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CHANGES AND LINKAGES: PREDICTIONS FOR THE NEXT DECADE

This concluding chapter does not contain summaries of the findings presented in the volume. Instead, it proposes predictions for the next decade. The editor of this volume asked all of the contributors to provide straightforward predictions and educated guesses pertaining to the topics of their chapters. The time horizon for the forecast was specified as the year 2008. I did not guide the authors as to how they should arrive at these straightforward predictions and educated guesses, for example, whether to use simple extrapolation, simulation analysis, or other methods.

All contributors to this volume responded to my request, presenting their thoughts for the future in the form of a short research note. I examined the content of the submitted material and tried to synthesize and harmonize it in a coherent document. Thus, although this chapter is based on a collective work, its initiation and the final product are the editor's responsibility. All of the authors are listed in Table 16.1 together with their straightforward predictions and educated guesses, which have been condensed to just one sentence. Readers are invited to use their imaginations in order to translate these sentences into more elaborate scenarios.

The predictions considered in this chapter can be grouped into seven categories: (1) social structure and modernization processes, (2) meritocratic tendencies, social mobility, and educational opportunity, (3) income inequality and the standard of living, (4) group interests and support for

Table 16.1. Straightforward Predictions and Educated Guesses of the POLPAN Study Contributors for 2008

Author and chapter	Predictions and guesses
Kazimierz M. Slomczynski, Chapter 1	The failure to modernize the social structure will not stem from the legacy of the communist system; this legacy will be dead.
Bogdan W. Mach, Chapter 2	In terms of intergenerational mobility patterns, Poland will no longer be a special case in Europe; hierarchical effects will become more pronounced.
Kazimierz M. Slomczynski, Tadeusz K. Krauze, and Sheri Kunovich, Chapter 3	In the modernized labor market, the life expectancy of job positions will be shorter than the life expectancy of the workers.
Chunlei Wang, Chapter 4	Knowledge will lead not only to money but also to power and prestige; a new, more comprehensive, meritocracy has a chance.
Anna Firkowska-Mankiewicz and Wojciech Zaborowski, Chapter 5	Intellectual competence will be more and more important not only for achieving economic success but also for escaping from economic failure.
Sheri Kunovich, Chapter 6	Ownership of specific household durable goods will help to secure and maintain advantages on the labor market.
Sandra Marquart-Pyatt, Chapter 7	Today's perception of the political and economic system will have an impact on how strongly people support democracy.
Kazimierz M. Slomczynski and Goldie Shabad, Chapter 8	Populism will increase, but will pose no real danger to Poland's democracy as long as other political options remain firmly pro-democratic.
Amy C. Oakes, Chapter 9	The political participation of women will make Poland a kinder, gentler democracy.
Elizabeth Osborn, Chapter 10	Now support of the capital, labor, and consumer markets is strongly correlated; this will not last ten years.
Anna Shadley, Chapter 11	There will be more post-communist victories, but with increased support for the democratic transition.
Robert M. Kunovich, Chapter 12	The future holds increasing class-based voting in a post-classless society.
Krystyna Janicka, Chapter 13	Social conflicts in various spheres will be increasingly separated; the inter-group differences in perception of these conflicts will depend more on ideological stances than on a location of individuals in the social structure.
Scott D. Orr, Chapter 14	Poland will continue to be a land happily free of severe divisions along mutually exclusive lines.
Katarzyna M. Wilk and Goldie Shabad, Chapter 15	In 2008, Euro-enthusiasm and Euro-skepticism will divide people more than was the case before Poland's joining the European Union.

democracy and a market economy, (5) political behavior, with an emphasis on class voting, (6) social structure, marginalization, and social identity, and (7) Euro-enthusiasm and Euro-skepticism as a result of utilitarian calculations. For each category, I summarize the main expectations stemming from the analyses contained in this volume and based on the knowledge of the authors who supplied their research notes.

Social Structure and Modernization Processes

After World War II, the class structure of the capitalist-type system was destroyed in East Central Europe. The three remaining classes – the intelligentsia, the working class, and the peasantry – were adapted into the socialist-type system. During the communist era these classes became internally differentiated, losing their important role in stratifying society according to social status. In the period of transition from a socialist-type system to a capitalist-type system, class structure requires dramatic change. The most obvious aspect of change is a new class composition, adjusted to the process of privatization of the economy and to its consequences. We are already witnessing much greater class inequality than there was during the communist era. Some of these inequalities will increase because of the consolidation of a capitalist class and the stabilization of the unemployed or those out of the labor force.

In terms of occupational structure, Poland has been a backward country for a long time. In comparison with West European countries, the Polish labor force has too large an agricultural sector and retraining workers in heavy industry has been difficult. The shortage of specialists in various modern industries is evident. In coming years the process of economic modernization will alter the occupational structure, and, as a consequence, will introduce further changes in class composition. The main changes will consist of a radical decrease in the number of farmers and farm laborers, and the formation of a new middle class. In addition, one might expect an expansion of self-employment not only among those in crafts and services but also among professionals.

Meritocratic Tendencies, Social Mobility, and Educational Opportunity

The relationship between education and occupational status can be analyzed in terms of *allocative efficiency*: the stronger this relationship is the higher the allocative efficiency will be. In turn, the stronger the relationship between

occupational status and income is – job earnings, in particular – the higher the *distributive efficiency*. One may demonstrate analytically that the higher the allocative efficiency and the distributive efficiency are, the higher the degree of meritocracy will be. An assessment of the degree of meritocracy in Poland in the future should take both components into account.

It is useful to consider allocative efficiency in the historical perspective. In a planned and centralized economy, education is a normative criterion for allocating persons to jobs. For example, in Poland there were prescribed rules specifying the level of education required for a given position. Moreover, education was a criterion for the distribution of social rewards, and the meritocratic principle was commonly interpreted as the rule that rewards should be distributed on the basis of effort. Allocative efficiency was, therefore, reinforced by administrative methods. Market mechanisms operate differently, and, at the beginning of the post-communist transition, the correlation between education and occupation decreased. In recent years, it has increased to a level that is typical of the 1970s. It will fluctuate around this level for the near future.

In Poland during the communist era, the correlation between occupation and job income was much lower than that in West European countries. We expect the market mechanism to strengthen this correlation. As a result, a further increase in the degree of meritocracy is very likely.

However, the assessment of meritocratic tendencies is a complicated task. In the next ten years education will be a less reliable indicator of intellectual competence than it was under the communist regime. In the communist era, only a few, highly selective educational institutions functioned as an effective gatekeeper for upward social mobility. The progressive commercialization of educational institutions tends to (a) put children from low socioeconomic backgrounds in a disadvantaged position, and (b) depreciate the value of educational credentials. As a result, educational institutions will become a key factor in the inter-generational transmission of social inequality. Moreover, the ranking of educational institutions will become a necessity in providing guidance to employers and managers with respect to the quality of graduates as potential employees.

Income Inequality and the Standard of Living

After the fall of communism, income inequality increased in all East Central European countries. The general expectation for the next decade is that social-class inequality in the standard of living will be parallel to inequality

in income distribution. In addition, we expect an increased discrepancy between households with two full-time employed workers and those with only one. The ownership of durable goods will increase in the first group but it will decline in households comprised of single full-time working mothers.

In comparison with the present time, in ten years, consumption patterns will be influenced more directly by household decisions to save money for children's education and for retirement. In order to secure and improve the position of their children, households comprised of professionals will have distinct consumer preferences that provide their children with advantages on the labor market. For instance, owning a computer that is connected to the Internet and purchasing cable television in order to watch broadcasts in English and German will emerge as important status markers. We also expect that households comprised of manual workers will fall considerably farther behind other households. The proportion of their budgets that is dedicated to the purchase of food will decline at a much slower rate than will be the case in the nonmanual segment of the population.

Group Interests and Support for Democracy and a Market Economy

Ten years hence, there is likely to be attitudinal crystallization with respect to evaluation of the political and economic system, with group differences diminishing further. Images of the political system will begin being linked with support for democracy, although one would surmise that such a shift depends on the development of democratic institutions. Generally, however, Poles are likely to be more accepting of democratic institutions.

It is possible to make three specific predictions about the trajectory of overall support for democratic principles and the distribution of such support within Polish society. First, if support for populist parties continues to increase, then overall commitment to democratic norms – especially those pertaining to civil liberties and minority rights – can be expected to diminish. Following from this, a second prediction is that there will be increased polarization among partisan groups with respect to fundamental democratic norms. Third, if the economy does not improve significantly in the next few years and if Poland's membership in the European Union hurts more people than it benefits in the short term, then dissatisfaction with the functioning of Poland's democracy is likely to increase. However, this should not by itself pose a serious problem in terms of support for democracy *per se*.

The more the Polish government adopts laissez-faire policies and weakens or abandons altogether programs designed to provide a social safety net, the more likely it is that women will oppose democratic principles, norms, and values. Of course, there is no theoretical reason to equate or associate democracy with capitalism, much less with a ruthless form that grants market forces free reign over society. Thus, if national elites are responsive to women's concerns, then we should expect the emergence of social-welfare capitalism as an outgrowth of the process of democratization. This is not as insoluble a problem as it appears at first glance. Indeed, it should resolve itself as the views of a majority of women are eventually reflected in the laws and policies of the state. After all, the concept of the will of the majority is at the core of democracy.

If self-interest tells us everything we need to know about political opinions, then the prediction for Poland in 2008 would be relatively straightforward. Poland's steady economic growth would mean that support for the political changes would be stronger in 2008 than it is currently. The move to enter the European Union will involve some unpopular decisions that cause a few bumps on the road, but, over time, support for the transition will increase as Poland's economy continues to grow.

However, self-interest calculations do not tell the whole story when it comes to political evaluations. To guess about Poland's future, we must also consider other, noneconomic, factors. One alternative we have suggested is that institutionalization and crystallization of the political party system will impact party affiliations, which will become an important determinant of support for specific political and economic policies.

Political Behavior, with an Emphasis on Class Voting: Is Class Voting a Dead Issue?

Votes for the post-communists do not represent a real commitment to communism. Rather, they are protest votes signifying very real frustrations with corruption and political infighting. The willingness and ability to throw support to a party of one's choosing, *any* party, is a mark of political pluralism and a goal of the transition from communism to democracy.

Given the recent post-communist victories, one could surmise that positive evaluations of the political changes are on their way down. After all, those who vote for post-communist parties are on average least supportive of changes toward democracy and capitalism. Our prediction, however, is that

while we will see more post-communist victories before 2008, we will also see a strengthening of support for the democratic transition. With continued democratization and economic development, voting in Poland will increasingly be based on social cleavages. We express a strong belief that in Poland, in 2008, voting behavior will be even better explained by party affiliation than it is now.

Social Structure, Marginalization, and Social Identity

The more extreme the polarization of wealth, power, and prestige between social classes, the less likely it is that new economic opportunity will be perceived or acted upon. The division of the population into winners and losers of the post-communist transformation may result in the marginalization of some specific groups of losers. In general, marginalization is a process by which a group is either denied access to important positions and desired goods, or a group imposes upon itself various restrictions on its participation in the life of a society. In rapidly transforming societies, it is likely that unequal shares of the rewards of success lead to marginalization.

One form of marginalization is based on mutually exclusive identities. A small part of the Polish population will continue to hold mutually exclusive identities, but, in this regard, Poland is probably no different than any other democracy. This feature of Polish society is unlikely to change until 2008. However, should economic or social shocks greatly affect a particular segment of the population that can be identified ascriptively, individuals within that segment may come to see their identities as mutually exclusive. For example, if European integration causes rural dwellers to suffer, some farmers may restrict their frame of self-identification to people in similar positions. However, it must be remembered that even the severe and often unevenly distributed shocks of the early transition did not have this effect on a large proportion of Poles in the 1990s. Thus, we do not expect any increase in this type of marginalization.

Marginalization not involving ascription is likely to occur and encompass unemployed and various groups living in poverty. It is likely that these groups will be perceived as a source of social conflicts. We expect increased hostility toward those marginalized groups that may be associated with unintended negative consequences of the transition to free market capitalism.

Euro-enthusiasm and Euro-skepticism as a Result of Utilitarian Calculations

The process of European integration requires monitoring of the adaptive abilities of the countries aspiring to membership in the European Union. In recent years, in Poland, a significant proportion of Euro-enthusiasts has created positive attitudes toward European integration. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the majority will actually vote for Poland's joining the European Union.

Euro-enthusiasm and Euro-skepticism form well-established attitudes, stable mental constructions, ingrained in everyday thinking rather than transient "impressions," or nonattitudes. We predict that in the next decade Euro-enthusiasm and Euro-skepticism will divide people more than it did at the end of the 1990s. Utilitarian calculations associated with individuals' location in the social structure will be even more important than they are at the present time because of the crystallization of group interests. Political orientations will continue to be important determinants of Euro-enthusiasm and Euro-skepticism mainly as a correlate of individuals' location in the social structure.

Concluding Remarks

Some world political events of the past decade have led to a change in sociologists' theoretical perspective on the social structure. In a sense, all internal conflicts in societies undergoing rapid transformation have structure-based components. In particular, in East Central Europe, studies of social structure must be adjusted to the post-communist transition, which reveals various conflicts generated by conditions of radical social change.

In Poland all of the major processes of building democracy and capitalism are associated with new cleavages among basic segments of society. Thus, there must be an alteration of theoretical approaches that is manifested in a greater focus on social conflict, including the formation and articulation of group interests – specifically, class interests. We hope that this volume will contribute to a gradual change in the theoretical perspective of sociological studies. Some of the studies that will be conducted in 2008 should assume a class-interest perspective.