

POLSKI UNIWERSYTET NA OBCZYŹNIE  
W LONDYNIE

ZESZYTY NAUKOWE

SERIA TRZECIA, NR 7, 2019

---

TERESA FOLGA-NAIDOO

POLISH UNIVERSITY ABROAD, LONDON

**MIROSLAW MATYJA, *UTOPIA OR CHANCE.  
DIRECT DEMOCRACY IN SWITZERLAND,  
POLAND AND OTHER COUNTRIES,*  
BOOKS ON DEMAND, 2019, 245 P.,  
ISBN 978-37-494291-0-3**

**F**irst ever, trailblazing book about this matter *Utopia or Chance. Direct Democracy in Switzerland, Poland and Other Countries* written by professor Mirosław Matyja describes the Swiss direct democracy as an ideal example for other European democratic countries. The aim of the book is to prove that implementing instruments of Swiss direct democracy in Poland and other countries would build truly strong political system in a place where citizens are no longer feel forgotten and without any anticipation in the political process.

The publication, which is divided into two main parts, includes information referring to democratic processes taking place in Switzerland and reveals an attempt to transfer them into the political realities of a struggling democracy in Poland. The author examines the Polish nation as an unequal regarding governance. What is crucial for the Polish state when decisions occur on the highest level of government, the ordinary citizens are not getting the opportunity to decide on majority of the matters.

The author accurately presents the Swiss model of grassroots democracy and assumes that applying it in the Polish political system could prove a chance to heal the democracy in Poland.

The first part of the book outlines in details a Swiss model of direct democracy and focuses on the history of cantons and the creation of a Swiss federation. To begin with Mirosław Matyja describes Switzerland as a *multicultural, poor in natural resources and mountainous* [country which] [...] *existed [...] in an unchanged form since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> C* (p. 11) and after the adoption of a constitution in 1848 it became *a society that still enjoys an unparalleled wealth and political stability* (p. 11).

It happens because Switzerland in its multicultural character is determined to protect its own citizens instead of being focused on skin colour, ethnic origin or a wealth of its individuals. Such an introduction leads the reader to a more detailed explanation of the history of birth of the direct democracy in this alpine federation. Swiss democratic success consists of several factors that played an important role in shaping the direct forms of democracy i.e. neutrality of the state which was gained through the centuries and accepted by other countries. That led Switzerland to creation of a wealth which boomed especially after the Second World War but during the Cold War proved to be advantageous for western politicians and dictators from around the world who found Swiss stability and neutrality to be a great opportunity to deposit their own plethora in the Swiss banks.

Further important factors such as responsibility for its own citizens, value of work or the role of the education have proven the direct democracy to be the most stable political system in the world. The main reason for abiding political success lies in the Swiss mentality simply characterized by calmness, slowness, acceptance of authority and responsibility for the common good which is more important than wealth or material goods.

Through the factors, presented by the author, Swiss nation have built a functional political system that became incomparable to other systems in the world.

Furthermore, Matyja draws attention to the Swiss constitution, which has been the most important innovation since 1848. The Swiss federation constitution grants citizens a number of rights including freedom of speech and the choice of residence. The constitution was amended only three times in its history and that happened through referendum and the popular initiative. With the functioning of constitution and the direct democracy, the existence of Swiss democratic system became a necessary reality.



Matyja introduces the main political institutions in Switzerland and describes their role in the functioning of direct democracy. He also presents instruments of direct democracy at the federal, cantonal and communal levels showing figures in the forms of tables, e.g. referenda or popular initiative through the years since mid. 19<sup>th</sup> C, which granted the citizens a huge influence over political decisions.

An interesting narrative leads the reader to the second part of the book where author analyses the development of direct democracies in four selected European countries, i.e. Austria, The Netherlands, Slovenia and Poland, carefully explaining why he chose these states. However, he puts the main focus on Poland.

After profoundly analysing the last thirty years of democratic existence in Poland the author calls for taking radical steps and believes at some point that radical changes will occur. The real problem, as he argues, lies in politicians who consider themselves different from the citizens and, above everything, they are the ones, elected, meant to govern.

Because of incorrect governance, vast number of Poles have left the country seeking economic and social stability abroad. The author directly asks: *Do they*

[politicians] *feel responsible for this situation? Do they feel ashamed? [...] Has any of the cabinets of the last 30 years apologized for its errors?* (p. 138).

Brutally exposing the truth about the Polish political system, prof. Matyja presents logical solutions solely based on the example of Swiss direct democracy and he demonstrates that applying the changes into Polish reality may prove feasible giving Poland a chance to ameliorate political framework. He denies that Swiss system based on a grassroot democracy of making binding decisions is a utopian idea.

In addition, the book contains several dozen pages of annexes, which are helpful in a deeper analysis of the discussed problem. Selected bibliographic positions guide those in need of expanding their knowledge in this matter.

*Utopia or Chance. Direct Democracy in Switzerland, Poland and Other Countries* by Miroslaw Matyja is the current trailblazing position on the market. It's a marvellous and valuable insight to politics. The book encourages readers to seek the answers to the question asked in the title.

I wish that this book would become widely available on the Polish market to educate the younger generation of people who want change, equality and fairness regarding their future which is decided by the politicians.