

## Conclusions

The objective of this book has been to critically discuss the thesis on the sociological vacuum formulated by Stefan Nowak (1979b) and its subsequent uses in explaining various social phenomena. I am convinced that so much attention paid to the thesis on the sociological vacuum is disproportionate to its actual explanatory power. I have located the reason for this misunderstanding, which was described as “a spell” cast on Polish sociologists (Wedel 1992b), in the undertheorization of the link between the micro- and macro-levels of analysis. Therefore, this book is not only a book about the sociological vacuum – it is a book about the micro-macro link in sociological theory. The story of the sociological vacuum is to be treated as an illustration, or warning, of what might happen when there are no proper tools to grasp the micro-level connections between individuals, small groups, interactions, relations, and situations, and the macro-level of social classes, states, nations, and societies. Ironically, the term “sociological vacuum,” which was coined to describe the lack of something in society, seems to represent the lack of something in sociology itself. The vacuum is not between the level of individuals and their primary groups, and the level of society, but in many sociological theories it is employed to explain the links between everyday experiences and large-sized processes. In this book, I have demonstrated how various theoretical approaches to integrating the micro-macro divide in sociological theory can be also useful in understanding what was troubling many scholars who believed in the thesis on the sociological vacuum.

In the introduction to the book, I have briefly outlined the problem and presented inspirations behind my interest in the sociological vacuum and its links with other important concepts. I also stated that the micro-macro issue in sociological theory is an equally important subject of this book, and that the story of the sociological vacuum is a perfect illustration of the trouble that its undertheorization may cause. I then described my strategy of approaching the problem of the sociological vacuum and the way I gathered materials which were the basis for the subsequent chapters of the book. Subsequently, I presented the outcomes of my preliminary analysis on the uses of the sociological vacuum in explaining various important social phenomena, which was the basis for selecting the most important themes, namely: *Solidarność* social movement, civil society, social capital, and quality of democracy. In the introduction I have also explained the reasoning behind the structure of the book.

The main body of the book has been divided into three, unequal in size and quite different from each other, parts. Part I, entitled “The micro-macro problem in sociology: theoretical background,” focused on sociological theory. Part II, entitled “The sociological vacuum: the story of the spell cast on Polish sociologists,” was devoted to the reconstruction of the emergence and uses of the thesis in most important research domains. In each of the domains, the thesis on the sociological vacuum was confronted with relevant theories linking micro- and macro-levels of analysis. Finally, in the shortest part III, entitled “What fills up the sociological vacuum? Empirical illustration,” I discussed my own research confronting the thesis on the sociological vacuum with the conception of the strength of weak ties.

In Chapter 1, I have discussed the issue of the micro-macro pairing in the perspective of other divides in sociological theory. There are close affinities between the micro-macro pairing and the individual-society, and agency-structure pairings, which have excited sociologists since the establishment of the discipline (Layder 2006). I made the claim that there has been a transformation of interests in theory: starting from the classics’ focus on the individual-society pairing, through the subsequent interest in the micro and macro distinction imported from economics, to the preoccupation with the agency-structure problem, which since the 1980s has been, in my opinion, the central issue of sociological theory. In this chapter I presented the views of the classics – Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, George Herbert Mead, and Florian Znaniecki – on the micro-macro issue. It has obviously been an anachronistic reconstruction, because these authors did not use the terms “micro” and “macro,” and rather focused on the issue of individual-society. Still, it was possible to find in them insights on the micro-macro problem as well. Then, I focused on the theoretical debates aiming at the integration of the micro and macro extremes in sociology which were conducted in 1980s. The theoretical breakthrough achieved by this debate has been that the theories reconciling the micro and macro divide are now at the mainstream of sociological thought, and so-called micro-chauvinism and macro-chauvinism, dominant in sociology before the 1980s, are currently of a lesser influence. The ongoing discussions about agency-structure are already taking for granted the need of integrating various levels of analysis and various ontological assumptions. In this chapter I have agreed that the micro-macro is an analytical, not empirical, dichotomy. Much of the theoretical confusion in thinking about the micro-macro issue stems from treating it as an empirical dichotomy, and its overlap with individual-society and agency-structure pairings. Micro is not only the level of individuals – interaction, relation and situation are

usually considered to be on the micro-level as well. Similarly, agency is not only pursued by individuals, but it also has some macro aspects, and a structure might be of the macro-level, but it also might be a structure of the situation (Ritzer 1990). There are various competitive solutions to reconcile the divide: either by describing the mechanism linking the two levels, or by introducing the intermediary level of analysis.

In Chapter 2, I have focused on the strategy of introducing an additional level of analysis in order to better understand the connections between micro and macro. The field theory had its early formulation already in the 1980s, but it was not regarded during the debate of that time as a promising reconciliation of the micro-macro divide. Currently, the concept of social field, which has been brought to sociology by Pierre Bourdieu (1993) and achieved huge importance for the institutional theory of organizations (DiMaggio, Powell 1983), is considered as one of the main theoretical instruments of sociology. Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam (2012) defined social fields as meso-level social orders, and in their strategic action fields theory they presented its applicability for various problems of sociological analysis. Social field is a good notion to understand what happens in-between – not only between the micro- and macro-levels of analysis, but also between social actors. The theory of fields applies analogies from electromagnetism, and not simple mechanics (Martin 2011), which means that the forces of the field are influencing the actors not only through the interactions, but also by the actors' awareness of existence of other actors. Although in the previous chapter I have agreed that the micro-macro divide is an analytical one, some of the authors (like Bourdieu himself) are convinced that fields are real entities. The field theory, thanks to its refining in the domain of organization studies, helps to understand the space where social actors (individual and organizational) constellate around a given issue (Hoffman 1999), and thus the common meaning system emerges (Scott 2014). In the analyses of fields, scholars bring together structures such as organizations and networks. Also current developments in the field theory allow to better conceptualize not only homogeneity in the fields, but also heterogeneity. The growing knowledge about the relations between various social fields helps to grasp the dense structures between conventional levels of micro and macro analysis. The fields are somehow invisible, and the so-called forces of field, described by electromagnetic allegory, are “sensed” by actors, who are not always capable of perceiving the totality of field relations. For this reason, social field is the meso-level of analysis that is not easily noticeable also for researchers. The studies of field-level processes, however, allow to see that in the alleged sociological vacuum there is, in fact, a lot going on.

Another stream in sociology that had already been developing in the 1980s but did not gain proper recognition as a potential micro-macro link was the social network analysis. The emergence of this paradigm and its contribution to the micro-macro debate have been discussed in Chapter 3. Early studies in social networks – patterns of social relations – were recognized by George Ritzer (1990) as an attempt to integrate the two levels from the macro-end. Yet, I think that this view about network scholars resulted from them being underestimated. The concept of the network was introduced to social sciences in the 1950s (Barnes 1954) and the predecessors of focus on relations are Georg Simmel and Jacob Moreno. The approach reached its momentum in the 1960s with the so-called Harvard revolution. In this chapter I have briefly described five various network approaches, namely: network exchange theory, Manuel Castells' theory of network society, actor-network theory, and new science of networks. I have focused on the social network analysis, although the new science of networks, which emerged in the 1990s, fueled all the network approaches with its computational tools as well as the focus on internet. Currently, social networks occupy not only the imagination of nerdy, mathematically inclined analysts, but of the whole lay of sociology, and the masses of people using internet and obsessively posting on social media. Networks replaced groups as a key category describing social structure. Yet, networks are not so easily perceived structures. Egos are aware of their own ties but the knowledge about the ties of their alters is limited. Moreover, egos do have relations called weak ties (Granovetter 1973), which are also not always perceived by them as important. To some extent, networks do also have an invisible character and only switching between the levels of analysis allows to understand the role played by certain nodes. As a conception of huge potential to integrate the micro- and macro-levels of analysis, I have pointed to the conception of embeddedness revitalized in network terms by Mark Granovetter (1985). According to the embeddedness argument, social action is embedded in social relations and markets or hierarchies are not the only sites for agency. Then, I have discussed the ideas of authors playing with the embeddedness argument and showing how organizations and markets emerge from networks (Padgett, Powell 2012), or how organizations influence the networks (Small 2009) to finally arrive at the concept of dual embeddedness (McDonald et al. 2012). The relationist approach brings the focus of researchers to phenomena which are easy to go unnoticed. It also teaches that important consequences are not always caused by important factors. Thanks to the social network analysis, we know that these are the weak ties that ameliorate social cohesion, mobilization of resources, and collective action.

After the conceptual discussion on the possible links between the micro- and macro-levels of analysis, in the second part of the book – “The sociological vacuum: the story of the spell cast on Polish sociologists” – I have critically reviewed the conception of the sociological vacuum and its applications. In Chapter 4, I have presented the way in which Stefan Nowak formulated his famous thesis. First, I briefly reconstructed its context, namely the survey paradigm dominating sociology in Poland in the 1970s. Stefan Nowak was mostly researching values and attitudes of individuals by focusing on the consciousness of his respondents, and treating social groups as key social structures with the society as the largest social group aggregating individuals. Then, I presented the empirical basis for coining the concept of the sociological vacuum, which was the research on the inter-generational transmission of values conducted in Warsaw and Kielce. I enumerated various reasons for considering the thesis on the sociological vacuum as not valid. I started with the internal critique showing that even on the ground of the paradigm of sociology, to which Nowak belonged, there were certain elements that were raising doubts about the thesis. The sample was biased because it included youth attending high schools, leading to tertiary education, and their parents who lived in two large cities. Also, by the rule of thumb, the relatively numerous identifications with workplaces were treated as identifications with small and not medium-sized groups. Then, I moved to the external critique and pointed that the thesis was coherent with its paradigm, but applying relational or behavioral perspectives would not allow to draw such dramatic conclusions. Nowak, as a researcher of consciousness, was assuming that only structures perceived by social actors as important were consequential for social processes. Being interested in values and attitudes, he lacked the theory of action, which would allow him to understand the role of less visible social structures (such as relations or fields) as constraints and enablers for agency. Of course, this line of critique is a bit anachronic: Stefan Nowak did not have a chance to apply the theoretical tools which were only being coined elsewhere at the time of his studies. Yet, the thesis on the sociological vacuum acquired the status of a fact and started to be extensively used by scholars in explaining social reality of Poland. What is interesting, Nowak’s thesis was often cited with a shift in its meaning, as a thesis on the lack (or the weakness) of objective structures, and not as a thesis on the lack of subjective identifications. It was also quite often cited partially, in a manner highlighting the strong identifications on the micro-level, but not drawing any references from the relatively strong identifications with the Polish nation.

I believe that the reason why Nowak’s thesis became so popular is that, to some extent, the emergence of the *Solidarność* movement triggered a debate

about its validity. To this issue I have turned in Chapter 5. I began by briefly presenting the events of the so-called *Solidarność* “carnival” in the years 1980–1981. Then, I presented how the thesis on the sociological vacuum was employed to explain the emergence of a large-scale social movement in the allegedly atomized society. What is striking, is that many of these attempts were using not only mechanical allegories from the world of physics, but also even metaphysical exclamations. *Solidarność* was certainly a strong experience for its participants, as well as the sociologists observing it, and for this reason I claim that many of them were unable to examine it with a proper analytical distance. In fact, also some of the younger scholars have problems challenging the powerful myth created by the *Solidarność* generation. Some scholars claimed that *Solidarność* could be treated as evidence that Nowak’s thesis was not valid. They pointed to structures omitted by Nowak, such as the catholic church (Kamiński 1992) or the workplace (Morawski 2010; Rychard 2010). Subsequently, I turned to a brief presentation of the use of concepts such as social networks or organizations in the studies of *Solidarność*. For example, Osa (2003) analyzed the networks of Polish opposition in the 1970s, which were activated in order to trigger the mass movement in 1980, and Laba (1991) presented the importance of the organizational infrastructure of large communist workplaces used for organizing the communication of protesters. In my opinion, the accounts employing the resource mobilization theory (which requires the focus on organizations and networks) are the most convincing in the analysis of *Solidarność* social movement. I am also convinced that *Solidarność* continues to be a research subject worth further studies. Certainly, the application of the social field theory may bring interesting results. A very difficult, yet interesting, research task would be to conduct deep studies of social networks of the 1970s. Their results, in my opinion, could be challenging for the strong presumption that Polish society was at that time atomized.

In Chapter 6, I have focused on yet another great subject for Polish sociology – the civil society – focusing mostly on its organizational aspect. Obviously, I did not discuss all the approaches and large debates about the concepts of civil society; I was interested in showing that civil society, understood as the self-organization of society based on free-choice associations, does not have much in common with the thesis on the sociological vacuum. I focused on organizations as the key social structures for civil society and did not discuss social movements or local governments. Focus on organizational form of an association allows to understand that the study of civil society requires also a good conceptualization of the micro-macro link. Civil society is not the kind of a macro-actor which interacts with the macro-actor – state. It is rather a label allowing to grasp the

associational life of a given society. What is very disturbing in the literature on the civil society in Poland, is the common lament about its bad condition: it is said to be weak, passive, and small in numbers. What I have seen in my review of sociological vacuum literature, was that Nowak's thesis fits perfectly into the laments about civil society in Poland. It was used to explain the obstacles for the development of civil society in Poland. I have shown that bringing the sociological vacuum thesis into the debate about civil society is a misunderstanding. There is no reason to link declarations on the identifications with certain social categories as a proxy for the quality of associational life. Following Ekiert and Kubik's (1999; 2014) line of argument, many aspects of civil society mobilization in Poland cannot be grasped by conventional methodological tools developed to study other countries. For instance, trade unions might have a small membership rate, but they are still able to mobilize and achieve certain goals. Another conclusion from this chapter is that many sociologists tend to romanticize civil society: they perceive associational life as something unambiguously positive. I confronted this vision referring to the work of Kaufman (2002), who discussed numerous negative consequences of associationalism in the United States. Similarly, the classical work of Chałasiński (1935) on Murcki settlement provides evidence that sometimes associational mobilization can fuel a vicious circle of social conflict. In this chapter I have called for more relational studies of civil society focusing on the interplay of non-governmental organizations with other organizational actors. The theory of social fields is particularly useful in understanding the relations between cooperating and competing associations, as well as other organizations belonging to the state or local administration or for-profit organizations.

Thanks to the popularity of Robert Putnam's (1993; 2000) work in Poland, the issues of civil society and social capital are often taken into account together. Indeed, their empirical connections are strong. As I have shown in my discussion of dual embeddedness, organizations form social networks and social networks help in emergence of organizations. Yet, for the sake of analytical clarity I have discussed the conceptions of social capital separately from the concept of civil society. The structure of an organization is key for understanding civil society and, by the same token, the structure of a network is key for understanding social capital. In Chapter 7 I have presented various conceptualizations of social capital formulated by Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), Putnam (1993; 2000), Portes (1998), Woolcock (1998), Burt (2005), and Lin (2001). There are huge differences between these conceptualizations. In the early formulations of Bourdieu and Coleman, social capital is a very fuzzy notion. The important theoretical problem is in pointing to the holder of social capital and recognizing whether it

is a property of individuals or collectivities. I am strongly convinced that most useful analytically are formulations of the social capital conception embedded in the social network analysis. In its all formulations, the conception of social capital is a mediator between individuals and larger structures. Thus, it is a good example of a theoretical framework which requires a conceptualization of the micro-macro link. Social capital defined in terms of social network is another way, next to the conception of social embeddedness, to integrate the micro- and macro-levels of analysis. Social capital is different from other forms of capital because it is not simply an attribute of an individual – an individual needs to mobilize social resources embedded in his or her social network. Thus, the notion of social capital is invariably conjunct with notions of social action and social relation. Social capital is a new term for a much older problem of sociology, namely the advantages of being in social relations, which since the 1980s has become an extremely popular notion treated by some sociologists as panacea for many social problems. Yet, the position in social structure is not only enabling but also constraining. Portes (1998) even provocatively formulated the notion of “negative social capital.” The sociological vacuum was used by some researchers as a proxy for the level of social capital in the period before the formulation of the concept. Some other researchers were interpreting the sociological vacuum thesis along Putnam’s (2000) categorization of bridging and bonding social capital. Strong identifications with family and close groups of friends were used as evidence for the existence of bonding capital and the lack of bridging capital (see Czapiński 2006; Miszalska, Kubiak 2004). Obviously, it is a conceptual confusion caused by the shift in the understanding of Nowak’s thesis. The sociological vacuum thesis described declared identifications with social groups, while social capital is a notion describing existing relations between individuals. Of course, the relations between individuals have the aspect of identification but cannot be just reduced to consciousness. I find that in Poland the studies of social capital considered on the collective level are inconclusive, while the studies of the social capital considered on the individual level are congruent with the findings in other societies. The sociological vacuum does not have much to do with social capital.

The problem of the quality of democracy, that I have discussed in Chapter 8, is in sociological perspective often connected to the quality of civil society and the level of social capital. For this reason, it was a good strategy to place this chapter after discussions on thus understood social base for a smooth functioning of democracy assumed in many of its conceptions. Since democracy is a very ambiguous idea, I started the chapter by discussing six conceptions of democracy distinguished by Coppedge and Gerring (2011): electoral; liberal, majoritarian,

participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian. In my presentation of these conceptions I was mostly focusing on how the micro-macro link is problematized in a given conception. One cannot avoid theorization about micro-macro when considering democracy, because it requires some form of a mechanism transforming the wills of individual citizens into a collective action of a macro-actor – state. Then, I discussed the works of scholars who perceived the sociological vacuum as a factor influencing democracy in Poland. The majority of these authors saw the sociological vacuum as a problem. According to them, in a similar way as it is connected with the low level of social capital or engagement in associational life of civil society, the sociological vacuum negatively influences the quality of democracy in Poland. This negative impact is said to occur in two main ways: first is that it is seen as a blockade for the development of institutions allowing proper communication between the masses and elites; second, is that the sociological vacuum, in a similar way in which it limits civil society, is limiting the participation in democratic process. In case of institutions of communication, the sociological vacuum was recognized as negatively influencing the solid party system (Grabowska 2004; Kubiak 1999), which in turn limits the communication between the voters and political leaders. Wasilewski (2006) coined the notion of “political vacuum” to describe the weakness of local political leaders who could be mediating in communication between the voters and state-level political leaders. In case of participation, the sociological vacuum was pointed as one of the factors that contributes to the passivity of civic life in Poland (Szczegółka 2013). Zybala (2015) stated that the condition of the sociological vacuum inhibits the participatory creation of public policies. I am very critical of these statements, because I do not find in them theoretical arguments for linking the thesis on identification with various types of groups, with processes of political communication or participation. In contrast, I consider as interesting and deep the works of Cześnik (2008a; 2008b), who showed that, on the level of political theory, the sociological vacuum should not be considered a problem and, on the empirical level, it does not have any impact on the quality of democracy. Actually, from the perspective of a coherent polity, it is good not to have too strong middle-sized identifications, as it could be disruptive for the unity of the political system. Building on the work of Cześnik (2008a), I claim that the sociological vacuum is irrelevant for some conceptions of democracy, for some it is advantageous (as inhibiting too strong cleavages), and it might be assumed as disadvantageous for the conception of participatory democracy. The latter is valid on the condition that identifications are a driving force for participation in political life. To be sure of that, however, empirical evidence is needed because the evidence available so far are mostly conceptual speculations.

The last, and the shortest, third part of the book entitled “What fills up the sociological vacuum? Empirical illustration” consists of only one chapter – 9 – which served as an empirical illustration, or an appendix, to the book. The majority of my argument is of a conceptual character and I deal with various theories and domains of social sciences. In this chapter, I have decided to confront the research strategy of Nowak with one of the approaches which, in my opinion, is promising in understanding the micro-macro link, namely the research strategy of Granovetter (1995). Another argument for confronting these two strategies was that although they are embedded in very different sociological paradigms, they both use the same tool of sociological survey. Confrontation of Nowak’s research strategy with the research scheme designed to study social fields would be totally incomparable. Thus, despite substantial differences (Nowak’s paradigm is dispositional and concerned with consciousness, while Granovetter’s paradigm is relational and concerned with behaviors), there is an intersection on the level of the employed research tool. I have presented the stream of research on getting a job initiated by Granovetter’s study on the strength of weak ties. Then, I have presented the results of my study, which replicated the classic study of Granovetter. In my study, I surveyed people who in one year prior to the interview started a new employment. The results I have obtained revealed that half of the jobs in Poland are acquired through personal contacts, and more than two-thirds of these contacts are weak ties. This result, consistent with similar studies in other countries, points to the fact that relations with others, which are important for the mobilization of resources and social action, are relations of a relatively weak character. Weak ties are easily unnoticed, both by social actors who perceive them as unimportant, and by social scientists who may not have the research tools sensitive for their elusive character. In the same research questionnaire, I asked the same question on identification with social categories, which was the empirical base for the formulation of the thesis on the sociological vacuum. Surprisingly, in my data there was a much lower frequency of respondents pointing to the Polish nation as a category of identification than in the data collected by Nowak’s research team in the early 1970s in Kielce and Warsaw. Otherwise, the general hierarchy of identifications remained quite similar. I attempted to find some relation between the declared identifications and behaviors on the labor market – they were nearly no existent: weak ties and strong ties users had very similar profiles of identifications. The inference to be drawn from this finding is that it is very deceptive to state something about relations and behaviors on the basis of data on dispositions and consciousness. My interpretation of this result is that it can be used as a good argument against scholars who wish to see some

explanation (or even causal potential) in the sociological vacuum in relation to other social processes. Of course, one needs to be cautious when building large extrapolations based on tiny empirical contributions, such as mine, but was this not the case with the sociological vacuum?

As Janine Wedel (1992b: 10) phrased it, Stefan Nowak “cast a spell” over Polish sociologists. The claim that there is a sociological vacuum in Poland was strong, dramatic, and persuasive. It was legitimized with a seemingly scientific method of survey sociology. Yet, does the data Nowak had in hand allow for this kind of extrapolation? I doubt it. In Chapter 4 I have shown various possible interpretations for the empirical validity of the thesis. The one appealing to me the most is that the result, which is a profile of identifications, does not allow to generalize about social actions and social processes. It is certainly interesting that a certain category of people more willingly expresses their identification with some social groups rather than with others, but this is it. Applying the sociological vacuum in narratives on *Solidarność*, civil society, social capital, and quality of democracy is, in my opinion, a misunderstanding.

There is another approach to the issue of the sociological vacuum at hand. It might be said that Nowak’s thesis might not be valid, but it expressed a certain intuition (Grabowska, Sułek 1992), which is actually confirmed in other empirical data. For example, this is the strategy of Andrzej Zybala (2015), who delivered historical evidence to support his claim about the weak culture of participation in Poland. In that way, the sociological vacuum is detached from Nowak’s empirical material and becomes a general and vague notion to describe some obscure deficiencies in social life in Poland. I understand this argument, but I do not accept it. According to me, the explanatory powers of the sociological vacuum are mostly of a rhetorical character.

This book is also a study of Polish sociology. In order to analyze the ways in which the sociological vacuum has been employed in explaining what is going on in Poland I came through of large share of Polish sociological production. Of course, not only Polish authors referred to Nowak’s thesis,<sup>83</sup> but it remained a rather local problem of the Polish sociology. It is risky to build generalizations on the whole national sociological field based on the literature selected because of the use of one concept. This is indeed a biased sample. Yet, the picture of the sociological field seen through the lenses of the sociological vacuum application is rather a sad one. What I have seen in many of these works is a theoretical

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83 I have discussed the attempts at exporting the sociological vacuum to other social contexts elsewhere (Pawlak 2016).

shallowness, political engagement, and the urge to build dramatic narratives about social reality. The thesis on the sociological vacuum was used in them without the proper understanding of its definition, often with the shift of its meaning, and with partial implementation. Quite often the sociological vacuum is treated as a thesis about weakness (or even lack) of social structures, and not as a thesis on the low level of identifications with certain social categories. By the same token, quite many authors citing the thesis on the sociological vacuum forgot about its national component (Pawlak 2015).

For this reason, I claim that the vacuum is not in the society but, as the direct reading of the label suggests, it is a vacuum in sociology. It is easy to blame the society for lacking something, but it is often the sociology which lacks the theoretical and methodological tools to see what is in-between. For this reason, this book is not only about the sociological vacuum or Polish sociology, but the problem of the micro-macro link in sociological theory as well. I believe it is still worth to discuss various approaches at reconciling, or integrating, micro-level sociology focusing on individuals, small groups, interactions, relations, and situations, with macro-level sociology focusing on large social groups, social classes, nations, and societies. The debate on the meso-level of analysis or mechanism linking micro and macro is not just an implementation of an unnecessary nuance. As I have shown in the first part of the book, the problems of individual-society, micro-macro, and agency-structure have been present in sociological theory from its very beginning. The story of the sociological vacuum presented in the second part of the book is an illustration of the kind of problems sociologists might find themselves in when analyzing social reality without the proper understanding of the micro-macro link.

If we apply theoretical frames allowing to notice the micro-macro links, we will see what fills up the sociological vacuum. Of course, to say that the vacuum is filled up is to shift the original meaning of the thesis. Keeping rigorously to its original formulation, the filling up would occur when the declarations of identification with middle-sized groups would become more frequent. Yet, when we decide to shift the paradigm and consider social processes in more relational terms, we see that the vacuum is allegorically filled up with structures such as networks of weak ties or social fields.

I do not intend to say here that the entire body of work of social sciences which considered the thesis on the sociological vacuum is wrong or not worthy of reading. On the contrary, many of the works in which the authors referred to the sociological vacuum, are great. The power of reification of this statement was so tremendous in the Polish sociological field that many authors took the lack of

something in the middle between the small groups and the society for granted. The ones who like Paweł Starosta (1995) in his study on inhabitants of small towns and villages, or Mikołaj Czeźnik (2008a; 2008b) in his studies on democracy treated Nowak's thesis seriously and discussed it in detail, demonstrated its limited validity.

I hope that the one of the contributions of this book will be that scholars will become more cautious when using the thesis on the sociological vacuum in order to build sociological explanations. This is, of course, a very limited objective. There are many notions which, similarly to the sociological vacuum, turned into buzz-words in sociological discourse. The sociological vacuum in Poland earned the largest popularity but terms like "amoral familism," "homo sovieticus," or "learned helplessness" would also be interesting subjects of studies similar to mine. The sociological vacuum thesis was coined during communist rule in Poland. The past events or conditions are often used to explain the present. Yet, we already know that path-dependency-like explanations were also used in studies of Poland with much exaggeration (Pawlak, Sadowski 2017). I hope that this book will serve as a warning against the use of buzz-words and dramatized narratives in sociology.

We need more studies of the less visible aspects of social reality. In this book I have highlighted the usefulness of the field theory and social network analysis. Both of them are now in the mainstream of international sociology and have also gained growing attention in Poland. We know more and more about social networks and the role of ties (of various strength). Surely, the confrontation of knowledge about behaviors embedded in networks of relations with traditionally gathered data on consciousness will extend knowledge about social processes in Poland. For example, in the traditionally strong field of political sociology in Poland, we need more studies on relational aspects of forming political opinions and the influence of social networks on electoral behavior. We have a growing number of studies conducted on the level of social fields and I hope that sociologists in Poland will be using also other accounts on social fields than the one created by Bourdieu. The organizational field (DiMaggio, Powell 1983) conception developed by the new institutionalists, or the strategic action fields theory (Fligstein, McAdam 2012), bring the attention to the relations between organizational actors which, in my opinion, are under-researched by Polish sociologists.

The outcomes of studies conducted on the field level will be a great material for future macro-synthesis of the knowledge on social processes in Poland. For a long time, sociologists in Poland were focused on macro-processes. Their ambition was to describe the whole Polish society. This was the case of Stefan Nowak

(1979b), who coined the notion of the “sociological vacuum” in an essay on the system of values of Polish society. I think that this research strategy was fallacious. By applying the bottom-up strategy of synthesizing the existing knowledge about the meso-level social orders, more interesting insights into macro-processes will become available.