Project "Multidimensional Biographies and Social Structure: Poland 1988-2018"

Summary [excerpts of the grant proposal accepted by the National Science Centre, OPUS 13 competition]

Goals and main hypotheses

The proposed study is designed to advance the theory, methods and empirical base for analyzing the dynamic relationship between multidimensional biographies and the social structure during the last 30 years in Poland. The project engages with a key research question in stratification and life course studies: How do intellectual and social resources impact individuals' economic, political and cultural biographies, and how do these biographies shape the social structure through time? In substantive terms, we expect that changes in the social structure are path dependent and lead to polarization through cumulative advantage/disadvantage processes. Thus, the hypothesis is that economic resources, but also political and cultural ones, will follow the distribution pattern implied in the Matthew effect: the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The empirical innovation of this project is panel survey data that will measure change in individuals' resources, together with transformations of structural features over the last 30 years in Poland. This project proposes to conduct, in 2018, a new round of the Polish Panel Survey POLPAN 1988-2013 on an estimated sample of 3181 adult Poles, containing new participants aged 21-25 years in 2018, and panel participants. This survey will be matched with the extant six rounds of POLPAN, resulting in an integrated dataset that is unique in in the world. Its data are essential for analyzing how individuals influence social structure while being influenced by it, because they offer the exclusive opportunity to assess, for as many as three decades, the extent of change within people over time in relation to the between-persons variation. By contrast, cross-sectional survey data can capture broad societal shifts but do not capture individual-level change.

The methodological innovations of this project will follow from using the integrated 1988-2018 Polish Panel Survey POLPAN to contribute novel research on quality assessment and inter-wave harmonization of panel data. Empirical results will provide crucial insights into the Total Survey Error and Total Survey Quality paradigms as applied to longitudinal survey data.

Methods

To achieve its goals, this project proposes to establish an interdisciplinary research team and develop a research infrastructure whose added value stems from linking specialists in longitudinal survey design and implementation, experts in advanced quantitative methods, and experts in substantive issues pertaining to dynamics of the social structure. Their cumulative expertise will ensure the highest quality of the integrated 1988-2018 POLPAN panel datatset and state-of-the art research on the substantive topics of the project.

Constructing the 1988-2018 POLPAN integrated datatset entails data collection and data management. This project proposes to conduct the 2018 survey round of the Polish Panel Survey POLPAN on an estimated sample (N=3181) of new, young, respondents (n=600) and panel respondents (n=2581), via face-to-face interviews (CAPI). For carrying the fieldwork out, the project will select a respected survey research firm based on public procurement

(tender). Data management, involving data quality assessment after fieldwork, and inter-wave harmonization will be conducted in house.

To analyze the resulting data empirically, the project will employ advanced statistical techniques, as appropriate to addressing the project's research hypotheses. This includes the use of structural equations, multi-level modeling, panel regression, and differential equations.

Positive impact for science and society

The impacts for the social sciences are: (a) addressing, through high profile publications, critical issues in sociology, economics, political science, psychology and demography on dynamics of social structure and the life course, thus strengthening multi-and interdisciplinary research; (b) archiving and publicizing the unique integrated 1988-2018 POLPAN dataset for the social science community to use and build upon. To facilitate production and dissemination of knowledge, the data and their documentation (in Polish and English) will be publically available free of charge, via archiving institutions in Poland and abroad; (c) training the next generation of PhD students and post-doctoral scholars in the social sciences on substantive and methodological issues of the grant project via seminars, workshops, CONSIRT Research Labs and the final conference.

The project has a positive impact potential for society via public engagement that includes media-friendly publications to detail the project and its products and to update progress throughout its duration, outreach and dissemination via blogs (e.g. polpan.org) and social media (Twitter, Facebook, ResearchGate, Academia.edu), the final conference, and the continuously updated project's bi-lingual website, polpan.org.