptance of certain facets of democratic values suggest the relevance of democratic models from more established democracies in the nascent democratic struc-
ture in Poland. In many respects, the Polish case resembles that of more established democratic counterparts in other regions. Corruption, for example, has a long tradition in political life, with recent scandals underscoring the importance of this issue for processes of institutional change. Even though citizens perceive political officials as corrupt, this has not deterred them from participating in political affairs, which serves as an important testament to the way that democracy is developing.

While democratic consolidation appears to have occurred, with attitudinal, behavioral, and constitutional aspects quite broadly distributed among the population, further research is needed to determine the precise trajectory of growth regarding these patterns of change. Additional regional and cross-national comparisons will enable researchers to determine the uniqueness of the Polish case relative to other post-communist countries as well as to other political cultures.

Institutional Attitudes: The State and the Catholic Church

While continuity could be said to characterize the way Poles in general view the evolution of democracy and the role of the state in social life, the former as a work in progress and the latter a necessary aspect to retain, evidence of shifting attitudinal patterns is also apparent. In general, citizens consider the state to have a prominent role in various economic activities, though there is also evidence of some attitudinal shifts away from the state socialist to the capitalist model, most notably in terms of whether reducing income differences falls under the domain of the state. Aspects of political, economic, and social change are mutually influencing processes, however, which can be illuminated by reflecting on how citizens view the role of the Catholic Church in the current situation. While doubtless having an important role with regard to social integration and establishing a moral ground, the particular role of the Catholic Church in political life generally remains a work in progress and may in fact be linked with broader processes of change.

Further Considerations

In reflecting back on the substantive topics and issues included in the volume relative to previous volumes, the content of the POLPAN survey, and predictions for the future, we would like to briefly address two aspects of social
change that have yet to be discussed in the Polish case: future orientations and European Union integration. Substantial structural and psychological processes of change can be linked with each of these phenomena and need to be placed within the broader context of this volume, focusing on class and stratification approaches to social change.

To this end, we have completed analyses that allow us to explore these within the context of the panel study and during the specific time frame of institutional change related to integration into the European Union from 1998 to 2003. We first explore retrospective and contemporary orientations. With regard to reflecting back on the past and comparing ten years ago with the current situation, the majority (74 percent) of POLPAN respondents say that Poland was a better country in 1993. Roughly one-fourth of respondents feel that Poland is a better country at present (in 2003). When asked about the situation five years ago, nearly identical response patterns can be discerned. That is, about three-fourths responded that Poland was a better country in 1998 compared with 2003 (26 percent).

However, when asked about future prospects, the results paint quite a different picture. For example, in response to the survey question Do you think that for people like you Poland (1) is a better country to live in now, or (2) it will be a better country in five years? a shift is evident in the perceptions of Polish citizens. While roughly 37 percent of survey participants responded that Poland is a better country to live in now, about 62 percent believe that Poland will be a better country five years hence. An even more optimistic outlook appears with regard to the second question gauging future orientations, Do you think that for people like you Poland (1) is a better country to live in now, or (2) it will be a better country in ten years? In this case, 74 percent of those surveyed held fast to the belief that Poland will be a better country ten years down the road. Thus, rather than painting a picture of a dissatisfied population, the general public clearly communicates a more optimistic outlook when asked about Polish society in general.

With regard to opinions about various institutional changes, we next turn to the question of European Union integration and highlight responses to two questions from the 2003 wave of the POLPAN survey. A similar optimistic outlook can be discerned in these results: 66 percent of respondents believe that entry into the European Union will be helpful to Poland’s development, again clearly showing movement toward a more positive assessment of ensuing changes that are likely to take place. In addition, respondents were queried about the particular effect that Poland’s entry into the European Union would have on their life personally. Frequencies for this pattern are
less strongly optimistic: 39 percent responded that a positive or somewhat positive personal impact is likely; 24 percent responded that a negative or somewhat negative personal impact is likely; and 37 percent responded that no personal impact at all is likely. Moreover, POLPAN respondents reported high levels of participation in the referendum regarding Poland’s entry into the European Union (74 percent), with over three-fourths of those who participated voting in favor of Poland’s entry into the European Union. Taken as a whole, these results suggest that Polish citizens are actively involved and highly cognizant of how processes of social change will influence institutional changes as well as more personal changes.

POLPAN: The Next Wave

Finally, with regard to future research on the topic of social change in the post-communist context, we propose that each of the aforementioned theoretical and thematic areas of interest will remain integral to subsequent studies, including additional waves of data collection under the auspices of the POLPAN project. Thus, the “core” of the proposed 2008 questionnaire concerning these topics should be retained, including detailed work history, education, household, father’s occupation, political biography, mental adjustment, and a variety of attitudes related to democracy, social inequality, and social conflicts. Retaining core questions provides comparability across waves and is thus appropriate in a panel context. Other areas are likely to emerge as topics pertinent to investigate, including the changing nature of the labor market situation, individual well-being, and the relationship between Poland’s integration into the European Union and emigration. It remains to be seen whether specific trajectories of change can be identified, as research points to similarities and differences with regard to how processes of transformation are transpiring both within and across the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Regardless of what is to come, the task of future research is continued exploration of the legacies of institutional and attitudinal change within this region as well as in the context of other large-scale social transformations that are yet to be realized.