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Guest Editors’ Introduction

Abstract: Like the introduction to the spring 2012 issue of the International Journal of Sociology, this introduction describes the Polish Panel Survey (POLPAN) on which the articles presented here are based. POLPAN is a survey among a random (probability) sample of the adult population in Poland interviewed in 1988, 1993, 1998, 2003, and 2008. The substantive articles in this issue of the journal deal with the influence of heterogeneity on intergroup relations, stability and change in religiosity, dynamics of occupational careers, patterns of employment, and perceived unemployment. Most of the analyses include sociodemographic differentiation in a dynamic perspective. The introduction ends with comments on the accessibility of the data from POLPAN 1988–2008 for future analyses.

This issue is a sequel to the International Journal of Sociology, vol. 42, no. 1 (Spring 2012) issue. Both issues are based on the Polish Panel Survey (POLPAN), a data set that gives the history of Polish societal transformation over twenty years. This survey encompasses a random (probability) sample of the adult population in Poland interviewed in 1988, 1993, 1998, 2003, and 2008. The core of the sample was interviewed in all of these years. In 2008, the respondents from the core panel sample were forty-one to eighty-five years old. However, POLPAN also covers subsamples of younger respondents. In 1998, a subsample of respondents twenty-one to thirty years old was selected and included in the study. In 2003 and 2008, the study was extended to subsamples of respondents twenty-one to twenty-five years old. Thus, POLPAN is a panel study with consecutive additional subsamples of younger people. The basic information on POLPAN is in Table 1.
POLPAN delivers a large database for both the description of changes in the social structure and the testing of theoretically motivated hypotheses about the transition from communism to democracy and capitalism. Substantively, the list of topics of the POLPAN project is extensive. It includes: the old and new elements in the social structure; specific changes in class composition and class inequalities; social mobility and status attainment; the formation of postcommunist meritocratic society, including the effects of intellectual abilities on economic success; various elements of the standard of living; the influence of individuals’ location in the social structure on their support for Poland’s transformation; the relationship between social structure and political behavior, especially voting behavior; perception of social conflicts; and determinants of support for Poland’s joining the European Union. These diverse topics are not motivated by a single overarching theory or theoretical perspective on the transition period from communism to a capitalist type of democracy. On the contrary, the scholars involved in the project at its various stages have represented different theories and perspectives in analyzing specific issues.
Social changes in Poland between 1988 and 2008 were dramatic. The period 1988–93 refers to the initial phase of the postcommunist transformation while 1994–98 deal with advanced postcommunist transition, involving both economic and political systems. Thus, the first decade of the transformation led to consolidation of the new type of regime: a capitalist democracy. What followed in Poland was the period before accession to the European Union (1999–2003) and the period when Poland integrated with the European Union’s structures (2004–8). POLPAN allows researchers to explore a wide range of social issues in a varied historical context.

Impact of Heterogeneity on Intergroup Relations

In his article, Zbigniew Karpiński analyzes how heterogeneity contributes to increasing the rate of intergroup relations. He tests the hypotheses concerning the weakening of the effect of heterogeneity when differences in various dimensions overlap. For example, it is assumed that when gender is correlated with occupation one can expect fewer friendship ties between members of different occupations than would be the case if gender and occupation were statistically independent. It is important to note that the rates of friendship ties with respect to occupation turn out not to be predicted adequately by the model.

This negative outcome of the test is interesting because the hypotheses were derived from a version of Peter Blau’s theory. Specifically, Thomas J. Fararo and John Skvoretz translated the original theory into a mathematical format. Karpiński used this version of the theory.

Stability and Change in Religiosity

The analyses conducted by Paweł Grygiel and Grzegorz Humenny show that in 1988–2008, the level of church attendance decreased slightly. The largest change occurred between 1988 and 1993, just after the collapse of the communist regime. About half the respondents are characterized by high levels of church attendance and a high level of stability over a twenty-year period. One-third of the respondents had a slightly lower initial level of attendance, which then decreased over time. One-sixth of the respondents display very low levels of initial church attendance, and the most rapid decrease.

In explaining these differences, Grygiel and Humenny focus on historically shaped regional differences. In their interpretation, they emphasize that socialization in rural areas favors more orthodox religious beliefs and contributes to higher levels of religious practice. They also take into account factors such as age and past membership in the communist party. As expected, older cohorts are more religious. The negative communist party effect appears to be strongest in the 1990s, when religious values were officially included in the area of the public sphere.
Dynamics of Occupational Careers

Kazimierz Slomczynski, Irina Tomescu-Dubrow, and Zbigniew Sawiński base their article on a model of occupational career in which the values of socioeconomic status vary in time. They apply a program (CONVERTER) that transforms the floating format of the occupational history (recorded by dates of the beginning and the end of each job) into a fixed format (in which occupational codes are given on a constant timeline).

CONVERTER provides mean values of the socioeconomic index (SEI) for calendar years, age, and career time. All these metrics are used in the analyses presented in this study. Career trajectories plotted on calendar time demonstrate the effects of different phases of economic development in Poland on status attainment. Age and career time refer to human capital attributes influencing intragenerational mobility.

Patterns of Employment

Małgorzata Mikucka’s study deals with interruptions of employment and returns to work. The article is based on a sample that includes 3,903 episodes of employment (out of which 1,681 are right censored), and 1,777 episodes of nonemployment (543 right censored). Data for employment episodes refer to 2,482 cases and for employment interruptions deal with 996 respondents.

Although employed women do not face a higher chance than employed men of interrupting employment, women’s chances of returning to paid work are approximately 40 percent lower than those of men after they experience an interruption. Living in a village increases the stability of employment. In terms of undertaking employment, older people appear to be disadvantaged, but this concerns only women. As expected, tertiary education decreases the risk of interrupting employment. However, contrary to expectations, the advantage derived from having tertiary education does not increase over time.

Perceived Unemployment

Robert M. Kunovich focuses on people’s misperception of unemployment and the consequences of their misperceptions. Not only do many people lack specific knowledge of regional unemployment rates in 2000, 2003, and the change from 2000 to 2003, they also do not accurately perceive general trends in unemployment. Overestimation is both the most common and, in absolute terms, the largest mistake. How can its occurrence be explained?

Misperceptions of unemployment vary in predictable ways: they are related to resources, cognitive ability, and a heightened awareness of unemployment (e.g., by living in the same household with someone who is unemployed or in a region with high unemployment). Misperceptions of unemployment, moreover, lead to changes in people’s economic and political attitudes.
Accessibility of Data, Future Analyses, and the Next Wave of POLPAN

The data are in the public domain, available at the Polish Data Archive (Archiwum Danych Społecznych, www.ads.org.pl) and the German organization GESIS–Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (www.gesis.org). The data set is also available through the Comparative Social Inequality section of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Nowy Swiat 72, 00-330 Warsaw, Poland) or the Department of Sociology, Ohio State University (238 Townshend Hall, Columbus, OH 43210). Sheri Kunovich was instrumental in preparing the initial data files with English-language labels for the first four waves. Data for 1988, 1993, 1998, and 2003 were archived with assistance from Marcin Zieliński. Management of the entire database is in the hands of Zbigniew Sawiński.

The next POLPAN wave is scheduled for 2013. The principal investigator of POLPAN and one of the guest editors of this issue, Kazimierz M. Slomczynski, invites comments on the thematic scope of the project and specific issues of the panel surveys. He can be contacted by e-mail at slomczynski.1@osu.edu.
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