

“After the Crisis”
The 15th Polish Sociological Congress
Szczecin, 11–14 September 2013

The 15th Polish Sociological Congress was held in Szczecin on the 11–14 September, 2013, and drew close to 1,000 sociologists from Poland and other countries. The Congress was organized by the Polish Sociological Association and the Institute of Sociology of the University of Szczecin. The Congress’s theme—“After the Crisis”—brought sociologists together to diagnose the ongoing world crisis and make prognoses connected with potential paths out of it. Possible constructions of the post-crisis world were also mooted.

The Congress had three basic aims:

1. Analyses of the world crisis—which began in 2008 and is still underway even though some politicians have already announced its end. The sociologists assembled in Szczecin not only increased their knowledge about the contemporary crisis but also undertook to imagine the post-crisis world. In addition, Polish society was analysed in-depth, including in the context of established sociological issues such as social or cultural capital, the values and norms constituting the social life of Poles, the process of institutionalization, and the ideas of contemporary capitalism. New areas of interest for Polish sociologists, such as queer theory, feminist theories, and phenomena in the intimate life of Poles, were added to phenomena that have always been the subject of sociological consideration. During the four days of the Congress, open air sessions, symposia, and special sessions took place: one of the latter was devoted to the memory of Professor Jacek Leoński, deputy director of the Congress’s Programme Board, who passed away in May, 2013. The Second Session was attended by a particularly large number of sociologists as it dealt with the place of sociology in today’s system of higher education in Poland. The attendees thus participated in a discussion whose fundamental element was an attempt to answer the question of how sociology should be taught in Poland. The session provoked visible emotion, and yet at the same time, a conscious appraisal of the state of sociology teaching in Poland. The majority of meetings occurred within the framework of thematic (working) groups, of which there were more than 100. These groups considered practically all the phenomena constituting more or less popular areas of sociological interest. Every participant of the Convention could thus experience the satisfaction of participating in interesting meetings, presenting his or her own work, or listening to the thoughts of others.

2. Integrative-social—the Congress is an important assembly of an integrative-social nature for sociologists from within Poland and abroad. This unusual meeting

in the somewhat hermetic world of sociologists occurs every three years, at various sociological centres within Poland. The meetings promote not only the exchange of sociological ideas and the sharing of recent research and experience, but also the making of contacts and friendships within the world of Polish and European sociology. Such an aim is served by the get-togethers and cultural events accompanying the four-day sociological conference. In Szczecin there were introductory cocktails and a banquet, and the sociologists could spend time watching films and theatre pieces, or go for a boat ride on the Bay of Szczecin.

3. Symbolic—the sociologists met in the town of Szczecin, which is located 100 kilometres from the Baltic; the Szczecin Shipyards are clearly delineated in the city’s landscape. Szczecin is a city with a proud but difficult history; it can boast, among other things, of the beautiful Chrobry Embankment, with its extensive view of the port. Such places add charm to this lovely city, which, as a result of the transformations, is losing its economic attractiveness. The problems of the Szczecin Shipyards have clearly had a role in the impoverishment of the town and its inhabitants.

Perhaps the fact that protests organized by three national trade unions were taking place in Warsaw while sociologists were analyzing the life of Polish society during the crisis could also be seen as symbolic from the sociological viewpoint. The culmination of the protest was a march of around 100,000 Poles in the Warsaw streets on Saturday, 14 September 2013. The march brought together citizens dissatisfied with the functioning of the structures of the Polish state. This dissatisfaction is, among other things, an effect of the global crisis, which has not entirely passed the Republic by, in spite of the statements of Polish politicians. We were therefore witness to a confrontation between the world of crisis conditions and protest and the world that will probably arise in post-crisis conditions.

The next, 16th, sociologists’ congress is expected to take place at the University of Gdansk in 2016.

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