Part II: The sociological vacuum: the story of the spell cast on Polish sociologists

4 Polish sociology in the 1970s, Stefan Nowak, and the sociological vacuum thesis

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the thesis on the sociological vacuum and clearly present the assumptions behind it. The thesis on the sociological vacuum is treated in this book as a key to understanding the salience of conceptualizing the micro-macro link in sociology. Thus, this chapter may be treated as a background description introducing the actual narrative on the most important question of sociology in relation to the problem of the link between the micro- and macro-levels of analysis. This chapter is also an introduction to the second part of the book. Making the concept of the sociological vacuum clear is a preliminary condition to examining how this concept was later applied in various research domains.

   The chapter has the following arrangement. In order to understand the most often cited sociological statement on Polish society (Pawlak 2015), I present its founder professor Stefan Nowak and describe the social, as well as the theoretical, context in which the concept was launched. I briefly reconstruct the survey-positivist program dominating in Polish sociology of 1970s. After a presentation of the thesis itself, I discuss the possible interpretations of its theoretical and methodological validity.

4.2 Stefan Nowak

Stefan Nowak was born in 1924 and started his sociological studies at the University of Warsaw, right after the end of World War II, in 1946. His mentor was Stanisław Ossowski, trained philosopher, pioneer of humanistic sociology, respected for his integrity. Ossowski was a product of the Lviv-Warsaw school of philosophy, so his writings were elegant and disciplined in terms of language. Ossowski's work, although nowadays it is considered to be rather outdated, still impresses with the clarity of definitions of basic sociological concepts. For sociology, the Stalinist era in Poland (1948–1956) was a period of persecution, affecting also Ossowski, who was not allowed to teach students for a certain time. As I will demonstrate later, Nowak's conception of sociology was very much different

from the one of his supervisor, yet there were also similarities between them in the care for clarity and the use of well-defined notions (Sułek 2014).

The period of political thaw in 1956 resulted with the reintroduction of sociological studies to the University of Warsaw and brought the great possibility of launching contacts with American sociology in the framework of Fulbright scholarships (Sułek 2011: 96–141). Stefan Nowak travelled to the USA, where at Columbia University he met Paul Lazarsfeld and became acquainted with the newly developing techniques of survey research. For this reason, in the hagiographical narrations of Stefan Nowak, authors describe him as "the one who brought the survey sociology from USA to Poland" or "the master of Polish survey sociology." The first time that Nowak applied the newly acquired methodological knowledge was in the study on students of Warsaw conducted in 1963. The research on the worldviews and values of students of Warsaw developed into a kind of Nowak's life-time project. Nowak surveyed the students, experimenting with the usage of quantitative research techniques.

Poland under the communist rule was a very difficult place for conducting sociological surveys, which one has to have in mind when evaluating Nowak's work. Empirical research in Poland was at that time uncommon, and the survey technique was something that Polish sociologists were still learning to use. The situation of taking part in a questionnaire interview was awkward for respondents, who often perceived interviewers as potential informers of the communist secret service, thus making it impossible to ask direct questions regarding, for example, opinions on the authorities. The surveys were conducted rarely and every piece of empirical material was analyzed for quite a long time. It is also important to mention the lack of the now obvious analytical tools such as statistical applications for personal computers.[28] For this reason, running simple two-variable correlation required serious effort.

Stefan Nowak made an impact on sociology in Poland mainly with his strong statements on sociological methodology. He published a collection of American methodological articles (Nowak 1965) and handbook of methodology (Nowak 1970), which served Polish students of sociology at least for 30 years. Nowak also became a head of the Unit of Methodology of Sociological Research at the Institute of Sociology where he gathered a team of young – and strongly influenced by him – researchers. Apparently, Nowak was a charismatic leader of the

---

28 Since 1973, Polish quantitative sociologists have been analyzing data in computational centers "Świerk" and "Cyfronet," which were equipped with CDC Cyber-72 mainframe computers. The data was input on punch cards. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for this information.

98

circle he developed. In the years 1976–1983 he served as President of the Polish Sociological Association – professional organization of Polish sociologists, which under the communist rule managed to remain a forum of open debates and democratic procedures.

Nowak was a positivist – more a student of Lazarsfeld than Ossowski. He called for the development of deductive theory, operationalization of concepts in research procedures, hypotheses testing and creating conceptions which would enable making predictions. He looked at society through the lenses of indicators, but preferred indicators of the social consciousness obtained by surveys rather than indicators of behaviors, possibly obtained by observation (Grabowska, Sułek 1992; Sułek 1998).

After his death, just after the fall of communism in 1989, Nowak became "sanctified" by some of his disciples. The main auditorium of his former Institute became named after him, and so was the prize in methodology of social sciences awarded by the same institute. Nowak's disciples edited a volume devoted to his life and his works (Sułek 1992), followed by a collection of his shorter works and essays (Nowak 2009).

4.3 Survey sociology: measurement of attitudes, values, and society as an aggregate of individuals

As I have already mentioned, Nowak was the leader of the survey sociology movement in Poland. In this section, I aim to reconstruct the program of sociology, in which Nowak was engaged, and discuss its understanding of sociology, key concepts, research methods, and key topics under research. The scientific program of Nowak's sociology has been recently discussed in detail by Jakub Motrenko (2017).

Nowak did not formulate any particular definition of sociology, but it is quite clear that he understood it as a science on social collectives (see Nowak 1985: 38–39). Understanding sociology as a science of society is, in fact, a striking feature of most works in the framework of the main paradigm of sociology in Poland of 1970s. The main subject studied by sociology was the society and collectives which sum up to this society – not social reality, not social institutions, not social action, and not sociability. Society was also understood literally as a synonym of the population of a given country. Thus, the main objective of sociology as an academic activity was to study the society of a given country: Polish sociologist were supposed to deliver the knowledge about Polish society. This sociology was heavily positivist, so social science was supposed to be objective and universal, but its laws might have had historical limitations. A society was

limited by its territory, and sociology was interested in researching its current condition.

If "society" became equated with "population," how were sociology and demography different in this approach? The difference lay in the interest in phenomena related to social consciousness. The phenomena researched by sociologists were attitudes and values, i.e. attributes located in human minds. What was then the difference between sociology and psychology? Making one step back, it is important to remember that sociology was designed as a study of society, but the society was understood as a simple aggregate of individuals. Thus, when talking about values of Polish society, Nowak was simply describing the frequencies with which values where shared by individuals.

This understanding of society was integrated into survey methodology. Sociologists had a research tool (questionnaire interview) thanks to which they could gather data regarding the individuals' states of consciousness and then, through a basic statistical aggregation, give statements on the society. In order to aggregate the results about individuals, tools needed to be standardized. An interview is a technique based on communication, so the obtained information about the individual needed to be mediated through the language. Respondents were expected to be able to express their values and attitudes. Thus, the respondents described their states of minds in a standardized manner, which was then aggregated to the level of society. The individual was on the micro-level, society was on the macro-level, and the mediation was… a sociologist who was aggregating the individual into the social.

The concept of the structure of the society as an arrangement of relations between social groups was developed by Ossowski (1968). Contrary to the sociology of social structure developed by Wesołowski (1966) and Słomczyński (1972), Nowak perceived society as the largest social group including smaller social groups. It is accurate to label this approach to social structure, after Brubaker (2004: 7), as an example of groupism: group as a category of practice is also treated as a category of an analysis. In Nowak's paradigm, the groups were perceived again through the lenses of consciousness: a group was constituted by a sense of belonging.

This picture of society in Nowak's sociology is static. First, it is because Nowak analyzes the states of consciousness. Secondly, it is because the groups are perceived not as potential actors but as objects to which individuals relate in their consciousness. Finally, it is because the society is treated as the larger possible group or simple aggregational category. Dynamics is possible to be observed only as changes in time of frequencies of individual states of consciousness. It is

possible to say what society thinks, what it perceives as appropriate, in what it believes, and even what it desires. On the language level, society as an aggregate often became personified. But in this social ontology it is really hard to describe how various entities act. Action in this paradigm is perceived as somehow conditioned by attitudes and values.

In Nowak's paradigm, institutions were understood along the common-sense definition as offices or workplaces. There was nearly no place for relations between individuals. Researchers were often evaluating the individuals' perceptions of their relations with certain objects: institutions, territories or social groups. A notion of bond was predominantly understood as relation between an individual and a social group (Malikowski 1979).

The subjects of study were predominantly attitudes and values, sometimes organized in broader arrangements as ideologies, which made it a dispositional sociology – focusing on the dispositions of individuals. The research questions seen as interesting in the survey-positivist paradigm concerned identifying socio-demographic variables which conditioned values and attitudes. Another studied topic were the changes of the values of attitudes in time – understood as changes in frequencies of pointing to survey items indicating given values and attitudes – and their intergenerational transmission. Values and attitudes were supposed to be preconditions of action but, as mentioned earlier, social action was not the subject of studies.[29]

The social context in which Nowak and his disciples conducted research cannot be forgotten. The late 1970s in Poland were a period of economic crisis and disappointment with the rule of Edward Gierek. The possibilities of conducting empirical sociological studies were very limited and researchers could not easily refine their arguments or empirically test new statements. In this scientific and social context, the thesis on the sociological vacuum was coined.

---

29 The lack of the theory of action seems to be the crucial reason for the later problems with explaining the emergence of the Solidarność social movement. This sociological paradigm was attuned to research "static" societies. The sociology focused on values has significant problems with explaining actions. John Levi Martin (2011: 309) illustrates it with interpretation of Milgram's (1974) experiment. If the values were to drive action, the value "don't torture the innocent" would stop the majority of people, who took part in Milgram's experiment from inducing electric shocks. Yet, put simply, action is driven by the recognition of expectations how to act in a certain institutional context.

4.4 Thesis on Poland's sociological vacuum

During the 5th Congress of Polish Sociologists in 1977, Nowak suggested that the "worrying void in our society" should become a subject of sociological study from dynamic perspectives (Nowak 1979c). In the next years, the idea matured and became one of the main points of Nowak's presentation given in 1979, during a session of the "Poland 2000" committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The text of his presentation was published twice – first as an essay "Przekonania i odczucia współczesnych" [Beliefs and Feelings of Contemporary People] (Nowak 1979a), and then in the leading Polish sociological journal *Studia Socjologiczne* under the title "System wartości społeczeństwa polskiego" [The Value System of Polish Society] (Nowak 1979b). As the latter is the most commonly quoted version, I will mainly use this reference for the purposes of this study. Its English translation was published in "The Polish Sociological Bulletin" (Nowak 1980), and in the year following the eruption of the Solidarność social movement, due to increased interest in Poland, Nowak reiterated his arguments in *Scientific American* in the article "Values and Attitudes of Polish People" (Nowak 1981). Nowak stated: "From the point of view of people's identification and their emotional involvement there exists a kind of sociological vacuum between the level of primary groups and that of the national community. If we wished to draw a gigantic 'sociogram' based on people's bonds and identifications, the social structure of our society perceived in those terms would appear as a 'federation' of primary groups, families and circles of friends united in a national community, with rather insignificant other types of bonds between those two levels" (Nowak 1979b: 160; original translation in Nowak 1980: 9).

In the two earlier mentioned articles, Nowak used the term "próżnia socjologiczna" [sociological vacuum] (Nowak 1979a; 1979b); this term was repeated in the English translation published in "The Polish Sociological Bulletin" (Nowak 1980), but in the ulterior publication discussing the concept in English (Nowak 1981), he used the term "social vacuum." As I have stated earlier, for terminological unity with the Polish publications I analyze, I have decided to use the term "sociological vacuum" throughout this book.

Nowak saw the vacuum as a peculiarity of Polish society. In his view, "the 'objective' social structure, and even more, the institutional structure of the society [in Poland], is as complex as in many other industrialized countries" (Nowak 1979b: 160). However, the "subjective" social structure, based on individuals' identifications, was distinctive from other modern societies. Nowak considered this peculiarity to be problematic: Polish society was lacking something. He explained the absence of identifications with intermediary-level institutions by

positing the occurrence of alienation from these institutions. People were not forming social groups and were not thinking about themselves in terms of "we."

In his essay, Nowak also made other remarks about Polish society and the moral values shared by Poles. He distinguished between the world of people and the world of institutions and pointed out that the dispersion of values in this country was almost random – there were no class or generational differences. According to Nowak, religion played only the role of a private philosophy, and thus it was not really capable of coalescing social groups around its institutions.

Nowak perceived the sociological vacuum as a highly problematic phenomenon. According to him, it was connected with the alienation from institutions and a low level of societal integration. As he perceived social groups as the most important social structures, the society lacking middle-sized groups was debilitated from the possibility of many forms of collective action. The announcement of the existence of a sociological vacuum was highly dramatic in tone. One cannot forget that Nowak formulated the thesis in the period of late 1970s when Poland under Gierek's rule was in deep economic crisis.

The most known version of Nowak's statement is an essay, in which the author did not cite any particular empirical data. Yet, the article published in *Scientific American* (Nowak 1981), explains that empirical base for the thesis on the sociological vacuum was built on surveys conducted in two big Polish cities – Warsaw and Kielce – among high school pupils and their parents. In the next section, I will discuss the validity of Nowak's thesis.

4.5 The sociological vacuum: brilliant intuition or a methodological artifact?

Nowak attempted to test the hypotheses about the trans-generational transmission of values. To reach that aim, together with his team he conducted a survey research among youth studying in high schools (in Polish, "liceum ogólnokształcące" and "technikum") and their parents. In the sample, there were 686 pupils and their 1228 parents from Kielce,[30] and 1220 pupils and their 2004 parents from Warsaw (Grabowska 1989: 16). The study was conducted in 1972 and 1973. Among other questions, the respondents were asked: "With which of the following categories of people do you feel particularly strong bonds?"

---

30 City in central Poland. During Nowak's survey it was inhabited by approximately 150,000 people.

(Nowak 1981: 52).[31] The respondents could choose 5 out of the 14 categories of people presented to them.

Table 4.1 Hierarchy of social ties

Categories of identification	Warsaw		Kielce	
	Parents	**Youth**	**Parents**	**Youth**
Family	97%	92%	94%	95%
Friends, close colleagues and close acquaintances	70%	78%	60%	79%
Colleagues from your school or workplace	48%	30%	46%	42%
The Polish nation	43%	40%	40%	35%
Acquaintances from your neighbourhood	36%	20%	34%	28%
People who are interested in the same things you are (Youth) People who have the same occupation (Parents)	27%	35%	28%	30%
People who think as you do	27%	35%	23%	51%
Mankind in general	17%	19%	17%	13%
People of your age group	15%	20%	15%	33%
People of the same religion	9%	9%	12%	10%
Members of the same political organization	9%	9%	10%	9%
People of the same economic position	8%	0%	9%	6%

Source: Nowak 1981: 52

Table 4.1 presents the results obtained by Nowak's research team.[32] What is strik-ing, is the fact that the results were interpreted according to the rule of thumb. In the formulation of his thesis, Nowak highlighted that there is a vacuum between identifications with family and close friends on the micro-level, and the nation on the macro-level. Three categories of respondents (all respondents from Kielce

---

31 The question in Polish was formulated as follows: "Jakich ludzi uważasz za bliskich sobie i czujesz się z nimi szczególnie związany?" (Szawiel 1989: 204). The direct transla-tion into English should therefore be: "What kind of people do you consider as close and feel a particular connection to?"

32 Table 4.1 presents the results according to Nowak (1981: 52). In another presentation of the same results (Szawiel 1989: 205) there are differences in frequencies of some categories.

and parents from Warsaw) were more often pointing to their colleagues from school or colleagues from the workplace than to the Polish nation as a group that they identified with. Nowak claimed that institutions (such as schools or workplaces) are alienating and not creating the feeling of togetherness and the notion of "we" (1979b: 161). Yet, while, focusing on the identification with the Polish nation, Nowak ignored the identification with school friends and colleagues from work, which could be easily interpreted as identification with an organization. At least in the group of parents, the identifications with acquaintances from the neighborhood were just barely less frequent than identifications with the Polish nation. Again, in the statement about the sociological vacuum, local identifications (as identifying with neighbors could be easily interpreted) are also absent.

There is also a problem with the justification of the extrapolation of the results. The sample of students from high schools (schools leading to tertiary education) and their parents from one large city and one medium-sized town is not representative for the entire Poland, because it includes a disproportionate number of inhabitants of bigger cities and better educated people. For instance, the research conducted by Paweł Starosta (1995) in small Polish towns and villages in the early 1990s revealed a relatively strong and frequently expressed identifications with local communities.

Can it, therefore, be simply said that the thesis is an over-interpretation of empirical data? The answer of the disciples of Nowak would be that the thesis was not only grounded in this single empirical result, but it was also an effect of interpretation of other survey data (especially the ones about students of Warsaw), and – what is most important – that it was an outcome of the sociological intuition of Nowak (Grabowska, Sułek 1992: 25–26). In this line of interpretation, the data gathered among the youth and parents from Kielce and Warsaw was just an inspiration to form a thesis about the Polish society. The thesis then should be understood as not grounded in particular empirical research but in kind of a synthetic wisdom about Polish society. Nowak, according to this interpretation, thanks to his intuition, was able to grasp the atmosphere of the 1970s in communist Poland.

There is some irony in the "brilliant intuition" interpretation of Nowak's thesis. After all, he was a methodological positivist, who claimed that statements on the society needed to be grounded in empirical data and expressed in the language of operationalized notions. It is possible to assume that Nowak was right to ignore the identifications with colleagues from the workplace and school, as well as acquaintances from the neighborhood, because the category "colleagues from the workplace and school" was understood by Nowak's team as "narrow circle of

well and very well known persons" (Szawiel 1989: 206). According to this interpretation, this category was not considered as a middle-range category, but just as another small/primal group on the micro-level of potential identification. The acquaintances from the neighborhood could have been ignored as those pointed less often. Thus, there is a line of interpreting the thesis as valid on the ground of the assumptions and methods applied by survey-positivist paradigm. As the next step in tackling the empirical grounds for the sociological vacuum thesis, I will deal with the methodological assumptions behind it.

As I have already written in the section on Nowak's program of sociology, this approach belongs to groupist sociology seeing in social groups central social structures. In this approach, a group is constituted when its members feel the bond with the group. The group is a category of social consciousness, so if it is not noticed or recognized by respondents as important or meaningful, it does not have consequences for social processes. This line of thinking is not a simple effect of the questionnaire technique application. In survey research it is still possible to ask questions about simple behaviors and, after constructing indexes, to find something about variables which are not recognized by respondents. Yet, the subjects of Nowak's research were attitudes and values, and their direct expression by members of society.

This is another possible line of interpretation: the sociological vacuum thesis is an artifact of methodology applied. Behind this methodology there is a certain social ontology according to which social groups are the most important social structures. The survey methodology of research of attitudes and values does not allow to grasp social practices on the low level of consciousness, or social structures that might be crucial for the social processes but are not noticed, or are regarded as not important. In this line of critique, authors like Morawski (2010) and Rychard (2010) pointed that a workplace in communist Poland could not have been an object of people's positive identifications, yet it had been an important institution organizing social life. Similarly, Kamiński (1992) claimed that the institution organizing social life which was overlooked by Nowak was the Catholic Church, which needed to be considered not only as provider of services to spiritual needs but also an institutional platform for socializing. This institutional line of critique may be extended by other structures mentioned in Chapter 2. Similarly, the method applied by Nowak could not grasp ties and larger networks connecting people discussed in Chapter 3 and highlighted in Janine R. Wedel's (1992b) critique.

In the comparison of Poland's subjective social structure to the subjective social structures of other societies, it can be noticed that Nowak had in mind a

certain model of the way in which the society should be structured. According to this model, a "healthy" society should be characterized by vivid social groups of various ranges built on strong bonds. It is not clear why Nowak believed that the social organization of other societies looked in such a way. He pointed to the vacuum as a peculiarity of Polish society but without making an actual comparison to other societies. Wedel (1992b) noticed that this is an effect of a typical positivist way of thinking which assumes a certain model of society and tests whether the collected data fits this model. What is more, as pointed out by Starosta (1995), the concern with the lack of intermediary structures was not something new and typical for Poland, and was expressed for the first time in USA by William Kornhauser (1960) in his thesis on the loss of community.

As it can be seen, the thesis on the sociological vacuum is strongly embedded in the positivist survey approach to sociology represented by Nowak. The objective social structure of Poland was according to him the same as in other industrialized societies, yet the subjective social structure represented by the feeling of belonging to certain social groups was considered problematic. What needs to be highlighted is the simple truth that the vacuum in a subjective social structure is a problematic issue, if the theory assumes that subjective structures are of significance. The problem of the sociological vacuum is a consequence of certain theoretical and methodological assumptions. If these are recognized as irrelevant or wrong, the thesis loses its validity or might be considered as an artifact of a certain methodology.

The thesis of Nowak started its own life, when other authors began to apply it in their works. The detailed discussions on the four subject domains are present in the next chapters, however here I would like to make some general remarks on the way the thesis was used by other scholars. It is important to notice that the uses of Nowak's thesis were transforming the original thesis (Pawlak 2015; 2016). There are two types of transformations I have found in the review of literature citing the thesis: shift in meaning and selective application. In the first type of transformation, the thesis was not treated as a thesis on weak level of identifications with intermediary structures but as a thesis on the weakness of these structures. In extreme cases of shifting the meaning, the thesis was treated as saying that there are no structures on the intermediary level at all. I am convinced that shift in meaning is a misinterpretation of the sociological vacuum thesis. Nowak never claimed that the structures itself are weak or non- existent. He actually said that the objective social structure in Poland is similar to the ones in other industrialized societies (Nowak 1979b: 160), although he believed that intermediary level structures (like organizations) are alienating their participants.

Moreover, many authors citing Nowak's thesis not only shift its meaning but also apply it selectively by ignoring the identification with the Polish nation. In that way the thesis is treated as a thesis on atomization, which is also not consistent with Nowak's intentions. The element of identifying with the nation was important for the thesis, and Nowak treated it as a sign of rejecting the alienating, authoritarian state.

4.6 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have described the context in which the thesis on the sociological vacuum was developed by Stefan Nowak. I analyzed the assumptions of his survey-positivist sociology, its social ontology and, consequences of use of its techniques. After a presentation of the thesis, I discussed the possible interpretations of its status. I claim that the thesis on Poland's sociological vacuum may be considered in the following four ways: (1) as a valid empirical statement grounded in survey-positivist paradigm of sociology; (2) as an invalid statement deduced by the rule of thumb from the empirical results that could be interpreted in an opposite way; (3) as brilliant intuition, relatively loosely grounded in empirical data but providing important message about Polish society; (4) as an artifact of the used method.

The sociology of Nowak, and the sociological vacuum thesis in particular, are good examples of the key tension between local engagement and international academic excellence, which – according to Marta Bucholc (2016) – has been troubling sociologists in Poland. Nowak imported to Poland survey methodology which at the times was considered as sophisticated, and pursued a positivistic, universally valid program of sociology as a science. Yet, his methodology handbooks are now out of fashion, and due to the technological development of computational capabilities of quantitative data analysis his empirical works are also outdated. Ironically, the only aspect of his work which is still not disputed and continues to be seen by some as current is the thesis of dubious methodological status and clearly local validity. Still, the thesis is very often repeated with a shifted meaning and an omitted national component.

The thesis on the sociological vacuum has consequences for the understanding of the relations between the micro- and macro-levels of society. In the sociology of Nowak, the micro-level consists of individuals and small groups based on face-to-face contacts. The macro-level includes the largest groups covering the society, which in Nowak's reasoning equals nation. The problem signaled by the thesis is the lack of something in the middle: the lack of meso-structures capable to link individuals and primary groups with the society. The test for the thesis

on the sociological vacuum and the whole survey-positivist paradigm came in August 1980 when the workers of the shipyard in Gdańsk initiated large-scale mass protests and called into life the Solidarność movement. The question of Solidarność's relevance to the problem of the micro-macro link in sociology is the subject of the next chapter.

5 Solidarność: how atomized individuals mobilized as a social movement?

5.1 Introduction

There were several episodes of social unrest in the history of the communist rule in Poland that took place in 1956, 1968, 1970, and 1976. Yet, the protests of summer 1980 and the following emergence of the social movement institutionalized in the form of the trade union Solidarność were the longest, engaged the largest number of people, and had the strongest political implications. The scale of these implications continues to be discussed to this day. In some narratives, Solidarność plays the key role in dismantling the communist system in Eastern Europe, but even in other – much more modest approaches – the movement and its formation is regarded as influencing political life in Poland even today.

The rise of Solidarność, or the period of Solidarność's "carnival"[33] in 1980 and 1981, is an extremely interesting period for Polish social sciences and historiography. The protests brought international focus on Poland, which also resulted in sociological interpretations of the phenomenon. The most often used frame is the one of social movements, but other interpretive frames have also been used. As Elżbieta Ciżewska (2010a) summarized, the other accounts are: Solidarność as a working-class protest; Solidarność as a revolution; religiosity of Solidarność; Solidarność as a national insurrection; Solidarność as a civil society; and political philosophy of Solidarność's republicanism. I will return to these accounts in the following sections of this chapter. This list of framings is apparently not a classification but rather a typology of themes found by scholars as central and then used by them to frame the events of 1980 and 1981 as meaningful. Some of the threads present in those different frames are accounted in others, but as less salient or in different configurations. It is especially the frame of civil society that continues to come back whenever scholars consider Solidarność's roots of civil society in Poland after 1989 (this topic is going to be discussed in detail in

---

33 "Carnival" is the term used by the participants of the 1980–1981 Solidarność mobilization to describe the special and unusual atmosphere of this time.

Chapter 6). The social movement approach is, in my opinion, the most relevant to the issue of the sociological vacuum. The often rhetorically stated question which appeared in the sociology of Solidarność was: How is it possible that such a strong social movement emerged in a society suffering from a vacuum?

The chapter is organized as follows. First, I start with a brief reconstruction of the events of 1980 and 1981 when the Solidarność social movement was active in Poland. The next section discusses how scholars associated the sociological vacuum with Solidarność. In this section I discuss mainly two issues: how the mechanism of filling the vacuum by the social movement was perceived, and how the emergence of the social movement was perceived as the falsification of the thesis on the sociological vacuum. The following section presents insights from various works on Solidarność which are in coherence with theories providing robust solutions to the micro-macro problem. The chapter is concluded by the summary in which, I point to the fact that the thesis on the sociological vacuum was mostly used when authors were attempting to explain the phenomenon of Solidarność in a metaphysical way.

5.2 The outburst of Solidarność: the most interesting event in Polish social history

In this section I will concentrate on reconstructing the actual events that took place in 1980 and 1981. I find it important because the mythological and even metaphysical narratives about Solidarność are very much present in discourses on it. This includes also debates in social sciences. The following reconstruction is based mostly on the work of Antoni Dudek (2010).[34] On the 1st of July 1980 the communist government raised the prices of meat products in factory canteens. This triggered protests in factories located in various cities. The atmosphere in Poland this summer was hot. On August 14, workers of the shipyard in Gdańsk decided to go on strike to protest against dismissing one of their colleagues. Their postulates were not only of an economical character, but they also included building the statue of shipyarders murdered in protests that took place in December 1970. On the next day, other enterprises and public transportation

---

34 I am conscious that it is impossible to describe only the facts and that every historical narration contains an interpretation of events, also formed by the genre used (White 1973). Yet, it is necessary to start from some description focusing on the events. As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, many considerations on Solidarność and years 1980 and 1981 in Poland are either full of metaphysical pathos, or omit events recognizing the timeline as something obvious for the readers who have somehow witnessed them.

in Gdańsk agglomeration also went on strike. On the third day of the strike, the management of the shipyard decided to set a bargain with striking workers. The leaders of the strike decided to terminate the protest, but under the pressure of workers from other enterprises, already present in the shipyard, finally the protest was not ceased. According to Antoni Dudek (2010: 15), this was the first turning point in the formation of the mass movement. On the following night, a committee coordinating the protest action among various enterprises was created, leading to the announcement of the list of 21 postulates (many of them were of political and not economical character, including the postulate to create trade unions independent from communist party supervision). This meant that the protest became a coordinated action of workers from various establishments. In the following days, workers in other cities went on strike using the same practice of coordinating strikes in various enterprises and announcing similar postulates. On the August 20th, 64 intellectuals (mostly from Warsaw) issued an open letter to the government, in which they insisted on negotiating with workers. Following the announcement of the letter, the group of so-called "experts" came from Warsaw to support the workers in their negotiations. On August 31, deputy prime minister Jagielski and the leader of the strikers, Lech Wałęsa, signed an agreement accepting 21 postulates of the protesters. The Gdańsk agreement became a starting point for the negotiations in other protesting cities, but also for the creation of self-organized workers' structures, similar to those in Gdańsk, in cities in which there had previously been no strikes.

On September 17, the representatives of workers' commissions from 20 cities gathered in Gdańsk and made the decision to create a trade union (Gdańsk agreement of August 31 guaranteed the workers the right to establish a trade union) uniting the emerging organizations from the whole country, organized on the basis of regional branches.[35] Then, also in September, similar self-organized trade-unions were created also by farmers and university students. The growth of Solidarność's structures was impressive – in the middle of October 1980 there were already between two and three million members in 2,600 enterprises and 60 workers' commissions on the city level (Dudek 2010: 21; cfr. Włodek 1992: 122). The following period was the time of Solidarność's growth and consolidation as an actor capable of initiating coordinated actions, such as threatening the government to set a strike stopping enterprises all over the country on the same day.

---

35 As Antoni Dudek (2010: 19–20) notes, this division was the idea of the protesters, who realized that their actions are more effective if they are coordinated on the level of cities and regions, and not on the level of industry sectors.

The leaders of Solidarność were negotiating with the communist government about implementation of their agreements.

According to Dudek (2010: 27), the peak of Solidarność's growth was the so-called "Bydgoszcz crisis" in March 1981, following the beating of the local trade union leaders calling for a formal registration of the farmers' union. The use of violence against Solidarność activists alerted the members of movement in the whole country, and the leaders became ready to organize a nationwide strike. Finally, the crisis situation was resolved without going on strike.

September and October 1981 were the period of the First National Congress of Solidarność, which was held in Gdańsk. For the sake of organizing the elections of delegates to the congress, the number of trade union members was counted: 9,476,584 were eligible to vote and 94% voted for delegates (Kaliski 2011: 18). Thanks to this count, Solidarność leaders were able to say that they represented an organization of 10 million members – the number which got well granted in the memory of the movement. During the congress, the leadership of the trade union was consolidated and Lech Wałęsa was elected as its president. Another outcome of the congress was the release of the document entitled "Samorządna Rzeczpospolita" [A Self-governing Republic], which was the program of the movement. During the congress "Posłanie do ludzi pracy Europy Wschodniej" [Message to Workers of Eastern Europe] was also announced, which angered the leaders of communist parties in other states of the Soviet Bloc. It needs to be remarked that during the congress, Red Army organized the largest war games since World War II (Dudek 2010: 29). More or less direct threats of this kind from the Soviet Union were present during the whole period of Solidarność's carnival.

On December 13, 1981, general Jaruzelski, who at the time was holding three key functions in the state – the first secretary of United Party of Polish Workers, the Prime Minister, and the Commander-in-chief of the Army – introduced martial law throughout the country. Approximately five thousand Solidarność leaders became "prisoners of war." Major enterprises went on strike in order to protest against the introduction of martial law and arrests of the movement's leaders. The strikes were brutally pacified and another thousands of protesters were arrested. Some of the leaders of Solidarność were not caught by the secret police and started underground activities. Yet, the martial law was an end of the open, mass-scale actions of the social movement. In this chapter I am focusing on sociological interpretations of period between summer 1980 and December 13, 1981, so the rest of the events of the late 1980s, which lead to Round Table Talks and the elections of June 4th of 1989 are not described here.

5.3 A movement fulfilling the vacuum? Solidarność as a problem for sociology of Polish society

Nowak's thesis is intrinsically bound with the history of the Solidarność movement for at least three reasons. First, as it was formulated shortly before the famous August 1980 strikes, it was almost automatically added to the descriptions of Polish society before this turning point. Secondly, some sociologists who observed, or even engaged, in the social movement needed to come to terms with the contradiction between the pessimistic bias of the thesis and the optimistic evaluation of the 1980 events in Poland. Thirdly, Nowak himself was engaged in commenting on the evolving situation from the theoretical angle he had only just launched. In his English-written paper, "Values and Attitudes of Polish Society" (Nowak 1981: 53), he stated that although he had not yet gathered empirical data, from his observation of everyday life he could infer that Solidarność was starting to fill in the vacuum.

I thoroughly analyzed the works, where Nowak's thesis was brought up in relation to Solidarność. Two main questions stand out: How was it possible for such a large and vibrant social movement to emerge in a society affected by a sociological vacuum? The second question is a closely related one: Does the emergence of Solidarność contradict, or at least limit, the applicability of Nowak's hypothesis? The former question is related to the often-repeated statement that Polish sociology was unable to predict the social anxiety of the times and the rise of Solidarność.

Sociologists had difficulties with answering the above questions. Sociology at this time in Poland was indeed unable to forecast the mass mobilization and emergence of the movement like Solidarność (Sułek 2011).[36] Even Nowak suggested that the application of regular survey methodology would be unable to explain the 1980 events: "There are important concepts that are not easily measured by batteries of indicators but that nonetheless are necessary for the proper understanding of some social situations. One cannot understand the events in Poland without reference to restored human dignity" (Nowak 1981: 53). When discussing this aspect, Marek Latoszek states that survey research on workers was mainly providing a "crippled" picture, and that the grasping of social processes was only possible thanks to biographical methods (1995). In a similar vein, Ireneusz Krzemiński (1992) pointed out that the survey methodology and the model of attitudes applied by Nowak were not capable of explaining the

---

36 The theoretical assumptions and methodology of Polish mainstream sociology of the 1970s are discussed in previous Chapter 4.

phenomenon of Solidarność. According to Krzemiński, the sociological analysis of Solidarność needed also insights from more interpretative and more qualitative paradigms than the positivist survey sociology of Stefan Nowak.

5.3.1 What was the mechanism of Solidarność filling up the vacuum?

The vacuum itself is a term taken from the physics. As Jakub Motrenko (2017: 132–133) showed in his work on Stefan Nowak's school of sociology, the author often referred to other "mechanical" notions, such as "set of free particles," "gas mixture," "laws of psychosocial diffusion," "force of suction," "compressed spring," or "aggregated social energy." In following paragraphs, I discuss how not only physical but also metaphysical explanations were adopted in order to find the connections between Solidarność and the conception of the sociological vacuum.

Thus, the descriptions of the emergence of Solidarność that make use of the concept of the sociological vacuum are more rhetorical than explanatory in nature. The idea of Solidarność bursting from out of the vacuum (Wnuk-Lipiński 1994: 16), and similar accounts depicting how the social movement filled the social void, employ a metaphysical tone – the trade union is called a "treasure" (Matynia 2001), or frustration "is turning into action" (Amsterdamska 1987: 281).

These works were written post factum – not trying to interpret the events of the day as did Nowak (1981) in his paper for *Scientific American* – yet the authors were not explaining the mechanism of filling up the vacuum by Solidarność. Solidarność – somehow miraculously – emerged, and the vacuum became filled. These remarks are linked with open evaluations of social affairs of the times: Poland of the 1970s, doomed by the vacuum, was evaluated negatively, yet the Solidarność movement was evaluated very positively and with enthusiasm.

Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński (1982) coined the concepts of "dimorphism of values" and "social schizophrenia" as present in Poland. According to him, the sociological vacuum is one of the elements connected to these phenomena. Also in this work, Wnuk-Lipiński struggles to explain how in a society suffering from a vacuum, dimorphism of values, and schizophrenia it was possible for the social movement of Solidarność's strength to emerge. In connection to the ideas of Wnuk-Lipiński, Paweł Rojek (2009: 100–101) in his thorough review of the literature on Solidarność and Poland in the 1970s and 1980s claimed that the sociological vacuum was caused not by a social anomie, but by the dimorphism of values, and the fact that formal institutions were not responding to the needs of people. When the communist government allowed people to organize, the identities also emerged – this mechanism could be described by the physical metaphor of vacuum's "force of suction" (Nowak 1984: 428).

114

Writing his remarks also nearly during the time of the Solidarność protests, Józef Figa (1982: 129) referred to the thesis on the sociological vacuum saying that formal organizations were not the base for social identifications, but the vacuum was filled with informal social groups. These groups lead to the formation of political opposition, such as Komitet Obrony Robotników (KOR) [Workers' Defence Committee] and later Solidarność. Thus, Solidarność was built thanks to the existence of informal social structures.

There was also the question concerning the reasons of the sociological vacuum's existence. According to Janina Frentzel-Zagórska, who analyzed survey data on values, working in a very similar field as Stefan Nowak, the sociological vacuum was created by the communist regime which was controlling all forms of social organization and was responsible for instilling fear of being active in the public sphere. When Edward Gierek, the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party in the years 1970–1980, loosened social control, the vacuum started to become filled, which resulted with the emergence of Solidarność (Frentzel-Zagórska 1985: 87–88).

In the debate about the condition of Polish society in the 1970s, Aleksander Matejko noted that the sociological vacuum was filled by the Catholic Church, the most powerful organization not controlled by the communist regime. Matejko (1986: 104) also pointed that the spontaneous development of Solidarność contributed to filling the vacuum, yet he did not explain the mechanism in which Solidarność managed to do so.

In her analysis of women's position in the Solidarność movement, Renata Siemieńska (1989) used the sociological vacuum as a frame to understand the barriers for articulating women's interests in the movement. In her view, women's strong identifications with the family was to blame. Yet, as Ewa Malinowska (2001) pointed out, the sociological vacuum provided not only the micro-level identification with the social role of a mother (family), but also the macro-level identification with the nation, which together matched the strongly embedded in Polish culture archetype of "Matka Polka."[37] In consequence, the Solidarność movement contributed to the future subjectitification of women's feminist identification.

Next to the Solidarność trade union, there was also Solidarność of Individual Farmers, organized in 1981. According to Krzysztof Gorlach (1990: 131), it was created as a manifestation of the class consciousness emerging from people of

---

37 The direct translation of the expression describing this archetype embedded in Polish culture would be "Mother Pole." Yet, it is one of the expressions which do not have a reference in other languages. It has its roots in the culture of Polish romanticism and symbolizes the Polish patriotic mother (Szerszunowicz 2013).

this social category. The sociological vacuum became filled when peasants of individualistic values started to realize that they, as a group, had a common class interest, and that the Solidarność of Individual Farmers was the subject expressing those interests. For constituting of this subject, the national and religious symbols were very important.

The process of filling the vacuum was also analyzed by Michael D. Kennedy (1991), who stated that its beginning lay in the negative identification with the communist government, which was rejected by many Poles. This negative identity was transformed into a positive, common identification after pope John Paul II's visit in Poland in 1979. This identification built the ground for the Solidarność movement, which eventually filled the sociological vacuum (Kennedy 1991: 44). Kennedy's analysis is based on his reading of Polish authors writing on Solidarność. It is another expression of the very popular narrative on the emergence of Solidarność, in which the visit of John Paul II is the key moment in creating a collective actor of the Polish society. Very similar remarks were also repeated by Geneviève Zubrzycki (2006).

The concept of filling the vacuum is an often-expressed metaphor used in the descriptions of the rise of the Solidarność movement. The same concept, however, is also used in narratives which describe these events in metaphysical terms. Lech Mażewski (1995: 214) writes about the vacuum which was the cause of Solidarność's emergence, and became filled with Solidarność. The process was not described by Mażewski in details, and because of this it resembles quotations from the Old Testament. The metaphysical, or nearly biblical language used in descriptions of Solidarność might be treated as a sign of the special meaning of the 1980–1981 events for their analysts, who often could not find neutral language to express their relation to Solidarność. Polish authors (and also many foreign ones) were either engaged in the movement or at least supported it.

A similar rhetoric was used by Waldemar Kuczyński – one of the experts assisting protesters during the strike in Gdańsk shipyard in August 1980 – who in one of his essays, stated that the filling of the vacuum was an outcome of the need to widen the field of the expression, and since Solidarność was a tool of self-expression, it quickly mobilized ten million people (Kuczyński 1996: 13). This passage is of an enormously convincing power, yet mostly because of the applied rhetoric. Kuczyński does not explain how the need of expression became transformed into social mobilization, and how it enabled the emergence of a mass social movement.

Arista Cirtautas (1997: 162) stated that Polish society, living under the conditions of the sociological vacuum, became fragmented, which was a factor that inhibited the formation of opposition movements ready to resist the communist

government. The sociological vacuum became filled as a result of Karol Wojtyła's election as the pope, and the emergence of the opposition elites after the 1976, which together contributed to the emergence of Solidarność. Again, this description provides only a rhetorical explanation of the social process under consideration.

As Ryszard Kozioł (2004: 199) claimed, the leaders of the Solidarność movement were aware of the existence of the sociological vacuum, and had a similar intuition as Stefan Nowak about the condition of society in Poland. According to Kozioł, the leaders of Solidarność were intentionally steering the movement in order to fill the vacuum. The evidence for this claim is the interview with Bronisław Geremek (1981) conducted during the First National Congress of Solidarność in October 1981, in which he described the objective of the Solidarność program – "A Self-Governing Republic" – as filling a vacuum, which is dangerous for the Polish society.

The theme of Solidarność is often seen as convergent with a different topic Polish sociology has been stubbornly tackling since the second half of the 1980s: civil society. This term, however, was not originally used to describe Solidarność, whose program was in fact entitled "A Self-Governing Republic" (Załęski 2010). Later on, the sociological vacuum, Solidarność, and civil society often started to become linked in the narratives of historical events: The 1970s were a time of the sociological vacuum, Solidarność emerged in 1980, and subsequently, civil society started to develop in Poland.

Dorota Mokrosińska (2012), speaking from the perspective of political philosophy, stated that Polish society was returning to the state of nature and the sociological vacuum was one of the symptoms of this process. Solidarność emerged when people started to demand civil justice and, according to Mokrosińska, it was a political organization driven mostly by the will of reinstating this civil justice in Poland.

Research on Solidarność does not concern only the movement as such – there were also studies conducted on the way the movement is remembered. Susan C. Pearce (2009) reconstructed, after Elżbieta Matynia (2001), the narrative on Solidarność filling the sociological vacuum. In Pearce's view, the sociological vacuum is coming back and manifests itself by repressing the memory of Solidarność to the private sphere – the one built on family ties.

For authors focusing on the absence of certain expected elements at the intermediary level, the question of the way it was possible for Solidarność to appear in such conditions remains an open one. Still, taking the national-identity element into account (as in Mikołaj Cześnik's work) is quite helpful in explaining

the success of Solidarność, which was built around a strong, unifying national affection (Cześnik 2008a: 44).

5.3.2 Did Solidarność falsify the thesis on the sociological vacuum?

In the previous section I have presented how authors were struggling with the emergence of Solidarność in conditions of the sociological vacuum, which – according to the assumptions of this conception – were more repressive for larger scale social organizations than small, primary groups. Hence, some authors seem to pose the following question: If Solidarność indeed filled the sociological vacuum, but it is difficult to explain how it happened, could it be that Nowak's interpretation of this phenomenon might be inaccurate? In this section I move to the works which attempted to use the emergence of Solidarność as evidence of falsifying the thesis.

The authors discussed above pointed to the strong role of the Polish Catholic Church in filling the sociological vacuum (Cirtautas 1997; Gorlach 1990; Kennedy 1991; Matejko 1986). A similar statement was made also by Mirosława Grabowska (2004: 57), who stated that the sociological vacuum was filled by the Catholic Church, working together with Solidarność. The argument of the Catholic Church's salience for social life in Poland was used by Antoni Z. Kamiński (1992: 253), who claimed that the emergence of Solidarność would not have been possible if the sociological vacuum had actually existed. Kamiński believed that organized religion in Poland, and especially regular social participation in religious rituals, were responsible for building the ties of trust and community – an aspect neglected by Stefan Nowak, who claimed that religion answers only to the private needs of individuals. According to Kamiński, these ties eventually enabled other forms of participation in collective life. This line of reasoning suggests that omitting the role of the Catholic Church by Nowak was a flaw in his thesis. Solidarność was not built by direct usage of organizational strength of Catholic Church in Poland, yet religious symbolism and rituals – which, like common prayers, visible especially in the shipyard of Gdańsk, brought people together – were cultural tools habitually used by protesters. In this way, Solidarność revealed something that Stefan Nowak regarded as not important.

Witold Morawski (2010: 106) and Andrzej Rychard (2010: 449) pointed to the importance of workplaces, especially the large communist enterprises, which were not taken into account by Stefan Nowak. Enterprises in communist Poland were not just places of employment – they were institutions organizing many aspects of social life. Solidarność took an organizational form of a trade union and used the structures built in enterprises. The subsequent bringing of

118

enterprises together was key to the emergence of the Solidarność movement.[38] Thus, Solidarność's reliance on the organizational structures of workplaces can be seen as undermining Nowak's thesis on the sociological vacuum, in which their role was neglected.

There were also authors who noted that the case of Solidarność reveals the historical nature of Nowak's thesis. The point was made by two of his disciples, who claimed that the validity of the thesis was limited to Poland of the 1970s, and the actual intention of Nowak was to provoke a discussion, and not to deliver universal truths about Polish society (Grabowska, Sułek 1992: 25–26). Another interpretation in the discussion on the validity of the sociological vacuum thesis was given by Ireneusz Krzemiński (1992). Krzemiński, in order to "rescue" Nowak's general description of society, decided to modify the model of attitudes by adding the concepts of meta-attitudes and latent cultural patterns. This modification of Nowak's perspective, inspired by symbolic interactionism and psychoanalysis, was meant to enable an explanation of Solidarność. Yet, Krzemiński's reflections provided only general directions on how to encompass the phenomenon of a vacuum and Solidarność in one theoretical model. The line of Krzemiński's reasoning hints to look for structures which are not noticed or not recognized as important by actors themselves, but may be crucial for facilitating a collective action. The line of rescuing Nowak's hypothesis might be called, according to his positivist views on sociology, the operation of hypothesis specification. Grabowska and Sułek (1992) specified the hypothesis by limiting its historical scope, while Krzemiński (1992) specified it by including some additional variables to the model.

5.4 Towards sociological explanations of Solidarność: how are atoms linked into a society?

In this section, I point to the analyses of Solidarność, which took into consideration the objects of sociological inquiry I have highlighted in the first part of the

---

38 It should not be forgotten that Stefan Nowak decided not to consider workplaces as salient objects of identification on the basis of the rule of thumb: In his research, 48% of respondents in Warsaw and 46% of respondents in Kielce pointed to their colleagues from the workplace as a category of identification. This identification was actually stronger than the one felt with Polish nation – 43% in Warsaw and 40% in Kielce, respectively (see Chapter 4). Thus, even according to Nowak's data and his way of thinking about society, there was "something" about the workplace that made it significant. Nevertheless, this data became interpreted as data on close and rather intimate relations.

book (see Chapters 2 and 3) as promising in linking micro- and macro-levels of analysis – namely organizational relations and social networks. I do not provide an exhausting review of the literature on Solidarność, as it would require an enormous effort: Solidarność is righteously a very developed field of studies of many Polish sociologists and historians. The objective of this section is not to describe all the possible avenues of studying the Solidarność movement, but to point to selected research where the structures linking micro- and macro-levels of analysis have been included.

A very comprehensive review of literature on Solidarność was presented by Elżbieta Ciżewska (2010a) in her study on the public philosophy of this social movement. According to Ciżewska, in literature there are seven ways in which Solidarność is analyzed: as a workers' upsurge; as a revolution; as a product of Polish religiousness; focusing on religious aspects of the movement; as a national uprising; as a civil society; as a social movement; and as a voice of republican political philosophy. These approaches of analyzing Solidarność are not mutually exclusive, and were combined by a number of authors in their studies.

David Ost (1990), in his study of Polish opposition and its use of anti-politics as a political tool, claimed that reconstruction of social ties beyond the control of the communist state was already an act of opposing this state. Ost (1990: 66) referred to the provocative statements made by Jacek Kuroń, who claimed that people who engaged in social activities became members of the opposition movement without actually knowing it. This brings up the issue of the connection between Solidarność and civil society, which in more details will be explored in Chapter 6. Here, I am more interested in investigating social structures which might have been helpful for the emergence of Solidarność, building on Kuroń's assumption that all forms of social activity, as building patterns of relations between people (be it some form of network or even organization), have the potential for opposing the authoritarian state.

In her reflections on how Polish sociologists had been interpreting Solidarność, Joanna Kurczewska (2006a: 283) noted that Solidarność was analyzed on three levels of aggregation: macro, meso, and micro. According to her, macro-level and micro-level approaches were the dominating ones. Kurczewska explained it with the predominant interest of Polish sociologists with macro-processes and the revitalization of micro-sociological studies of identities and discourses which started in the 1980s. Kurczewska pointed at an important gap in the research, although her proposal on the way of filling it is not fully satisfactory: Kurczewska's understood the meso in a quite straightforward way – as something larger than the level of interactions and identities of individuals, but something smaller

than the level of society. Then she proposed to focus more research on regions (important element of Solidarność's organizational structure) and local manifestations of civil society.[39]

The frame of social movement in the interpretation of Solidarność was set very early by Alain Touraine and his team who in 1981 conducted a research using methodology of sociological intervention (Touraine et at. 1983). The approach of Touraine was focusing on collective action and simultaneously rejecting the survey methodology, which he saw as suitable for analysis of individual behaviors, not collective actions (Touraine et al. 1983: 6). In sociological intervention, the research is done in cooperation of social movement members gathered in small groups. The researcher discusses with them the movement, and its goals and policy, which allows him or her to observe the group's dynamics. Yet, such an approach to the micro-macro link is undertheorized. Touraine's team took part in meetings of six groups of movement members placed relatively low in the organizational structure of the union.[40] The approximate size of the groups was ten members. Surely, the researchers were able to observe the dynamics of the small-size group discussion and they could understand the meaning attached by individuals to the collective action of movement, yet this was still an analysis of micro-level interactions which served to interpret a macro-level entity – a movement which, according to the interpretation of Touraine et al. (1983: 59–60), aimed at winning over the Polish nation.

Touraine and his French collaborators perceived Polish society as an integrated whole with short social distances: "Compared with pre-war Poland, Communist Poland is indeed a more socially and culturally integrated country, and the French observer is struck by the relatively small social distance between the major professional groups" (Touraine et al. 1983: 59). This remark is interesting as it contrasts with the lament of Stefan Nowak on the Polish society being a federation of primary groups. There are two reasons for this opposition in interpretations: space and time.

In regards to space, as I have written in the Chapter 4, Stefan Nowak made a comparison without an actual reference point: he compared the state of affairs in Poland with abstract – not specific – industrial societies. Touraine, however, compared Polish and French societies and observed (still, it is important to keep

---

39 The call for more focus on regional and local aspects of Solidarność goes in hand with Kurczewska's research program of sociology of localness (Kurczewska 2006b).

40 It is worth mentioning that some of the research collaborators of Touraine were sociologists from the circle of Stefan Nowak.

in mind that it was just his speculation) more social integration and smaller social distances between occupational groups in Poland.

In regards to time, Nowak came to his conclusions in the 1970s, while Touraine visited Poland in 1981, in the period of Solidarność's carnival, which was the period when Nowak also claimed that the vacuum was being filled. The social atmosphere of 1981 (enthusiastic) and 1970s (full of resignation) was very different and guiding towards opposite interpretations of reality.

Adam Mielczarek (2011) claimed that Touraine's interpretation of Solidarność was not very useful. The main point of Mielczarek's critique was that the assumption about the movement's homogeneity was erroneous. According to him, the key to understanding Solidarność was its heterogeneous character, so it was more reasonable to use various theoretical frameworks on social movements as complementary rather than competitive approaches. According to Mielczarek's review of the literature, the success of Solidarność was built thanks to several factors: spontaneous mobilization of the people at the beginning of the movement, networks and resources of movement managers, the convenient organizational form of a trade union, and the cognitive framing "we versus them" ("we" meaning "the nation," and "them" – communist authorities). All interpretations which attribute the success of Solidarność only to one of those factors are wrong. As Mielczarek notices, this tendency to monocausal explanations is sometimes an outcome of the perspective applied by the researcher. If a researcher focuses on the regular members of the movement, then the bottom-up approach seems to be natural. If he or she focuses on the movement leaders, or on the organizational form, then the top-down approach seems to be natural. The bottom-up approach highlights elements like spontaneity, community, authenticism, or expression of self, while the top-down approach highlights the political aspects of the movement or its organizational aspects. Mielczarek opposes this division and calls for the integration of approaches in studies of Solidarność, claiming that various approaches might be better in interpreting different phases of movement (Mielczarek identifies the 1970s opposition as the beginning of the movement, and post 1981 underground Solidarność as its late phase), but none of them offers the full interpretation of the whole. Thus, there is a need for including resource mobilization theories, like the one focused on structures and patterns of relations, and the cognitive theories, more focused on symbols and identities. There is a need for combining the perspective which understands the movement participants' need for self-fulfillment with the perspective analyzing managers of the movement using networks, organizations, and cultural resources in order to achieve certain political objectives. Similarly to Mielczarek, Ciżewska (2010b)

claims that one theoretical approach to study Solidarność is not enough to understand the complexity of the movement. In her opinion, various aspects of the movement's formation require insights from traditional social movement studies, theories of new movements, the resource mobilization theory, and studies of collective emotions.

Roman Laba (1991), interested in Solidarność mostly as working-class protest, pointed to the organizational and communicational infrastructure used by workers to foster collective action. He stressed the conditions of informational black-out in which Solidarność was formed. Television, radio, as well as paper media were under the control of the state. The mass spread of information was possible only thanks to Radio Free Europe and BBC, and later through the weekly *Tygodnik Solidarność*. Although Solidarność at its grassroots was built as "a movement of the spoken word" (Laba 1991: 129), the spoken word needed its carriers. Thus, during strikes, usually the first thing that protestors would do after taking over factories was seizing control over public address systems, telexes, polygraphy devices, and information boards. In this way, the protestors were able to spread their own political propaganda, for example, using the public address systems to play recordings from important meetings and speeches recorded during other protests or communicate with other striking factories through the use of telexes. The use of communication networks designed for government enterprises was certainly not the only way of spreading information, and Laba mentions also networks created by the opposition groups from the 1970s and simple "word of mouth" strategies. However, in the context of organizations and networks, the possibility of using the equipment of nearly all enterprises in Poland in 1980 was a crucial enhancer of collective action. This aspect is also highlighted by Maryjane Osa (2003: 179) because in addition to the role networks play in democracies, in authoritarian regimes (in the pre-internet era) they substitute for media and help spread uncensored news.

Still, it must be remembered that Laba drew far reaching conclusions from his analysis of the 1980 protests. According to him, Solidarność had an endogenous working-class-generated character (Laba 1991: 182) and was created thanks to the structures of the state, which tried to build the working class. Here, social class is a notion from the macro-level, potentially helpful for explaining Solidarność. In my opinion, however, social class as a wide heuristic might be inspiring to understand Solidarność, but the actual power of Laba's analysis lies in inspecting organizations and networks used by workers: the infrastructure of large and complex industrial organizations interconnected by a dense network of communication channels.

Osa (2003) analyzed the networks in the opposition domain, in which nodes were the organizations and ties were representing the co-membership of individuals in the organizations. To create her database, she used different historical sources, ranging from secret police materials to memoirs. Osa's study was influenced by social movement scholars such as Doug McAdam (1982), who listed three key factors for the emergence of a movement (political opportunity, organizational networks, and cultural framing) or David Snow, who was mostly developing the conception of cultural framings in study of social movements (see Benford, Snow 2000). As a result, Osa's study merged the structural (network) and cultural (cognitive) approaches to the mobilization of social movement. What is very important, Osa stressed how both of these approaches link the micro and the macro-levels of analysis. In cases of the structural approach, personal ties allow the micromobilization and recruitment, while interorganizatonal (or intergroup ties) allow macrocoordination (Osa 2003: 15). Similarly, frames are also used to the analysis on the level of micromobilization, where the collective action frames serve protesters to articulate their ideas, and on the level of macrocoordination, where master frames open a possibility of connecting various organizations and interests into one movement (Osa 2003; see Benford, Snow 2000).

Social networks are a structural base for social movements for at least five reasons: they are channels of information circulation; they allow the distribution of material resources; they expand the risk to the whole network, so the individual risk is reduced; the previous three elements make the emergence of collective identity more likely; at some point of expansion social networks become substitute of public sphere (Osa 2003: 15–16). In the 1970s, due to the less oppressive policies of Gierek, new groups and organizations began to emerge. Yet, what is important here, is that they were all connected, and the older (created in 1950s) catholic organizations of official status were anchoring this network (Osa 2003: 157). The dynamics of the network expansion in the course of the 1970s measured by Osa (2003) is simultaneous with the increase of network's integration: the more new groups and organizations opposing the communist regime were emerging, the more they were connected to each other.

According to Osa's (2003) network approach, the attempts to create political opposition in communist Poland were failing because of the isolation of groups. KOR created in 1976 was the first organization of a more developed structure and – what is important from the social network analysis perspective – having its branches in several large Polish cities. Osa (2003: 135) highlighted that from the perspective of creating super inclusive networks, the ideological ambiguity

of KOR was a good strategic decision, as it allowed to connect to the biggest possible number of groups emerging in the country.

The visit of John Paul II in Poland in 1979 is often described as an important symbolic turning point for the development of political opposition because it allowed people to realize how many of them there were (some events of the visit were broadcasted live on Polish television, and huge open masses were organized). Yet, from the organizational point of view, the important factor is that the public events during John Paul II's visit were organized by church authorities and parish volunteers (including crowd control). This ability for collective action and coordination demonstrated by organizations related to the Catholic Church in Poland should also be taken into consideration when discussing the grounds for forming the Solidarność movement one year later.[41]

In Osa's (2003) network interpretation, following the foundation of Solidarność as a trade union, the movement played a role of the hub in a network connecting organizations and smaller groups and individuals of various interests. The networks created by the opposition in the 1970s were a structural base for Solidarność's huge network allowing social mobilization (Osa 2003: 181). The hub through inter-organizational ties connected the already existing networks and allowed a massive recruitment of a new members. The structure of the network linked the individuals with a massive, nationwide movement. The emergence of the hub was also enabled thanks to the cultural mechanisms such as master frames, inclusive for all members of the movement.

It can therefore be said that in 1980, the network and organizational structures, necessary for the emergence of a social movement were already present. Another important resource for the social movement – the people – were present as well, and the number of the members (of more and less central position) of opposition networks was growing exponentially throughout the entire 1970s, increasing their skills and developing ties between the groups. The summer of 1980 brought the third element needed by the social movement to emerge on a large scale, according to McAdam's (1982) conceptualization: political opportunity. The increase of the prices in July 1980 triggered the protests, but without

---

41 The connection between pope's 1979 visit to Poland and the self-organization of catholic activists was also highlighted by Grzegorz Bakuniak and Krzysztof Nowak (1984). In the popular narrative about Solidarność, the 1979 visit is important mostly because of two reasons: its symbolic meaning and the massive participation of the people. Yet, a deeper sociological analysis has to point the fact that John Paul II's tour around Poland required an organization and coordination of many social actors.

the network and organizational infrastructure they would not have had a chance to reach such a large scale.

5.5 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have presented the struggles of sociology with the Solidarność movement which, particularly among Polish sociologists, evoked the conflicting feelings of love and hate. They loved it, because many of them saw it as an opportunity for Poland to become a better country, and engaged in the movement, or at least supported it. Yet, they also hated it, because it exposed the weaknesses of their discipline. As Antoni Sułek (2011) remarked, sociology was unable to forecast the social movement's emergence. The thesis on the sociological vacuum is a good illustration of the atmosphere of despair and resignation present in the late 1970s. Yet, the fact that the quite fresh thesis on the sociological vacuum got confronted with a new social situation most probably contributed to its popularity – there was a need for debating about it.

I started the chapter with a brief reconstruction of the events of the Solidarność carnival in the years 1980 and 1981. Then, I moved to the discussion of works in which the concept of the sociological vacuum was a concept used in the context of Solidarność. Some authors attempted at reconstructing the mechanism according to which the sociological vacuum was supposed to become filled up. I also presented the works whose authors stated that the emergence of Solidarność was an evidence that the thesis on the sociological vacuum was false.

Rhetorical explanations were often used in works citing the sociological vacuum in the context of Solidarność because of the lack of a good theory linking micro and macro. They were explaining the phenomenon of Solidarność (and its relations with the sociological vacuum), yet they did so only on the surface and did not show any of the causal connections between events or elements of the social setting. This rhetoric often resorted to physical (mechanical) allegories, as in the works of Stefan Nowak himself, or were even pursuing metaphysical narratives on Solidarność.

I believe the use of metaphysical rhetoric (sometimes engaging pathos) was caused by the fact that for many scholars analyzing Solidarność was a living and very important experience. I am writing this not to ridicule the authors who experienced the emotions connected with protests and felt that they are taking part in something very important, and at the same time were deeply concerned with the possible reactions of evil authoritarian government and its Soviet allies. Actually, I do envy this kind of experience. At the same time, I can skeptically assume that such strong experience may have blurred the analytical lenses of

126

researchers, who lost distance from their object of study. For some of the younger researchers who did not have this experience, the powerful myth built by the Solidarność generation might be difficult to digest – and this myth became deeply built in Polish culture, in general, and in Polish sociological field, in particular.

Some speculations of authors hinting to what was a possible falsification of the sociological vacuum thesis – for instance, the role of Catholic Church, highlighted by Kamiński (1992), or the role workplaces, highlighted by Morawski (2010) and Rychard (2010) – find stronger confirmation in studies focused on network and organizational structures behind the social movement of Solidarność. These structures were not noticed by scholars studying Solidarność directly during the events and in the short time after the events. In case of networks, at this time there was simply a lack of this kind conceptual tools in Polish social sciences. In case of organizations – such as workplaces – the conviction about their alienating role was obscuring their potential as resources for social action. Yet, what can be seen from the studies on Solidarność is that the role of social networks created in the 1970s and the possibility of using inter-organizational communication channels (like telex systems used for the communication between large communist enterprises) were crucial resource for collective action. It is certainly hard to notice social ties. First, one needs a theoretical framework taking into account their importance and these frameworks were still not in the sociological mainstream of the 1980s. Secondly, one needs a research tool thanks to which ties can be registered. Thirdly, the ties' usefulness for collective action needs to be evaluated along some theoretical framework. All of this was not possible in the 1980s. It was also not possible later for scholars who in order to explain Solidarność were applying theories disregarding networks and organizational structures.

I have discussed the importance of networks and organizations allowing to mobilize resources for the social movement. The cultural master frames from the macro-level which helped in organizing large heterogeneous movement were also applied by the movement. Generally, I agree that only by virtue of the social structures analysis it would not be possible to explain the emergence of Solidarność. Yet, without taking into account the networks and inter-organizational relations any attempt at explaining Solidarność is unsuccessful.

I believe that studies on Solidarność still have a future. There are more open questions and not applied theoretical framings in the analysis of this truly most interesting moment in recent Polish social history. As I have demonstrated, elements of social networks, inter-organizational relations, and cultural frames were applied to the study of Solidarność. All of these three elements are combined in the theory of social fields (Fligstein, McAdam 2012) and the various conceptualizations of

field theories were presented in the Chapter 2. I am convinced that applying the field approach to the studies of Solidarność would contribute to the understanding of the social movement. For example, the opposition of the 1970s could be analyzed in terms of an emerging social field. The architecture of this field, the relations between various actors, their power in the field, valued resources, as well as the developed and institutionalized cognitive frames were all later used in the emergence of the Solidarność movement when the opportunity for larger scale collective action appeared. Later, the formation of the large-scale social movement changed the relations between the social actors within the opposition field.

Also, there is still a need for more network-oriented research. This kind of study is certainly difficult to conduct, because it is not an easy task to reconstruct social ties from the 1970s and 1980s, however, I am sure that more social network analysis of Solidarność would allow to understand it better. As it can be seen, there are still new avenues of research on Solidarność. The ones which focus on relational aspects of the movement and have good theorization of the micro-macro link are capable of providing a more elaborate answer to the question: how in an allegedly atomized society was it possible for a large-scale movement to emerge? This question, however, includes an important assumption which gives rise to yet another question requiring testing: was the Polish society in the 1970s really atomized?

6 Civil society: in search of the new actor of the social transformation

6.1 Introduction

The notion of the sociological vacuum appears not only in the context of discussions on the Solidarność social movement, but also the discussion of civil society in Poland. In this chapter my aim is to discuss the relations between civil society and the sociological vacuum. The second aim of the chapter is to show the theoretical conditions for the perspective on civil society, according to which it is in a deficient state and the sociological vacuum has something to do with its deficiency.

Civil society is a huge theoretical problem for philosophy and social sciences, and I feel overwhelmed when attempting to tackle it. Thus, I need to limit myself and from the three pillars of civil society – non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local authorities, and social movements – I focus only on NGOs. Such an approach is justified because in Chapter 5 devoted to Solidarność I have discussed the social movement perspective, and in Chapter 8 devoted to the quality of democracy I will also look at the local governments. In this chapter, however, I am

interested in the associational life and the third sector in Poland (the third sector in Poland consists also of other organizational forms than associations – mostly foundations).[42]

Civil society is an important topic for Polish sociology and the public debate in Poland, in general. In recent history of Poland, sociologists did not only study the civil society but were also engaged in building it. Polish Sociological Association is also considered as an actor of civil society (Wiśniewski, Pawlak 2013). The civil society as such was often considered as a needed actor of societal transformation. I prefer to talk about various organizations as actors taking part in the transformation – and later the Europeanization – of Poland than to treat the whole society as an actor. The sociological language in which civil society is called an actor is usually interested in macro-processes. The macro-actor of civil society is then interacting with other macro-actors such as the state or the whole society. This kind of sociology – in my opinion – is not very helpful in understanding social actions and social structures. Thus, in this chapter I will attempt to analyze the concept of civil society more thoroughly and determine the social structures that it is built from.

The order of this chapter is as follows: I start with brief conceptual considerations in which I try to place the notion of civil society in the space near other concepts such as nation or social capital. Then, I present how sociological studies of Polish society connected the civil society with the sociological vacuum. Following the analysis of works in which civil society is usually treated with enthusiasm, and the sociological vacuum is perceived as a threat to its expected development, I look at the dark side of associational life and discuss the literature focusing on the problems of conflict and negative consequences of associationalism. In the last section, before the concluding remarks, I show how sociologists search for civic life in Poland, and discuss their units of analysis and preferred research

---

42 Some sociologists and activists of civil society say that there is also a fourth pillar of civil society that should be taken into account: the so-called fourth sector, or simply collective actions of low-level of institutionalization, which are somehow similar to the third sector but do not use formal organizations and quite often locate themselves in opposition towards non-governmental organizations believing that they are bureaucracies. This phenomenon was studied recently by Rafał Krenz, Stanisław Mocek, and Bohdan Skrzypczak (2015). I decided not to focus on this kind of activism in this chapter. I will present the traces of this kind of thinking about civil society when analyzing the work of Janine Wedel (1992a), or Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik (2014). I am convinced that they will also contribute to filling up the sociological vacuum by the virtue of interactions and social relations which are not visible for certain sociological methodologies.

strategies. The chapter finishes with concluding remarks, in which I claim that the civil society is neither in such a bad shape as it is suggested, nor that the civil society is such a good thing in itself, and claim that the sociological vacuum does not have much do with civil society.

6.2 Civil society: its rivals and kin

It is a common agreement among historians of ideas that civil society is a notion of ancient origins, that has already been used by Aristotle and Cicero. In the modern era, it was debated by John Locke (1689), Georg Wilhelm Hegel (1991), and Karl Marx (1970), who already understood this notion in very different ways. The first work regarded as an empirical study of civil society is de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1988), first published in French in the 1830s. Yet, the idea of civil society had its renaissance in the late 1970s, returning in a slightly modified form (Szacki 1997: 16). There are authors who claim that the civil society revival was rooted in movements of anti-totalitarian opposition in Eastern Europe and point to Solidarność as its direct source (Cohen, Arato 1992: 31; Pełczyński 1988). Regardless if this is an exaggerated opinion, discussing civil society just after discussing Solidarność seems a justified choice. Polish sociology often highlights the links between Solidarność and the subsequent emergence of third sector after 1989. Both of those grand research topics were often associated with the problem of the sociological vacuum. Another grand problem of Polish sociology – social capital – will be discussed in Chapter 7. This chapter therefore needs to start from a conceptual distinction between two notions: civil society and social capital. It is important because they often overlap, either due to the fact that empirically they are in a relation, or due to the conceptual chaos and usage of "civil society" and "social capital" as buzzwords.

I am not able to "solve" the civil society theoretical debate, yet in order to analytically separate it from the issue of social capital, I would say that the both concepts have different key-social structures as their base. In the case of civil society, the key structure is the social organization, and in case of social capital, it is a social network. This may sound very simplistic, but I found it to be the best way to show the differences between the two – sometimes regarded as very close – concepts. Civil society is about the self-organization of society. For social philosophers and political theorists, civil society is something either next to the state or opposite to the state. As Jerzy Szacki (1997: 21) noted about the authoritarian regimes, scholars tended to present civil society as a morally good alternative for the degenerate state. Yet, all the societal self-organization of a non-state or non-governmental character is a much broader set of phenomena than civil society. Ernest Gellner

130

(1991: 500) pointed that civil society is not a society of cousins, which means that organization based on ascribed (or constructed as ascribed) relations is not constitutive for civil society: family, clan, ethnic group, religion are bases for societal organization, but not for civil society. At least in its ideal model, civil society is built on free-choice associations of individual citizens. These associations might be interest-driven, yet there are to be distinguished from the associations made for profit. It is therefore possible to ask many empirical questions regarding civil society, always constructed in societies of various networks: How is it possible that the so-called "cousins" often create free-choice associations together? Why so many associations are church based? Why national ideology is a driving force of associationalism? Yet, I believe, after Szacki (1997) and Gellner (1991), that taking every sort of organizational base for collective action of a non-state character as a civil society is obscuring the picture. As I am going to discuss in Chapter 7, social capital is a phenomenon based on social networks and it also includes many primary relations, such as families.

Civil society may be considered on the two levels: the macro-level of the whole society, and the organizational level of associations. The macro-level considerations about civil society are typical for the social philosophy and political theory, but also for grand theory in sociology. The macro approach is also present in empirical studies on the so-called condition of civil society in a given society. In this strategy, macro indicators, such as the number of associations in given society or the participation rate in associations, are used to measure the condition of civil society. This is an archetypical case of dispositional sociology: the measurements on the level of individuals are aggregated on the level of society and used to explain social processes. These kinds of indexes are a very good strategy for comparing various societies, but from the point of view of relational sociology, they are very unreliable in constructing explanations. My point is that the only possible strategy of explaining (or understanding in a meaningful way) something about civil society requires taking into account its relational character, which on the level of general discourse requires analyzing how its ideologies are positing civil society towards state or other large communities (nations), but on the level of practices, it requires studying how concrete organizations relate to other organizations (of governmental character, ascribed character, for-profit character, or other organizations of civil society). Therefore, the strategy of studying civil society which I consider to be the most apt is studying given social fields in which around the issues of civic concern there are also active civic associations.

The civil society, especially in the context of Eastern Europe, for quite long time was idealized and presented as something morally good and contrasted to with

the state, which the anti-communist opposition in the Soviet block regarded as a corrupt tool of oppression. Alternative social structures built, for example, by Solidarność were perceived as an emanation of freedom and positive societal mobilization. The Polish way of thinking about civil society as opposed against the state, according to Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato (1992: 31), was the most dramatic. As I will demonstrate in the next section, many authors writing about the civil society in Poland were not only lamenting about its bad condition, but also contrasting it with the state as something morally valorized. This might be considered as something very typical for all sociologists: to perceive a self-organization and other so-called spontaneous forms of social life as positive in opposition to the state, government, and other large institutions formatting the modern societies.

Civil society is also a concept bridging the dichotomy of statal and private (Kulas 2010; Szacki 1997). Involvement in associational life is a departure from private activities, yet it is still not simply a public action, in the political sense. Many associations deal mostly with private concerns of their members (who, for example, love to play chess or breed homing pigeons), but provide them with a platform for sharing these concerns. Associations, which have strictly public goals, attempt to achieve them not in a strictly political way.

Before moving to a deeper analysis of how the sociological vacuum was employed in considerations on civil society, I need to make a short excursion to the macro-sociological problem of "competition" between civil society and nation. According to Szacki (1997) and Calhoun (1994), these two collectives are rivals. Civil society is built on blocks of associations – individuals are not members of civil society as such, they participate in it through the mediation of organizations, which they create by a free choice. Nation is, according to its nationalistic ideologies, something given, and to participate in a nation there is no need for any organizational mediation. Of course, on the level of practices of any nationalistic regimes (or at least regimes using elements of nationalistic ideologies), the mobilization to nation-participation is achieved through the use of organizations. Yet, these organizations, at least in plans, are of a mass-participation. From the point of view of nationalist ideologies, civil society is something suspicious. From the point of view of civil society enthusiasts, national mass society is a threat for liberty.[43]

This section did not have the ambition to present the whole theoretical discussion on the concept of civil society. Its goal was to present the theoretical

---

43 The consequences that these two approaches to the polity have for the conditions of democracy will be discussed in the Chapter 8.

rivals and kin of civil society. Thanks to articulating the difference between civil society and social capital, on one hand, and civil society and nation, on the other hand, I can move forward and discuss the intriguing relations between civil society and the sociological vacuum.

6.3 Civil society in the vacuum

The issue of the sociological vacuum is recurrently coming back in discussions about the civil society in Poland. At the time I was working on this chapter, Polish public television engaged in defamation campaign against a number of prominent activists of civil organizations. Some of these activists are sociologists (also quoted in this chapter, like Zbigniew Pełczyński), which led the Polish Sociological Association to issue a statement of protest against the defamation of civil society activists. In the statement, the Board of Polish Sociological Association remarked that "civil engagement is in sociological circles regarded as one of the key challenges of Polish democracy, and the barrier for this engagement a phenomenon of 'sociological vacuum.'" I recall this event, because it shows how in the minds of Polish sociologists the sociological vacuum is strongly linked with civil society. This short excerpt from the statement is an apt summary of the sociological discourse on this relation in Poland: civil society is something crucial for society and democracy; civil society is not developed as it is expected; the barrier for its development is the sociological vacuum. From this short summary of a current view on the relations between the sociological vacuum and civil society, which was consecrated by the key sociological organization in Poland,[44] I can now turn to a deeper reconstruction of the way in which this relation was considered in social science discourse.

As I have already pointed out in an earlier-written article (Pawlak 2015), the issue of civil society is the topic that was most often made to converge with Nowak's thesis. The vast majority of publications linking civil society with the sociological vacuum have a strong ideological character: civil society is assumed to be valuable and its development should be supported. At the same time, the authors complain about the poor condition and underdevelopment of civic institutions – and the civil society, in general – in Poland explaining it with the sociological vacuum. Thus, these publications usually link two elements: a diagnosis that civil society is

---

44 The Polish Sociological Association is a vivid organization and plays an important role for the integration of Polish sociologists. It organizes sociological summits and other conferences. It is also a publisher of the most influential Polish sociological journal "Polish Sociological Review."

underdeveloped in Poland (i.e. according to indicators of participation in formal associations) and disappointment with this state of affairs.

I will now briefly focus only on the titles of some works on civil society, consisting of keywords such as "barriers" (Bukowski, Gadowska, Polak 2008; Dzwończyk 2003), "blockades" (Szczegóła 2003), "non-movement" (Nowak, Nowosielski 2005), and "factors limiting the development" (Dzwończyk 2005). Some other titles also contain rhetorical questions: "What kind of democracy do we have?" (Mokrzycki 2000); "What kind of self-governing Poland? What kind of civil society?" (Rymsza 2014); "From the revolution of participation to…?" (Skrzypiec 2008).

These works on civil society presented several explanations converging civil society with the sociological vacuum. According to the first explanation, during communism, there was a shortage of associations (the accounts which shift the meaning of Nowak's thesis even point to their absence) and those who were present were controlled by an oppressive communist state to such an extent that the people refused to identify with them. According to the second explanation, the concept of connection between the communist regime and associations became so strong that even after the fall of communism Polish society still refused to identify with them. In addition to the sociological vacuum per se, a related statement by Nowak (1979a; 1979b) on the existence of two worlds – the world of the people and world of the institutions – is often mentioned in this context. Even when the gathered statistical data reveal an increase in the number of associations in Poland, the authors usually doubt that people really do engage and identify with them.

For many authors, building a civil society is a specific goal that needs to be reached. The civil society described as nearly non-existent or very fragile should be strengthened, and "the task of filling the sociological vacuum in the Third Republic [of Poland] was first of all taken up by the so-called third sector" (Dzwończyk 2008: 83). The physical term "vacuum" serves well to describe and highlight the absence of something needed and desirable. In these publications, the vacuum appears to be a characteristic feature distinguishing Polish society from "imagined" Western ones. An underdeveloped, imperfect, and weak civil society troubles the authors because it is a proof of Poland's incomplete modernization. These publications display a strong normative tendency. Pointing to the sociological vacuum allows the authors to express their worries in a more dramatical way.

I will now turn to three publications in which the sociological vacuum is a key concept for understanding the shape of civil society in Poland. I present them in

a chronological order, starting from Janine Wedel's (1992a) work on civil society in Poland of 1980s. Then, I turn to Mirosława Grabowska and Tadeusz Szawiel's (2001) book on building democracy in Poland, in which the sociological vacuum plays an important role and allows to understand the conditions of civil society. The last of the three publications is the work by Marek Nowak and Michał Nowosielski (2005) who connect the sociological vacuum with social non-movement.

The volume edited by Janine Wedel, *The Unplanned Society* (1992a), is a collection of anthropological studies of Polish society in the 1980s, authored by Polish scholars. The studies vary in approach and empirical focus, but they all have a unifying aim, which the author defined in the introduction to the book as confronting "a spell cast" by Stefan Nowak over Polish sociology, as she referred to the social vacuum thesis (1992b: 10). Although the American author was more than appreciative of the Polish scholar, she claimed that Nowak's thesis is a product of positivist methodology: "Models, rather than experience, are at work here: Nowak assumes axiomatically both the prior existence in Polish history of a classic civil society and such a society's ongoing survival in the West. [...] But Nowak goes on to observe that civil society in the rigorous sense remained lacking a generation later, and so judges his society to be guilty of vacuousness" (Wedel 1992b: 10).

The research strategy applied in *The Unplanned Society* derives from the anthropological tradition: there are no hypotheses being tested, while the findings are expected to emerge from field research. Wedel claimed that, thanks to this strategy, she and her Polish colleagues were able to actually observe social structures located in the middle, between families and the nation, namely informal networks and social circles (Wedel 1992b: 12). According to Wedel, Nowak was unable to notice the importance of these structures because analyzing Polish society, he was looking for structures assumed to be typical for Western societies. Hence, although Wedel's edited work could be seen as an empirical falsification of Nowak's thesis, upon a closer look, it turns out to be the case of the earlier-discussed shift-in-meaning in which Wedel interpreted the sociological vacuum argument as regarding the lack of civil society, and not the lack of identification with middle-level groups.

The studies in the volume document the richness of informal social self-organization in Poland during the 1980s. Wedel's inductive methodological approach was essential in revealing this reality – this could not have been accomplished with Nowak's deductive approach alone. These groups could have been studied only via qualitative techniques. It is worth to mention here the remark made by Barbara Czarniawska, who stated that although Wedel rejected

model-testing, the people whom she was researching might have been similarly normatively model-guided. Hence, it is highly probable that the researched individuals were also ashamed of the lack of "proper Western" structures in Poland and were not too proud of their informal replacements that they had developed (Czarniawska 2000: 144).

Wedel's work was an attempt to fill the vacuum by applying a different methodology than Nowak. She was successful in showing the richness of various social life forms, which although recognized and described by Nowak (1981: 53) in his remarks about the atmosphere in Poland, could not have been detected with his tools. The methodological considerations by Wedel and Czarniawska show that the search of the sociological vacuum requires triangulation of research methods. It is impossible to insert all possible groups of identification in precategorized survey questions, so the research of the middle-level structures requires also a qualitative component. Wedel, thanks to shifting the meaning of Nowak's thesis, was able to explore the abundance of collective life forms in communist Poland.

Another interesting aspect of the deep conviction that the civil society in Poland is weak was pointed by Wedel (1998) in her book on Western aid for developing democracy in post-communist countries. American civil society organizations were willing to support the development of all sorts of civil organizations in Eastern Europe, and for some of its recipients this aid was a very important resource. Wedel claims that in order to receive more aid some of the Eastern European organizations pointed to all possible symptoms of weakness of civil societies in their countries, reasoning that it would result in receiving larger financial support. The sociological vacuum, according to Wedel, was yet another good argument to support the thesis on the civil society's weakness. The statement of Wedel may be interpreted in line with some conspiracy theories, but it is also possible that activists engaged in the so-called building of civil society were honest in their evaluation of how much they still had to do.

The sociological vacuum is an important context for the considerations of civil society as a crucial element of democracy in Mirosława Grabowska and Tadeusz Szawiel's (2001) book on building democracy in Poland. Although their work is analyzed in this chapter, it could actually be placed in any other part of this book because the authors build strong conceptual bridges between Solidarność, civil society, social capital, and democracy in Poland. Keeping all of this in mind, I will concentrate on the topic of civil society. Grabowska and Szawiel (2001: 129) understand civil society as an intermediary zone between a citizen and a state. Consequently, in an ideal typically totalitarian state this zone

136

would remain empty. Yet, the Polish communist state was quite far from the ideal type of totalitarian state as the number of existing associations and participation rates within those associations were quite high. The question remains whether such participation was voluntary. Grabowska and Szawiel (2001: 154) question the rationale of comparing simple statistical indicators of communist societies with those of the societies of the Western word. Their argument is that it is impossible to say whether the participation in such associations was spontaneous or architected by the communist authorities. Similarly, the participation might be only nominal, meaning that members of associations were official members and took part in some of the association's "obligatory" activities, but it was not a true, engaged participation. Due to these assumptions and lack of sociological data on the quality and meaning of participation in associations of communist Poland, Grabowska and Szawiel use the findings of Nowak[45] on the sociological vacuum as a proxy of the quality of this participation. Strong bonds with families and nation, and weak bonds with associations and other intermediary groups, according to Grabowska and Szawiel (2001: 149), support the conviction that participation in associations was not authentic and only nominal. Authors claim that this kind of participation had some positive effects regardless, and that it allowed members of associations to get accustomed to procedures of associational life such as democratic (at least theoretically) elections, writing minutes, constructing statues, and many others. This know-how of associational life was, according to Grabowska and Szawiel, a crucial capital for organizing the Solidarność movement.

Grabowska and Szawiel analyses of civil society and its role for the Polish democracy are very balanced: they do not dramatize their narration and they work with a realistic perspective on civil society (although they employed Putnam's perspective, they did so not without a number of caveats). My discussion with their arguments pertains to three aspects of their interpretation of the influence of the communist past on the civil society in post-1989 Poland: the role of the opposition which started to institutionalize after 1976, the use of the sociological vacuum as a proxy for authenticity of engagement in associations, and mentalist treatment of resentment as a factor influencing the civil society in Poland.

Grabowska and Szawiel focused very much on activities of the opposition and pointed to groups formed after 1976 identifying them as civil society. Although

---

45 Mirosława Grabowska and Tadeusz Szawiel were Stefan Nowak's disciples, and they took part in Nowak's research in the 1970s working on data which were later the basis for the statement on the sociological vacuum (the details are discussed in Chapter 4).

the researchers provided much information on "politically neutral" participation in other associations and confirmed that they had some positive effect on developing the knowledge of associational life practices, they treated as civil society under communism only democratic opposition. Yet, their book was written in the sub-field of political sociology, so their perspective, although influenced by Putnam (1993), was for obvious reasons more focused on political activism.

The second problem is more important and regards the "authenticity" of associational participation. Building on the sociological vacuum argument, Grabowska and Szawiel claimed that participation in associations of communist Poland was numerous yet nominal, and the people who were involved in such groups were not truly engaged. In this manner, the troubling lack of something is still there. But is the participation in associations of Western societies also truly authentic? Are people never joining them because it is well perceived or in order to achieve personal gains? I am not trying to say that there is no difference between democracies and authoritarian societies, yet the distinction between them is not so simple. Another aspect of that problem is whether the research tool of Nowak's team was adequate for measuring the authenticity of participation. In Chapter 4 I enumerated doubts regarding the validity of their findings; here, I would like to say that they are a quite distant proxy of engagement in associational life. This engagement may take other forms than a declared attitude of feeling connected with members of association. Some of the practices might not be fully consciously recognized, yet they still play a role in social cohesion – i.e. even in communist Poland, the associations were most probably creating weak ties between their members.

The third issue regards Grabowska and Szawiel's (2001) considerations about the alleged resentment of Polish people. I find this part of their work on civil society as the most speculative. It lacks support in empirical data and brings into sociology the mentalist perspective. This dispositional mode of explanation was quite typical for Stefan Nowak's sociology, in which – as discussed in Chapter 4 – he aggregated attitudes of individuals (the psychological variable of dispositional character) and used them to understand the whole society. In a similar manner, the resentment of individuals was aggregated by Grabowska and Szawiel to the level of the whole society. Yet, the link between micro and macro is missing here and the considerations about the impact of resentment on the condition of civil society are not convincing.

An intriguing development of Nowak's thesis in relation to the problem of civil society was proposed in Marek Nowak and Michał Nowosielski's (2005) book chapter entitled "Od 'próżni socjologicznej' do 'społecznego bezruchu.' Uwarunkowania ewolucji społeczeństwa obywatelskiego w Polsce lat 80. i 90.

XX wieku" [From 'Sociological Vacuum; to 'Social Non-Movement.' The Conditioning of Civil Society Development in Poland in the 80's and 90's of the 20th Century]. As can be noticed in the title, the authors perceived a certain continuity between the vacuum and the state of social non-movement. The latter is said to be peculiar for Poland and Central-Eastern Europe, and it is contrasted with mature democracies, which the authors assume to be littered with social movements. The state of non-movement and weakness of civil society are treated by Nowak and Nowosielski as problematic – it is a characteristic feature of Polish society which renders it different from the Western ones. As with the work of Wedel (1992b), the meaning of the sociological vacuum was shifted and became interpreted as the lack of social representation between primary groups and the nation, as well as the structures of the state (Nowak, Nowosielski 2005: 272). Thus, the authors treated Stefan Nowak's thesis as pertaining to the lack of structures and not on the absence of identifications with these.

According to Nowak and Nowosielski, the social non-movement is a variant of the sociological vacuum, and the effect of the intended rejection of social self-organization, replaced with practices of action based on the low level of trust and assumed lack of stability (Nowak, Nowosielski 2005: 292). In their view, the sociological vacuum is something that objectively exists and continues to characterize Polish society even today. Nowak and Nowosielski's approach is an example of applying Stefan Nowak's thesis to the analysis of the condition of civil society in Poland. It explains the weakness of civil society and it links present research with investigations carried out during communist Poland. While such rhetorical maneuver increases the receptiveness of their argument, this is achieved via shift-in-meaning and employing an argument to explain phenomena which were initially not intended to be within its reach. In Nowak and Nowosielski's (2005) contribution, the sociological vacuum is used as a powerful metaphor.

To sum-up the section on the way in which the relations between the sociological vacuum and civil society are perceived by social scientists, I would like to highlight that although there are different perspectives on the strength of the sociological vacuum, there is a common agreement among the authors that it does, in some way, negatively influence the civil society in Poland. Wedel believes that formal organizations on the intermediary level are weak but, according to her, the vacuum is filled-up by informal networks. Grabowska and Szawiel, similarly to Nowak and Nowosielski, find the sociological vacuum a valid diagnosis and see it as a handicap for societal self-organization and especially associational life. Thus, in the next section I will attempt to answer the provocative question: is associational life indeed such a good thing?

6.4 For the common good? Associationalism: its advantages and disadvantages

What is striking in the studies of civil society conducted in Poland, and especially the ones discussed above, is that associationalism is assumed to be something unequivocally positive for society. There is also a hidden assumption, which seems to be taken for granted by researchers of civil society in Poland, that simple measurements, like the number of civic associations (or other types of organizations) or participation rate in these organizations, can reflect the quality of civic life. Even if these measurements are doubted to be valid indicators of civic engagement in Poland (this issue is going to be discussed in detail in the next section), various forms of participation are evaluated as something positive and generally serving the "common good." This section has been inspired by the book by Jason Kaufman (2002) *For the Common Good?,* in which the author questions the wide spread belief that the mass participation in American fraternities and other kinds of associations in the 19th and early 20th centuries was bringing mostly positive effects for the social life in the USA. Following Kaufman, by "associationalism" I understand a strong trend towards creating civic organizations and the general atmosphere of positive evaluation of their role in society.

Kaufman's (2002) book may be understood as a developed and empirically well informed discussion with laments of social scientists about the fall of civic engagement in the USA.[46] Kaufman (2002: 5) noticed that many authors in the USA assumed that participation in associational life is something inherently good, thus the central question of his book is: "Do people form associations because they aspire to community and cooperation or because they accept the challenges of intrasocial competition?" Although the so-called "Tocqueville Debate" has recently been dominated by the view that civic organizations are bringing positive effects to society, this view was not always dominant. For a very long time, social self-organization was perceived rather as a threat to the state, and associations were seen as potential conspiracy groups. This mode of thinking in

---

46 Kaufman (2002: 210) positions his argument in opposition to authors such as Benjamin R. Barber, Amitai Etzioni, Seymour M. Lipset, Robert D. Putnam, and others. I refer to their work in other parts of this book (Barber and Lipset are discussed in Chapter 8, while Putnam is discussed in Chapter 7). Kaufman's (2002) work is here the main inspiration for expressing the possible disadvantages of associationalism, but similar arguments were also given by authors like Michael D. Foley and Bod Edwards (1996), who pointed to associations as promoting anti-democratic values, or Sher Berman (1997), who claimed that strong associational life of the Weimer Republic eventually helped in dismantling its democracy.

modern social sciences and political discourse has been long forgotten (or at least marginalized), and it is not my intention to promote it. However, following Kaufman, I argue not to take the positive outcomes of associatonalism for granted.

The organizational form which dominated the civic life of USA in the late 19th century was a specific kind of secret society: the fraternity. The reason behind its popularity was the simple reason that, according to the fiscal regulations, this kind of association was exempt from paying taxes for certain kinds of financial operations. Equally important was the fact that fraternities offered to their members primitive burial insurances: the family of a deceased fraternity member who had regularly paid the fees, received money to cover the cost of the funeral (sometimes the amount of policy would exceed the costs of funeral, thus such insurance might in fact be concerned a life insurance policy). Fraternities were classified as secret societies because their members during closed meetings performed masonry-like rituals. At the same time, however, the membership in them, as well as many of their activities were public – for instance, fraternities were very proudly presenting themselves during holiday parades.

The character of American associationalism was described by Kaufman (2002: 7) as "competitive voluntarism," which he defined as "a general social process whereby by number of voluntary, or nonprofit, organizations in a given society rapidly increases, thus fueling competition among them for members, money, institutional legitimacy, and political power." The fraternity-like associations were competing over their members (in case of having the same recruitment base) but they were also competing against each other. The most illustrative cases of this competition were wars between voluntary fire-brigades fighting over turf and the possible profits connected to it. Competitive voluntarism, according to Kaufman, contributed to the increasing differentiation of American society.

Fraternities became a platform for social life as very often they had their own club space or meeting rooms. In the peak of the golden age of fraternities in the USA, around half of the adult Americans participated in lodges, clubs, and other similar organizations (Kaufman 2002: 21). Obviously, this was opening the possibilities for collective action and facilitating the growth of social capital of fraternities' individual members. Yet, Kaufman's book points to several outcomes of associational life in the USA which he evaluates as negative. These are: societal segregation, lack of national insurance system, weak trade unions, and wide gun possession.

The most important accusation of associationalism stated by Kaufman (2002) is that it vastly contributed to the American ethnic and religious segregation. This point is particularly important because, conventionally, associations are

believed to foster societal integration. In reality, however, associations brought together only the members of their recruitment base, and blocked their social interaction with members of other social categories. The majority of fraternities were recruiting members only of a very specific social category. They were gender-segregated (majority of associations were accepting only men) and as the so-called native American[47] fraternities, they did not accept members of the new migrating ethnicities – Germans, Irish, Italians, Poles, or Jews – as well as African Americans. The segregation was based on race, ethnicity, and – what was often reinforcing the previous bases for segregation – religion (in the 19th century, American Protestants treated Catholic groups with suspicion, and Jews were openly discriminated against). The feed-backing mechanism contributed to segregation and distrust between different ethnic groups until the 1920s when the immigration to USA became limited, yet the discrimination of African Americans, Jews, and unprivileged Catholic migrant groups (the Irish, Italians, Poles) continued throughout the entire 20th century.

Kaufman (2002: 144) claims that the most powerful American associations providing insurance policies were lobbying against enacting the compulsory health insurance in the early 20th century. Since benefit plans were the key reason for participating in them, the associations recognized the possibility of establishing a national health insurance system as a large threat. The introduction of a healthcare system following the European model, and applied also in other former English colonies such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, would have made it much more difficult for fraternities to recruit new members. Although in the political campaign against the enactment of compulsory health insurance, fraternities presented the state as an evil power which should be limited, and emphasized the importance of individual entrepreneurial skills or community self-organizing. Yet, according to Kaufman, these ideological justifications were only a facade for preserving the interests of fraternities and the emerging private health insurance industry.

Kaufman (2002) provides also evidence for the claim that American associationalism was one of the reasons for which the workers movement in the USA did not develop into a large-scale movement, similar to those in Europe. Referring to the example of the Knights of Labor – a fraternity-type organization which was an American proto-trade-union – Kaufman claims that the organizational

---

47 The term "native American" denotes here people of a well established, white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant background and not "American Indians," as this term is understood today.

form of fraternities, their high-exit character, and segregational policies disabled the possibility of creating an institutionalized movement based on working-class identity.

Finally, Kaufman (2002) blames associationalism also for fostering the gun culture in the USA. As he points out, contrary to the popular myth, gun ownership in USA before the Civil War (1861–1865) was rare (Kaufman 2002: 138). Kaufman believes that the change that came after the Civil War was linked to the simultaneous development of fraternities, which by promoting gun culture through displaying guns or practicing shooting, as well as taking part in acts of violence between various ethnic groups, contributed to the spread of the gun ownership. Perhaps the most vivid example of such groups is, the National Rifle Association (NRA) which became established as an organization right after the Civil War, and until today remains a powerful and influential lobby for gun ownership in the USA. It goes without saying that the use of guns in the USA is much more common than other countries.

I will now compare American associationalism to a well-known case study of ethnic antagonism conducted in 1930s by the Polish sociologist Józef Chałasiński (1935). Chałasiński focused on the ethnic antagonism in one of the mining settlements in Upper Silesia. In his book, the settlement was coded under the fictional name "Kopalnia" (which in English means "mine"), yet it is now commonly known that his research study was conducted in Murcki – nowadays a borough of Katowice, the capital of the industrial region of Upper Silesia. Murcki was a working-class settlement built around the mine owned by a German capitalist, in 1934 inhabited by 3,330 people (Chałasiński 1935: 14). After World War I, this part of Upper Silesia became a part of newly independent Republic of Poland, yet the property relations and ethnic tensions were influenced by the former social structures, established when the territory was still a part of the German Empire. Ethnic relations in Murcki were to some extent parallel with social class relations: the owners and mine administration were Germans – not Poles – the workers comprised of both ethnic groups. In the context of associatonalism and competitive voluntarism, passages of Chałasiński's (1935) work describing associational life of Murcki seem particularly interesting. Both ethnic groups, Germans and Poles, were creating their own clubs and associations. Thus, in Murcki there were two separate German and Polish football clubs, two separate association for German and Polish homing pigeon breeders, and two separate choirs – the Polish choir "Paderewski," named after the famous Polish pianist and politician, and a German choir "Uthmann," named after the German composer and singer (Chałasiński 1935: 128–130). All together, in 1934, in a settlement of

3,300 inhabitants, there were 39 associations[48] and each of them had a national affiliation. The case of Murcki is similar to phenomena described by Kaufman (2002): the initial hostility between categories became the base for associational life. The proliferating associations were strengthening the ethnic segregation and contributing to the already strong antagonisms rooted in different ways of remembering the past, social class differences, and positions in power relations. As Chałasiński (1935: 134) concluded his analysis of associational life in Murcki: "Residents organization is in large extent a function of an antagonism: they organize to fight the enemy."

The conclusions of Kaufman's and Chałasiński's works written in different times and different social contexts are important for the proper interpretation of indicators of civic engagement. High participation in associations and a large number of associations may mean that a given society is divided by intense conflicts, and although the integration in smaller social categories might be increasing, the global outcome might be perpetuating segregation and hostility.

The second lesson from Kaufman's (2002) work is that civic engagement in associations is usually interest driven. It is true that people join associations in order to fulfill their need of sociability, but the popularity of associations is also facilitated by the profits they provide to their members. In case of fraternities, their individual profits were the insurance benefits. The interests of different social groups building associations are sometimes conflicted. The organized form of conflict contributes to its institutionalization, which – at least in classic sociology of conflict – was perceived as something positive (see Dahrendorf 1959). Yet, the organizational level of interests adds up to the previous level of individual interests and social categories interests. Associations become organizational actors and establish their own aims, which cannot simply be reduced to the aims of their individual members. Furthermore, the presence of organizations oriented towards reaching their aims results in an emergence of a social field (Hoffman 1999). This starts a new dynamics (which has been described in Chapter 2) of organizational interests being not only an aggregation of their members' interests or interests created by the organization-level dynamics – the interests of organizations are also co-created by their position in the field structure and orientation towards other organizations. As I have stated in the chapter on social fields, they

---

48 This makes approximately 85 persons per association. To compare it with the current situation in Poland, there are approximately 70,000 active associations and foundations (Adamiak, Charycka, Gumkowska 2016: 28), which makes approximately 550 residents of Poland per organization. The associational life in Murcki in the 1930s was indeed vibrant!

might be a space of conflict, a space of cooperation, or a space of a specific mixture of both. This conclusion calls into question the assumption that a high rate of associational participation and a high number of associations is always for common good. I am not trying to say it is a factor which always disrupts societal cohesion and that I am an enemy of people gathering in associations: I am just saying that associationalism may have various outcomes and there is quite strong evidence not to assume that it is always brings positive results.

6.5 In search of civic life in Poland

Polish historiography of 19th and 20th centuries was (and still is) dominated by the interest in national independence movements, and the history of ideas contemplates much upon the idea of nation and its relations to romanticism and philosophical positivism (Kurczewska 1979). The concept of civil society, however became used in the interpretations of Polish history only recently. An interesting example is the book of Alicja Kulecka (2016), who reinterpreted the political debates and political practice before and during the Polish January Uprising of 1863 as concerning the civil society. According to Kulecka (2016), conventionally, the January Uprising and the preceding period of political mobilization was described in the context of the uprising's political and military consequences. Yet, as she points out, the political debates and practices of the uprising leadership (i.e. the compulsory draft or taxation) to much extent considered the questions of citizenship, relations between the citizens and the states (the Polish state claiming its independence, as well as the Imperial Russian state controlling the territory), and societal self-organization. These political debates and practices were usually interpreted by Polish historiographers in the context of nation building, national state building, national identity etc. Kulecka (2016) argues that the problems of nation and citizenship were in this period very much entangled, so one cannot say that the debate concerned only national independence, or the question of citizenship and equality in front of the state institutions. This problem is still relevant when abstract models of national community or civil society are being used to describe a given social process. According to the Szacki's (1997) considerations, mentioned in Section 6.2 of this chapter, nation and civil society are contradictory concepts, and on the definitional level, civil society must comprise only the associations formed by the free individuals by their choice. Using the example of the January Uprising, Kulecka (2016) shows that associations created by choice and communities (at least as social constructions) in which the membership is regarded as ascribed, are in reinforcing relations. Kulecka's (2016) work is a case study well illustrating Szacki's (1997: 45)

statement that in reality, the victory of an idea is always an outcome of its hybridization, so theories of civil society need to take into account the nation-state.

Zdzisław Kowalewski (1991) documented the life of civil society in various periods of Polish history. According to him, the period between the two world wars was not only a time of agitated political activity and state-building, but also a time of the eruption of civic activism of various shades. An example of such activism was presented by Chałasiński (1935) in his work on Polish-German antagonisms discussed in the previous section. However, different kinds of associations had already been forming during the three partitions of Poland in the late 19th century, reaching their momentum in the early 20th century, and developing since than at a large pace. Among the most popular forms of associations were trade unions, scouting organizations, organizations dedicated to education and "enlightenment" (i.e. education of illiterate adults, which was an important social problem in interwar Poland), scientific associations, and many others. Particularly impressive was the growth of cooperatives: in 1938 there were 13,741 active cooperatives in Poland (Kowalewski 1991: 332). Thus, it might be assumed that associational life of Polish society before the communist period was very rich and already had its deeply embedded traditions.

Dariusz Gawin (2013), specializing in history of ideas, presented an analysis of the way in which the leaders of leftist anti-communist opposition took up the idea of societal self-organization against (or alternative towards) a communist state. Gawin's book (2013) is not a study of practices of civil society but a study of how the ideology of civil society (although under different labels: the term "civil society" started to be used in Poland in the 1980s in the context of Solidarność) was developed by intellectuals turning against the communist regime. According to Gawin (2013: 10), during the twenty years between 1956 and 1976, Polish intellectuals made a "great turn"[49] from the traditional way of thinking about revolution to the new theory of political action, understood as a peaceful building of independent from the state civic structures. This political theory of action is best described by one of the slogans used by Jacek Kuroń, the leader of democratic opposition in Poland, in which he referred to the incident from the 1970 protest in Gdańsk, during which shipyarders set on fire the building of the local committee of the Polish United Workers Party: "Don't burn committees – create your own!"

On the level of practices, according to Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik (2014), the associational life of Poland and other communist societies was quite rich – organizations had many members and possessed large resources. The authors

---

49   This is a direct translation of the Polish title of Gawin's book – *Wielki zwrot*.

admit, that these were incomplete civil societies as they were largely controlled by the communist states, yet they recognized a certain diversity of interests and provided organizational infrastructure for the development of associational life after the fall of communism (Ekiert, Kubik 2014: 47). Ekiert and Kubik oppose the claims that only the anti-communist opposition or informal social life were the antecedents of civil societies in Central Eastern Europe. Also Adam Podgórecki (2016) claimed that civil society was relatively vivid and, for example, it was able to mobilize against amending Polish constitution in 1976. In a similar vein, Polish sociologists like to claim that the Polish Sociological Association was one of the rare enclaves of civil society in communist Poland, as it maintained democratic procedures and freedom of expression (Sułek 2011: 157). Yet, and what seems to be under-researched topic, similar spheres of self-organization perceived as exceptional enclaves, were not so rare in the Poland of late communism.

According to some authors, who in the 1990s expressed their enthusiasm for the idea of civil society, the meaning of this concept was so broad that it encompassed any kind of social structures independent from the state. This line of thinking was most likely rooted in the fascination with the Solidarność movement and the anti-politics of political opposition in communist Poland. An interesting illustration of this is the article by the sociologist Jacek Kurczewski (1996), who at that time just stopped working as the vice-speaker of Polish parliament. In this article, Kurczewski (1996: 330) stated: "civil society, if understood as a network of autonomous structures independent of the political power of government in the broad sense, was, in Poland, clearly located not in associations but in families and the Church." Similar line of reasoning was used by Janine Wedel (1992b), who claimed that in the Poland of the 1980s civil society was built on social circles called "środowiska."

The search for the civil society in families, social circles, or church had – in my opinion – at least two reasons. First, authors of the modernizing approach where really trying to find different expressions of the phenomenon of civil society in Poland. Second – indeed, in Poland of 1980s and early 1990s, it was possible to notice collective action, not organized by state, and the social scholars needed to name it somehow. Obviously, treating the family as an institution of civil society, as Kurczewski (1996) suggested, destroys any meaning of the notion. If the family is an institution of civil society – and in the view of cultural anthropology, family is an institution present in every society – every society has its civil society and as a result the concept becomes meaningless. This idea was accurately criticized by Gellner (1991) who claimed that a society of cousins is not a civil society. Such attempts were not bringing anything useful to the understanding the

civil society in Poland.[50] I will therefore turn to the type of activities which are considered as strictly civil society related phenomena: third sector organizations and protest mobilization.

"In the modern world there is no well-functioning democracy without developed civic values and organizations, without civil society and its institutional aspect – an efficiently functioning sector of NGOs, the so-called third sector" (Gliński 2002: 5). This is quite a strong statement from the introduction to the volume of collected works from sociological studies on the third sector[51] in Poland. Its author, Piotr Gliński, before entering the world of politics, was one of the leading researchers of the civil society in Poland. In fact, it might be said that he was one of the creators of the paradigm of civil society research on the third sector in Poland. As the earlier quotation shows, this research program was strongly value-driven: the third sector was assumed to be the condition of proper democracy, and understood as something good, and desired. It would be very unjust to say that the empirical research studies on the third sector in Poland were blurred by values. Researchers were quite often critical in describing the daily practices of non-profits, as can be seen in the study of styles of the third sector activists by Gliński (2008), however, the general assumption is strongly embedded in the views on the way in which the organization of society should look like. The third sector studies in Poland are quite well institutionalized, with a history of published volumes on different aspects of civil society, its different organizational forms and transformations (Gliński, Lewensten, Siciński 2002; 2004; Gawkowska, Gliński, Kościański 2005; Kościański, Misztal 2008) and the academic journal "Trzeci Sektor."[52]

---

50 We cannot forget that the family was also considered as an institution of civil society by Cohen and Arato (1992) in their influential book of the time – *Civil Society and Political Theory*. Yet, this line of thinking is against the majority of conceptualizations of civil society (Grabowska, Szawiel 2001) and was not well documented in Kurczewski's (1996) rather speculative and essayistic work.

51 In Polish literature, but also in public discourse on civil society, "trzeci sektor" – which translates directly to English as "third sector" is the most common expression used to label what is more often described in English as a voluntary sector, community sector, non-profit sector, or not-for-profit sector. In this understanding: the first sector is the state, the second sector is the market, and the third sector is a non-profit (therefore non-market), but also non-governmental, sphere of activities, as discussed by Amitai Etzioni (1973).

52 As mentioned in the previous footnote, "trzeci sektor" translates into English directly as "third sector."

The condition of the third sector, in the perspective of Gliński and his fellows, is often evaluated negatively. To quote another work of Gliński (2008: 7): "The structures of civil society in Poland are relatively weak and they are not equal partners for spheres of business or politics. It is one of the fundamental causes of the weakness of Polish democracy and numerous problems, with which our society does not cope." Gliński (2008), in his analysis of NGOs' styles of action, blames for the underdevelopment of civil society the social environment for civic engagement: the corrupt political class and self-centered business elites. He also puts the blame on cultural factors such as learned helplessness, demanding attitude, or the *homo sovieticus* attitude. However, the main idea of Gliński's book is that sometimes also the third sector's policies turns out to be insufficiently supportive for the desired development of civil society. He points here to the nostalgic style of action typical for organizations established before 1989, which became used to the monocentric political regime and planned economy, and to business-oriented organizations, which despite using the legal forms of associations or foundations were actually profit-oriented. It is also similar with organizations which depend on financing from various sorts of public agendas. Finally, Gliński pointed to the leader-centered style of action, which, in his view, also quite often seemed to block the development of positive effects of civic engagement. Nevertheless, the general conclusion of Gliński's (2008: 269) considerations is that although the huge potential of civic engagement in Poland is wasted, there are also some positive civic attitudes which slowly diffuse from NGOs to other social actors, such as public agencies or business.

As I have shown earlier in this chapter, in the majority of works linking the civil society in Poland with the sociological vacuum, the condition of civil society in Poland was recognized as bad. Authors were alarming their readers pointing to statistics about low membership in organizations or weak attachment to civic values. Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik (2014) criticized such operationalizations of civil society by saying that in Central Eastern Europe and in Poland organizations are as active as in Western Europe, but as non-for-profit organizations are less centralized and more informal, it is not possible to measure them with the same research tools and compare to Western organizations. One of the examples illustrating this are Polish trade unions, which have a relatively low participation rate, yet they play a vocal role and are capable of influencing the government (Ekiert, Kubik 2014: 51). The authors highlight the contentious aspect of civil society in Poland, which means that its actors are quite often not very active on an everyday basis, but are capable of mobilizing in moments of public debate. In the recent years, this could be observed on the example of the movements formed by

parents opposing the lowering of the limit of obligatory school attendance, street protests against Beata Szydło's government's disregard for the verdicts of Constitutional Tribunal, or protests against the penalization of abortion. As Ekiert and Kubik (1999) observed, it is quite difficult to evaluate the potential of a civil society to rebel using conventional research tools. Although it is often inactive, it is capable of protesting when some of its active members define the actions of the state as limiting their freedom.

Another assessment of the activists of Polish NGOs was made in the study by Magdalena Dudkiewicz (2009), who focused on the activists' self-consciousness. In her relational approach, Dudkiewicz was reconstructing the reference groups of activists of NGOs of various sizes and locations. According to her analysis, based on individual in-depth interviews, the differences in self-consciousness vary depending on whether the organization is based in Warsaw and depending on its size (Dudkiewicz 2009: 272). The activists from Warsaw more often relate themselves towards the world of organizations, while activists from smaller localities relate themselves more often towards the world of the people involved in the third sector. Similarly, for the activists of large (and usually Warsaw-based) organizations, their social world was the whole sector of NGOs, while activists from smaller localities are relating themselves rather towards their local communities (Dudkiewicz 2009: 277). At the same time, however, activists – regardless of the size and localization of their organizations – tend to exhibit certain technocratic attitudes (Dudkiewicz 2009: 282). For instance, activists are convinced that they are the ones who know, how to deal with social problems. They are also strongly convinced that NGOs are better providers of services than state agencies and, paradoxically, they are convinced that they know how to assist people in need better than the actual people in need themselves.

A similarly designed study of people involved in NGOs, conducted by Galia Chimiak (2006: 287), resulted in the finding that "altruism and self-interest do not contradict or exclude each other" as motivations of civic activists. People involved in NGOs were motivated by various reasons, but they also accepted the liberal individualistic model of civil society. This allowed Chimiak to conclude that the solidarity of Polish civil society was built by individuals with an individualistic approach. Another important finding of Chimiak (2006: 291) was that civic engagement in Poland was not longer the domain of the educated elites. According to her research, the activists of NGOs were of different social strata, although quite often, when engaged in civic activities, they developed an ethos similar to the one traditionally attributed to those educated elites.

The above-presented works demonstrate that a significant part of knowledge about civil society has been gathered in studies of individuals engaged in associations. This is the dominant methodological approach to the third-sector studies paradigm in Poland. Consequently, the knowledge on individual members who contribute to collective action is quite thorough, but the knowledge about the organizations is of a different character and it is gathered rather as statistical data on the membership, finances, and activities of various associations or foundations. The conclusion that it brings is that in the recent years there has been an impressive growth of the third sector in Poland.

The organizational-level considerations are always a base for empirical studies of civil society. In Poland, the knowledge about NGOs is gathered very systematically and published regularly by Central Statistical Office (see Goś-Wójcicka 2016), and by NGOs themselves (see Adamiak, Charycka, Gumkowska 2016). Since 2004, when Poland accessed European Union, the overall income of non-profit organizations in Poland has more than tripled from 8 billion PLN in 2005 to 26 billion in 2014; the number of active organizations has increased from 61 thousand to 101 thousand; the number of staff employed by non-profits has been increasing as well (Goś-Wójcicka 2016; Leś 2013). The fact that Poland is a member of the European Union and its non-profits have access to multiple European funds, such as the European Social Fund, is of course not a simple mono-causal explanation of this situation. Yet, the possibility of acquiring money from Brussels certainly impacted many spheres of Polish NGO activities. Some authors would agree that such a state of affairs has a postcolonial impact on the civil society project in Poland as the aims and structures of associational life were projected somewhere else, and perhaps are not fit for Polish societal life (Górniak 2014). For others, it is an interesting aspect of a broader phenomena of late modern complexity, which in the case of public policies might be understood only with regards to conceptions like multi-level governance. For example, in the narrow field of non-profits assisting immigrants in Poland, the European Union covered half of the budget of every such organization, and the transfer of money was followed by the transfer of norms (Pawlak, Matusz-Protasiewicz 2015). The tension between professionalization, on the one side, and preoccupation with acquiring grants and dependence from the public administration, on the other side, was recognized by Marek Rymsza (2014: 15) as a key challenge for the third sector in Poland. According to him, the professionalization and orientation towards project-culture may cause disembeddedness, even though professionalization and efficiency in acquiring funds is a condition of legitimacy and effective work of non-profits.

Ewa Leś (2013) compared the share of various social services provided by non-profit organizations in Poland and other European countries. In majority of cases (except the care for the elderly), the share of social services provided by Polish non-profits was much smaller than in France, Germany, Sweden, or Great Britain (although larger than in Hungary). This would be an indicator of relatively small significance of Polish NGOs in comparison to services provided by the state, families, or markets.

As can be seen from the above-discussed literature, scholars have a quite good knowledge about individuals active in associations (and other civic organizations) gathered through the use of conventional sociological methods such as in-depth interviews or questionnaires, as well as a good knowledge about organizations, based on their reports and documentation. Thus, the knowledge on dispositions of NGO activist and documentary reality dominates. This allows to make some general conclusions about the whole third sector in Poland (and maybe even broadly about the whole civil society). I believe, however, that there is a relatively small knowledge on the relational aspects of civil society. The studies of relations between different organizations, and between third sector actors and other collective actors are, in my opinion, very much needed in order to draw the full picture of civil society in Poland. This picture is partially drawn by studies on the institution of social dialogue (Gardawski 2009; Gąciarz, Pańków 2001), studies on cooperation between local governments and NGOs applying the relational concept of social field (Piróg 2014), or studies on relations between NGOs (Kaim 2014). I believe that more studies of certain social fields populated by NGOs, but also by other social actors, are needed. A better understanding of relations between various types of actors, and institutions (formal and informal) regulating these relations, as well as mobilizing individuals would shed more light on what is allegedly lacking in the Polish civil society.

6.6 Concluding remarks

Civil society is an important subject of sociological studies. Polish sociologists tend to be enthusiasts of associations and other forms of societal self-organization, and would like civil society to play a more important role, be stronger, and larger in numbers of active organizations and members. Because of this, some of the studies of civil society are strongly value based. As I have attempted to show in this chapter, civil society is not in such a bad shape as some authors claim. The evaluation of its condition very much depends on the conceptual and methodological tools applied. If, following Ekiert and Kubik (1999; 2014), different forms of contentious mobilization or, following Wedel (1992b), informal organizations

are taken into account, the emerging picture of civil society turns out no to be that dark. Additionally, the analysis of statistical data about non-profits in Poland reveals that the third sector is growing. Perhaps, it reached certain limits of growth in terms of membership and number of active associations, but non-profits are becoming more resourceful and more embedded in certain social fields, in which they cooperate or compete with the state or for-profit actors.

It is important to remember the lesson from Jason Kaufman's (2002) book: associational life does not always have positive motivations and does not always bring positive effects. The study of Kaufman, as well as the Polish study of Murcki in the 1930s (Chałasiński 1935) which brings the same conclusions, serve as a reminder that people associate also for less virtuous reasons, and even if they do so for the common good, it sometimes has negative consequences. Is then the issue of civil society exaggerated in Polish sociology? I would not fully agree, but I would say that it requires a more relational perspective when studied. The research cannot be just limited to calculating members or associations. It also cannot be limited to studies of worldviews, styles, and motivations of activists. I would say that what is needed is a more relational approach in studies of civil organizations, focusing on the way they form coalitions, the way they oppose oppressing regulations, or the way they compete for resources and prestige. Certainly, social field theories provide a good framework for studying the relational aspect of third sector in Poland.

Regarding the sociological vacuum, I do not see much theoretical connection between the claims about individuals' identifications and the practices of associational life. Most probably, only for the core, engaged activists their associations play central role as an object of identification. For many others, who associate for all sorts of reasons, or simply work for the third sector, the top identifications are located elsewhere. What is important for the condition of the third sector is not only consciousness but also social practices. For instance, people might not perceive organizations such as parent councils as important objects of identification, but working (for better or worse) in the social vicinity of schools they might help in accomplishing some collective objectives. The sociological vacuum is not a proxy for the condition of civil society. A low number of people identifying with intermediary organizations does not make it impossible for the organizations to function properly.

7 Social capital: what mediates between individuals and society?

7.1 Introduction

As Alejandro Portes (1998: 2) noticed, the notion of "social capital comes to be applied to so many events and in so many different contexts as to lose any distinct meaning." Its popularity since the 1990s has indeed been huge. It spilled from the social sciences to policy making and public debate: it was used by the US president Bill Clinton and also the Polish president Andrzej Duda in their speeches. Deeper considerations, however, show that the idea of social capital – that is, the idea that social structures bring benefits to individuals or groups – brings nothing new into sociology. Yet, sociology is not a science that develops linearly. It is banal to say that quite often its explanatory power lies in metaphors[53] and linguistic tools allowing to perceive social reality from different angles. This is probably the case of social capital – the notion which received an enormous attention in general sociology and also in Polish sociological debates.

The notion of social capital is a fuzzy one. It has many different operationalizations and there are also two different views on the kind of objects it is an attribute of: individual and collective. The uses of the notion of social capital were connected with a lot of exaggerated and moralizing statements (Portes 1998). Some social scientists, saw social capital as a remedy for social problems, and its alleged lack in certain communities was seen as a as cause for concern.

In this chapter, I discuss the relation of the conceptions of social capital with the problem of the sociological vacuum. In my opinion, it is the key to understanding the nature of the alleged vacuum or finding what fills in the vacuum. The notion of social capital became the way of discussing problems which in older sociological language were described as ties or bonds. This terminology was, in fact, used by Nowak in his discussion of the sociological vacuum – he talked about the group bonds expressed in statements on group identification. I claim that the debate about social bonds is currently going on in the area of social capital research and speculation. Thus, the problem remains but the theoretical framework and language became transformed.

---

53 An abuse of a metaphor is often leading to grotesque consequences. It is so in the case of social capital. If – in a huge simplification – maximization of physical capital is something desirable, it cannot be simply translated into the social capital, the maximization of which may bring bizarre consequences.

The chapter has the following order. I start with the short history of the fuzzy concept of social capital. In this review of classical literature related to this topic, I do not intend to reveal anything new. My aim is twofold: to clarify the terminology before using it to discuss the problem of the sociological vacuum in social capital perspective, and to focus on the issue of the micro-macro relations in classical social capital conceptualizations. The next section is devoted to a discussion of publications in which authors dealt with the topic of social capital by connecting it to the issue of the sociological vacuum. Eventually, I turn to the brief review of findings of studies on social capital in Poland. I conclude the chapter with a summary in which I aim to show how the erroneous perceptions of social capital reinforced by the references to the sociological vacuum may be corrected when the cautious understanding of the micro-macro relations is applied.

7.2 Social capital: short story of a fuzzy concept

Michael Woolcock (1998) provides a prehistory of the idea of social capital discussing even authors from the 18th century who pointed to the benefits of some forms of social organization. According to this interpretation, Marx, Durkheim, Simmel, Weber, and Parsons could be also considered as theorists of social capital. The actual term appeared in the second half of the 20th century and in the 1990s it reached an enormous attention among sociologists, economists, and political scientists.

One of the first people to use the term "social capital" – even though he did so in a rather imprecise and intuitive way – was Glenn C. Loury (1977), an economist criticizing the neoclassical approach to economic processes, which he perceived as too individualistic. The social capital, according to him, could be the bridge between the individualistic (micro) and the general (macro). Although, Loury only mentioned the idea and did not develop it further, this signaled the emerging need in socio-economic theories for grasping what is on the meso-level.

7.2.1 Pierre Bourdieu and the three forms of capital

In the theory of Pierre Bourdieu, different notions of capital play a central role next to concepts such as field (for discussion of Bourdieauan conceptualization of field, see Chapter 2) or habitus. Bourdieu was mostly engaged in the project of developing the concept of "symbolic capital," and analyzed its relations with economic capital, framed by the mechanisms and structures of certain social fields (Moore 2012). In his writings, social capital is often used intuitively and understood as self-evident. A deeper conceptualization of social capital is provided by Bourdieu in his well-known essay "The Forms of Capital" (1986). The definition of

155

social capital he gives is as follows: "Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word" (Bourdieu 1986: 248–249).

Social capital in Bourdieu's writings is usually treated as an attribute of an individual, yet this definition shows that it cannot be reduced only to the property of an individual. The first part of Bourdieu's definition recalls the network definitions of social capital (or social resources), yet its second part is strongly groupist. Social capital is not simply just a property of an individual, but it is collectively produced by a social group. Thus, for Bourdieu, the network is understood as connecting members of the same group and the principle behind the understanding of the notion of social group is homogeneity.

For the theoretical framework of Bourdieu, social capital is useful as it allows to conceptualize how social actors mobilize economic and symbolic capital they do not possess by themselves. Social capital is then a profit from the membership in a certain social group. Bourdieu highlights the ritualization of relations and membership that secures access to social capital. Although Bourdieu underlined the network character of social capital and its reproduction through exchanges making relations alive, his understanding of social capital is strictly connected with the notions of groups and classes. Social capital does not help individuals in mobilizing resources from members of social categories which are distant from them. Just as homogeneity is the principle for social groups, heterogeneity seems for Bourdieu to be the principle for social fields. Yet, heterogeneity is for him connected with conflict, or at least rivalry, over the symbolic capital. This understanding of social capital is actually very intuitive and does not help to conceptualize the gains individuals receive from ties with other individuals who are socially distant from them.

For the great sociological enterprise of Bourdieu, social capital is important because it connects members of the same homogenous group. It allows individuals to use economic and symbolic capital which is not just their own. Yet, it is not purely a phenomenon on the individual level. Social capital is a product of groups as collective agents. In this understanding, social capital is connecting an individual level with the group level; it is bonding individuals with their groups and then allows them to reproduce their material and symbolic capital.

156

7.2.2 James Coleman and human and social capital

The next important author cited as one who laid the foundations for the social capital concept is James Coleman. In his essay (Coleman 1988) introducing the concept, Coleman did not actually provide its definition. Coleman's work explores the issue of usefulness of the social capital for the theory of action which binds together the micro- and macro-levels of analysis. This is a true evidence for the fuzziness of the social capital concept – even its founder did not define it sharply. The most comprehensive description of social capital concept provided by Coleman is as follows: "In explicating the concept of social capital, three forms were identified: obligations and expectations, which depended on trustworthiness of the social environment, information-flow capability of the social structure, and norms accompanied by sanctions. A property shared by most forms of social capital that differentiates it from other forms of capital is its public good aspect: the actor or actors who generate social capital ordinarily capture only a small part of its benefits, a fact that leads to underinvestment in social capital" (Coleman 1988: S119).

Social capital is important for Coleman to bind together sociologic and economic theories of action.[54] In his view, the former was oversocialized and the latter overindividualized. He noticed that exchange theory of Blau (1964) and Homans (1961) was limited to microsocial relations and it lacked the "ability to make micro-macro transitions from pair relations to system" (Coleman 1988: S98). His aim was to build a comprehensive social theory bringing together micro, macro, sociological, and economic perspectives. Central for his theory was the notion of action, and social capital was understood as a resource for actors (individual or collective) facilitating their actions (Coleman 1988: S98).

Similarly to Bourdieu, Coleman considers social capital in the context of other capitals: physical and human. As he pointed out, physical capital is created by changes in material, human capital in changes of persons' skills, and social capital in changes in the relations between actors. Thus, social capital brings value for the actors by letting them utilize the social structure to achieve their interests (Coleman 1988: S100–S101). Thus, social capital brings the micro-macro link into the theoretical framework, because it allows actors to capitalize their participation in social structure.

---

54 In Chapter 1 I discuss James Coleman's contribution to the 1980s debate on integrating micro- and macro-levels of sociological analysis. He attempted to do so by applying assumptions of rational choice theory.

When Coleman attempts to explain and specify the notion of social capital by describing its typical forms, he creates a new concept as a set collecting notions which were already in use in sociology. The newness of this idea lies not in defining some new theoretical tool, but in bringing together some old notions and showing what they have in common when facilitating action. Thus, social organization with its expectations, obligations, and trustiness, together with channels of information, as well as norms and sanctions, are for Coleman different forms of social capital. To some extent, the concept of social capital in Coleman's understanding is redundant: sociology already used and explained the profits of social organization, exchange of information or of having common norms in the past. The novelty of his approach is that he shows what these various forms of gaining from the social structure in order to achieve interests through action have in common. It is in a way poetic as a two-word term brings together economy and sociology, which was Coleman's intention. "Capital" is a term from the economic order but with the prefix "social" it has a virtue of bringing the two together. Yet, the disadvantage of Coleman's understanding is that a notion so wide and containing so many meanings loses its explanatory power.

Coleman's understanding of social capital has a positive overtone. Coleman, as examples, discussed profits for actors mobilizing their social capital. Yet, according to him social capital not only enables action but also coerces it. If obligations and expectations are considered in the context of social norms, social capital also limits the actor, who is expected to act in a certain way or who is sanctioned for deviant behavior. This is the difference – not expressed by Coleman – between social capital and physical capital: physical capital emancipates its owner; social capital enables an individual to act but, at the same time, it does not allow him or her to act in certain ways, i.e. it may limit the innovativeness of those who do not act according to the norms.

Coleman saw social closure as important to all forms of social capital. For him, the density of relations had a positive influence on possible gains from social capital. It is an approach similar to the one of Bourdieu, in which social capital bound with a homogenous social group. As I will demonstrate later, the closure or density of relations in other conceptualizations of social capital are not always seen as its foundation.

According to Coleman, the peculiarity of social capital lies is its public character. Other forms of capital may be public but most often they are private. Yet, social capital, as being an outcome of relations, never belongs to one individual only, and its creation spills over to other participants of the structure. Thus, Coleman perceived that production of social capital is a kind of a loss of resources for

an actor. At the same time, social capital is gained from the structures brought into existence for other purposes, as in the case of a social organization which constitutes a social capital for its members regardless of its basic objective (Coleman 1988: S108).

To sum up, Coleman's approach, similarly to the approach of Bourdieu, linked social capital with density of relations and explored how it translates into other types of capital. He generally evaluated it as a positive attribute of social structures facilitating action. He used it in a fuzzy way and it could be said that everything which is of social character and enables action could be pointed as social capital. In this sense, Coleman created a very broad concept which is useful only when one of its forms is taken into consideration. Then, however, it seems to be redundant as its forms, enumerated by Coleman, are well established sociological concepts, such as "social organization" or "norm."

7.2.3 Robert Putnam and capital that makes democracy work

Robert D. Putnam is the author who made the concept of social capital familiar to the general public debate. Putnam's two bestsellers *Making Democracy Work* (1993) and *Bowling Alone* (2000) brought both the author and the concept enormous popularity. However, the understanding of the notion of social capital in these two works is a bit different.

In *Making Democracy Work* (Putnam 1993), which studies the differences between civic institutions in northern and southern Italy, social capital is understood as a property of collective having three forms: trust, social norms, and social networks. Social capital is treated as a positive property of collectives. Thanks to social capital, the civic life of a collective flourishes and democracy works. Comparative study of Italian communes from the North and South delivers evidence which confirms these statements. Social capital is also path-dependent and thus causing either virtuous or vicious circles: the commune possessing high amounts of social capital will develop and then possess more social capital, or the commune possessing low amount of social capital will deteriorate or stagnate and thus not increase the volume of social capital. Hence the criticism of Putnam's approach expressed among the others by Alejandro Portes, which I will discuss in the next section.

Putnam (1995) announced the decline of social capital in his home country United States soon after publishing his work on Italy. A few years later, in his work *Bowling Alone* (2000), Putnam presented a developed perspective and also a modified approach to the problem of social capital. In his text, social capital is not understood as something entirely positive. Putnam divided social capital in

two general types: bridging and bonding. This dichotomy echoes the Granovetter's (1973) differentiation for weak and strong ties, however, Putnam tends to evaluate the two types of social capital from the normative angle, pointing to the inclusive aspect of bridging capital and exclusive aspect of bonding capital. According to Putnam's (2007) constrict theory, the ethnic diversity of American social communities is decreasing the levels of trust not only between the ethnic groups, but also inside the groups.

For Putnam social capital is a property of collectives, and – similarly to Coleman – he treats the stable local community as an archetypical idealized possessor of high social capital – unless its network or trust is not deteriorated by path-dependent arrangements like in Southern Italy. Any social changes (for example, migration) are perceived as a threat to the social capital. Its crucial component in Putnam's eyes – trust – needs stability and time to develop and then foster the production of benefits from social capital. Putnam's approach was very successful, but it was also very strongly criticized for romanticizing the perception of community, overlooking social networks' capability to not only trigger innovation but also to inhibit it, reinforcing traditionalism and localism – which actually might be blocking social change – and a naive use of the concept of generalized trust (Cook, Hardin, Levi 2005; Hedin 2001; Levi 1996). As I will demonstrate in Section 7.3. Putnam's approach to social capital had a strong appeal for Polish studies of social capital.

7.2.4 Alejandro Portes and the demystification of social capital

Alejandro Portes, next to the empirical applications of the notion of social capital in the studies of immigration and ethnic entrepreneurship, made some very important theoretical clarifications to its conceptualization. He underlined that social capital represents not a new idea for sociology, but it is rather a new brand for some conceptualization, visible also in 19th century theories. According to Portes (1998: 2), the heuristic power of the notion of social capital lies in its attention to its positive aspects and in placing it in the economic-like framework of the concept of capital.

Yet, Portes is much more skeptical about the power of this notion. Noticing its usefulness and attractiveness, he states that social capital always has its less-desirable consequences as well. He is also extremely critical of prescribing social capital to other units of analysis than individuals. His critique of Putnam's approach is overwhelming and points to many methodological and theoretical issues, which because of the space and scope of this book cannot be presented in their entirety. Firstly, the approach in which social capital is possessed not by

160

an individual but by a community or nation leads to the confusion of the three aspects: the possessor of the capital is at the same time its source. Secondly, when social capital is treated as a property of a collective, it becomes simultaneously a cause and an effect: communities of Northern Italy prosper because they have social capital – and because of their prosperity, they have social capital. This attempt to treat social capital as a macro phenomenon is, according to Portes, a tautology.

Portes' contribution to the development of the concept of social capital lies in distinguishing between three elements relevant to it: the possessors of social capital, the sources of social capital, and the resources themselves. The first two have an agentic character and their cooperation is needed in order to mobilize the latter. According to Portes (1998), the confusion between these elements is the main reason for the tautological treatments of the phenomena behind the concept.

In his review of social capital literature, Portes (1998: 9) points to three functions of social capital: a source of social control, a source of a family support, and a source of extrafamliy benefits. But, as he ironically notices, "it is our sociological bias to see good things emerging out of sociability; bad things are more commonly associated with the behavior of *homo economicus*" (Portes 1998: 15), and this leads to the conclusion that all three functions of social capital may also cause negative effects for social actors. It is a truism for sociology that social control is crucial for social order, but at the same time it suppresses innovativeness. Similarly, the possibility of earning support or benefits is connected with the expectations of providing them also in an extent which blocks development or creates inequalities. Thus, it is possible to talk about negative social capital, which is an oxymoron. It is important to remember that material capital may be used for evil purposes, although it cannot be negative on its own. Material capital for its possessor has only an emancipatory aspect – from the sociological point of view, it is a resource enabling action. Similarly, human capital does not have a negative aspect: all new knowledge has a potential for enabling new actions. Social capital is different as it may have both negative and positive influences on actions of individuals. Portes' critique of the notion of social capital is of huge importance. It emphasizes excessive expectations towards this notion and its overly positive treatment. It also asks for a more cautious consideration of social capital as an avenue of linking micro with macro. Portes criticized the idea of pointing to collectives as possessors of social capital. Its macro aspect is to be rather seen as emergent from the relations of individual possessors of social capital who need to interact in order to mobilize goods.

7.2.5 Michael Woolcock and social capital as a factor of economic development

In his critical review of the conceptions of social capital, Michael Woolcock (1998) pointed to their faults: they try to explain too much with too little; they do not distinguish the sources and benefits of social capital; they can justify contradictory public-policy measures (non-obvious relations between the state and the social capital); they grapple with the problem of maximization. Woolcock's critique of the notion was presented at the same time as the work of Portes (1998) and shares with it many common elements. Furthermore, Portes pointed Woolcock as the only author whose conception of social capital as a property of collectives he saw as promising. The work of Woolcock is especially interesting in the context of the problem of the present book as he deals with social capital as a notion allowing to understand the micro-macro link.

Woolcock (1998) brought together the inspirations of ethnic entrepreneurship studies (micro-level) and comparative institutionalist studies of state-society relations (macro-level) to develop his conceptualization of social capital, and divided it into four dimensions according to axis of micro-macro and embeddedness-autonomy. Embeddedness[55] at the micro-level refers to intra-community ties and is labeled as "integration," and at the macro-level to state-society relations and is labeled as "synergy." Autonomy at the micro-level refers to extra-community ties labeled by Woolcock "linkage," and at the macro-level it refers to institutional capability and credibility, and is labeled "organizational integrity." Woolcock's model is seductive because of its elegance (two dimensions and four fields to be filled) and integration with the sociological tradition. Woolcock shows the heritage of proposed notions in classical theories: Integration – Durkheim; linkages – Simmel; organizational integrity – Weber. Woolcock, being interested mostly in the dynamic effects that social capital has on development, considered possible outcomes of various combinations of absence of the four dimensions. The lack of all of them he called "anarchic individualism," and the presence of all four dimensions, "beneficent autonomy."

At the micro-level, Woolcock defines the combination of high linkage and high integration as a "social opportunity." All other combinations of different

---

55 Embeddedness is treated by Woolcock in the line of the Granovetter's (1985) conception stating that every economic action is embedded in social relations, thus the model of depersonalized market is deceptive. In Chapter 3, I have discussed the conception of embeddedness as one of the most promising ways of linking micro- and macro-levels in sociological theory.

saturations of linkage and integration are, according to him, not beneficial for the development of small communities (micro-level): high integration and low linkage are amoral familism,[56] high level of linkage and low level of integration are anomie (once a key notion for sociologists like Durkheim or Merton), and the low levels of both linkage and integration are the rare amoral individualism (but still possible, as in the case of the Ik tribe from Uganda).

The model by Woolcock – a World Bank Expert – is interesting also because it was developed as a heuristic for development programs. It is an emblem of the 1990s that the problems of developing countries started being perceived not only from the perspective of institutions (and their alleged corruption) but also consequences of interplay of social structures and cultural norms. Here, it is interesting to consider Woolcock's model because it explicitly deals with the problem of the micro and macro relations. The lesson of Woolcock is that only the special combination of weak and strong ties and structures on the micro- and macro-level may have beneficial outcomes. Thus, Woolcock is another author who healed social sciences from the social-capital-over-optimism.

7.2.6 Ronald Burt and structural holes

Ronald Burt's contribution to the conception of social capital is of a paradoxical nature. Before his announcement of the problem of structural holes (Burt 1992), social capital was derived from the closure and density of relations, as in the statements of Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu (1986). The definition of social capital by Burt (2005: 4) is very short: "the advantage created by a person's location in a structure of relationships." Social capital, as Burt highlights, is a metaphor about advantage and it is the contextual complement to the metaphor of human capital. The human capital explains why people do better because they are more able individuals, while "social capital explains how people do better because they are somehow better connected with other people" (Burt 2005: 4).

The concept of structural holes is simple, though revolutionary, for thinking about social capital. Burt demonstrated that the advantages of locations in a social structure are not always caused by the density of network relations or closeness to many other participants of the network. In case of brokers fulfilling

---

56 "Amoral familism" is a term coined by Banfield (1958) and also often recalled in Polish context. It was used by Tarkowska and Tarkowski (1990) to describe the state of affairs in Poland. This combination of strong intra-group ties and weak extra-group ties is often associated with the thesis on the sociological vacuum. I will explore the examples of this line of sociological reasoning in the next section of this chapter.

the structural holes, the advantage lies in the fact that they create non-redundant connections between different networks. The brokers could be perceived as marginalized in both of the groups they are members of, but the fact that they are the only ones connecting them gives them enormous advantage. They are able to control the inflow of information and mediate between the networks. They are simply in the position of a merchant buying something for one dollar and then selling it for two.

This line of reasoning about social capital, similar to this of Putnam's, inherits much from the seminal work of Granovetter (1973) who showed that weak ties are beneficial in job search because they often connect with social circles that are socially distant. Thus, it is not the tie's strength that is important but the possibility of connecting distant social worlds. Here, the location may give an individual a huge advantage.

Yet, it is necessary not to reduce the thinking about social capital only to the structure of networks. As Krackhardt (1999) demonstrated, a broker who connects two networks, but is simultaneously visible in both of them, is unable to use his or her advantage derived from location. His or her actions would break the norms of one of the two networks. In this case, the ties torture social actors, and not open new opportunities for their actions. Burt's conception of social capital is not only reduced to the location in structure. The structure has consequences on norms and trust. Thus, according to him, closure also provides advantages, for example, supporting the trust. In that extent, Burt's reasoning is in line with Coleman (1988). Similarly to Woolcock and Putnam, Burt (2005: 7) highlights the interplay of close and loose relations by saying: "facilitating the trust and collaborative alignment needed to deliver the value of brokerage, closure is a complement to brokerage such that the two together define social capital in a general way in terms of closure within a group and brokerage beyond the group."

In case of Burt's conception of social capital, there is a very interesting interplay of micro, macro, and action. Micro-level is understood as the level of individual persons, who have different capabilities of performing successful action, depending on their location in the network. But the structure and norms of this network, which are here to be understood as the macro-level, are crucial context for the action. Social capital is therefore the metaphor of a mediator between micro and macro.

7.2.7 Nan Lin: from social resources to social capital

Nan Lin's early research focused on the problem of weak ties defined by Granovetter (1973). In his research on getting a job Lin, together with his colleagues,

coined the notion of "social resources," defined as "the wealth, status, power as well as social ties of those persons who are directly or indirectly linked to the individual" (Lin et al. 1981: 395). Social resources consist of two constitutive elements: social relations and resources which are accessible through these relations. In this sense, social resources are not simply possessed by individuals – they are accessed by them, because they are embedded in their networks. Later Nan Lin jumped on the wagon and integrated the conception of social resources with a theory of social capital. The conception of social resources later transformed into the network theory of social capital (Lin 2001). According to Lin (2001: 24), social capital should be understood as "resources accessible through social ties that occupy strategic network locations (Burt) and/or significant organizational positions (Lin)." Thus, Lin, constructed his theory of social capital in a dialogue with other social network scholars such as Ronald Burt. The inspiration from the works of Mark Granovetter was also very important for him. Thus, the operational definition of social capital proposed by Lin (2001: 25) is: "resources embedded in social networks accessed and used by actors for actions." In his theory, Lin focuses on investments in social capital and how it is both accessible by social action and enabling for social action. At the same time, however, he also opened an avenue for the research on unmobilized social capital (Chua 2014) by coining the concept of "the invisible hand of social capital."

7.2.8 The invisible hand of social capital

The concept of "the invisible hand of social capital," which was first pointed by Lin (2000), has been receiving much attention in the recent years. The very term "social capital," used by the earlier-discussed authors, can be defined as "resources that need to be mobilized." This means that a beneficiary of these resources needs to be a social actor: capability of mobilizing constitutes his or her agency. Yet, contrary to other forms of capital, social capital quite often does not require a purposeful mobilization of its possessor. As documented in studies on the labor market, approximately quarter to one-third of employees receive their jobs without prior search. The majority of them – according to McDonald and Elder (2006), 80% in the USA – receive the information about job through personal contacts. Thus, the participants of the social networks may gain advantage of the resources embedded in these networks without agentic mobilization (Lin, Ao 2008). In case of the invisible hand of social capital, the gains received by some of the members of a network seem to be an effect of a kind of collective agency of the social group. Yet, it is an outcome of routine exchanges (such as small talks about employment opportunities) between members of networks with unequal access to the

resources. The issue of the invisible hand of social capital is helpful in understanding the central problem of this book: a tie between the micro- and macro-level of analysis in sociology. By analogy to the famous invisible hand of market, in case of the invisible hand of social capital, it is possible to ascribe the agency to the collective. It seems that this was the line of Bourdieu's (1986: 249) thinking when he stated that "the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word." The Invisible hand of social capital is an interesting example explaining this problem: individuals interact and this creates "social capital," meaning access to the resources, which are than gained by individuals. Yet, for the external observer – the one excluded from this very network – it may seem that it is a planned strategic action of the whole group guarding its resources and purposively keeping it only for their members.

7.2.9 Summary

To sum up this brief history of the fuzzy concept of social capital, it is necessary to highlight three issues. Firstly, social capital is an example of a successful concept. Since the 1980s it has gained an enormous attention of scholars, and now it is impossible to conduct sociological studies and ignore it. Secondly, many of the conceptualizations of social capital are strongly normative. It is regarded as a solution to social problems (Ryan et al. 2008: 677) and its lack is regarded a social problem. Thirdly, social capital is a concept which has a potential of understanding the relations between the micro and macro phenomena in social sciences. As Burt (2005: 4) elegantly expressed it, "the advantage created by a person's location in a structure of relationships is known as social capital." Social capital – although it is often hard to grasp what exactly it confines – is a metaphor which helps to notice the consequences of individual actions for the larger structure and, subsequently, the aggregated consequences of this structure for the actions of individuals. I will now move to the section where I explore how this "hottest" notion in current sociology became linked with the "hottest" notion of Polish sociology: the sociological vacuum.

7.3 Social capital and the sociological vacuum

The sociological vacuum conception has been coined before the social capital entered the stage of sociological debates. Yet, the sociological vacuum is, in much extent, a story of social bonds understood in groupist terms as relations between an individual and a group. This relation, as can be seen in the above history of the concept of social capital, fits perfectly in the new language of social capital. Especially the normative tones of social capital's story, highlighting the

166

gains that social structures bring individuals and – even more so – collectives, became connected with the sociological vacuum thesis of Nowak. Firstly, I will describe some general features of the process of binding together the conceptions of social capital and the sociological vacuum, and then I will go more deeply into the two examples of papers in which this connection was a central issue: Anna Kubiak and Anita Miszalska's (2004) work on social bonds, and Janusz Czapiński's (2006) work on the social capital.

The sociological vacuum appears useful for scholars in two cases. Firstly, when they draw a historical background for the analyses of social capital. As the construct of social capital emerged in sociological theory in the 1980s, in order to describe its earlier state, it is necessary to cite studies using different concepts. For example, in Działek's (2011; 2014) works there is often a repeated hypostatization that in the past the levels of social capital were low, which is supported by the reference to Nowak (1979b). Secondly, the sociological vacuum is used in order to support the considerations on the state of social capital in Poland, following Putnam's (1993; 2000) understanding of this concept: the attribute of a collective rather than of an individual, importance of the component of trust, and the differentiation between bridging and bonding capital. This brings the sociological vacuum perspective on considerations regarding the social capital very close to the considerations regarding the civil society.[57]

The picture of social capital in Poland, when applying Putnam's definition, seems to be very pessimistic. Low level of associational life and low level of generalized trust are connected to the existence of a sociological vacuum. For example, Jędrzej Chumiński (2011: 124) wrote: "Poles suffer from such a lasting predisposition to distrust and atrophy of the capabilities to cooperate." References to the thesis on the sociological vacuum very well fit Putnam's (2000) conceptualization of bonding and bridging capital. The strong bonds with family and immediate friends, described by Nowak, are treated as evidence for the existence of strong bonding capital in Poland, while the lack of bonds with groups of intermediary level are treated as evidence for the lack of bridging capital. Thus, the sociological vacuum describes the "worst" – according to Putnam – combination of capitals. Such a description of the state of social capital in Poland even allows to state that Poland is the Southern Italy of Central Eastern Europe (Lasinska 2013).

Interestingly, there are no authors who tried to present having strong bonds with the nation as a potential ground for bridging capital – a potential possibility

---

57 The issue of civil society and its debated linkages with the thesis on the sociological vacuum were discussed in the previous chapter (6).

of tying together nearly all members of the Polish society. In the works on social capital, the evaluation of the situation in Poland is very pessimistic and it goes hand in hand with Putnam's normative theory. The low level of social capital is something negative, and so is the vacuum. Together, these two negative descriptions sound even more dramatic. The sociological vacuum appears in works on social capital mostly when social capital is understood as an attribute of a collective – in some cases, this collective is the entire Polish society. Thus, social capital is used as a parameter to describe the entity of a macro-level. In this approach, the potential of bringing together the micro- and macro-levels of analysis are not used. However, bonding capital (which equals strong family bonds) might be interpreted as a phenomenon on the micro scale, and the bridging social capital (lack of bonds with intermediary level groups) might be interpreted as a phenomenon (or rather lack of it) on the meso scale. I will now turn to two papers, where the sociological vacuum played a central role in analyzing social capital in Poland.

Anna Kubiak and Anita Miszalska's (2004) article "Czy nowa próżnia społeczna, czyli o stanie więzi społecznej w III RP" [New Social Vacuum, or the Nature of Social Bonds in the Third Republic of Poland], attempted to revisit the sociological vacuum concept by investigating the nature of social bonds. The paper offered a broad picture of the state of social affairs in the Third Republic of Poland and of the available literature on the topic. Nowak's thesis gave the general angle for this review, although it underwent both shift-in-meaning and selective and partial implementation in the process (see Chapter 4). Kubiak and Miszalska compressed several statements on Polish society under the name of the sociological vacuum and treated it as a general claim about social atomization and a deficit of horizontal bonds (2004: 19). According to the authors, after 1989, the vacuum was filled only to a small extent, and mainly with institutionally backward or pathological settings (Kubiak, Miszalska 2004: 19). The authors used various data sources, further developed the conclusions of other publications, and identified the symptoms of a weak condition of social bonds in present Polish society. The general message of their paper is very pessimistic.

Though non-negligible effort was put into Kubiak and Miszalska's investigation, upon a closer look it transpires that the data was treated rather selectively, and that the argument was built with exaggeration in order to dramatize the drawn picture. Data challenging the general thesis of the paper – see statistics on the small number of divorces (Kubiak, Miszalska 2004: 29) – were not given the due analytical consideration, and the analysis of interesting empirical findings got mixed with stereotypical claims, rather characteristic of socio-political

journalism than of the academia – see, for instance, the strong statements on pathology in professional corporations (Kubiak, Miszalska 2004: 31).

Kubiak and Miszalska expressed their concerns about the low levels of generalized social trust and of social capital in Poland using Putnam's (2000) theory of social capital as a framework for these remarks. It is worth noting that the authors' lamentations appear inconsistent: sometimes it is the low level of engagement in formalized organizations that they point to as a cause for concern, while on other occasions, it is the people's usage of market exchanges instead of informal networks – as with babysitting, care for elderly, etc. (Kubiak, Miszalska 2004: 26, 38). The sociological vacuum thesis was the leading metaphor in describing the situation perceived as unfavorable, but there were also other idioms applied in a buzz-worded manner – a case in point is "dirty togetherness" (see Podgórecki 1987) or "amoral familism" (see Banfield 1958; Tarkowska, Tarkowski 1990). Thus, Kubiak and Miszalska's article is a very interesting example of a dramatized sociological narrative on the condition of Polish society.

A very similar tone is adopted in the paper of Janusz Czapiński (2006), in which the sociological vacuum is used as a metaphor for describing the low levels of social capital in Poland. The author, a well-known Polish public intellectual, took up the sociological vacuum concept in the paper under a provocative title "Polska – państwo bez społeczeństwa" [Poland – A State without Society]. The article uses Nowak's conception in a quite original way, organizing around it Czapiński's line of argument – the thesis is quoted at the beginning and also invoked in the concluding part of the paper. The sociological vacuum phenomenon was converged with the topics of civil society and social capital. The article itself is very dramatic in revealing the lack of society in Poland.

Czapiński's interpretation of Nowak's thesis provides a next example of its shift in meaning: it was presented as a thesis on the lack of real structures, and not on the absence of identifications with such. Czapiński disappointedly observed that the sociological vacuum had not become filled since the 1970s. In his opinion, the existence of the vacuum means that there is no civil society in Poland. In order to support his argument, the author relates to findings from "Diagnoza społeczna" [Social Diagnosis] (research project carried in the years 2000–2013 in order to study quality of life in Poland) on low levels of engagement in civil life, generalized trust, and social capital in Poland. These low levels and lack of "society" are presented as a problem, hence the author's conviction that the vacuum should be filled. Czapiński's treatment of social capital and civil society is of a normative character: Civil society and high level of social capital are something good. Czapiński's application of the notion of social capital is also

of a Putnamian character – social capital is a good possessed by collective actors (Putnam 2000). In this case, the collective is a whole society, although according to the dramatic tone, the low level of social capital in Poland does not allow to talk about society but only about population in Poland.

The two above-presented works reveal a huge impact of Putnam's understanding of social capital as an attribute of collectives. The authors, drawing comparisons between the combination of low level of bridging capital and high level of (bad) bonding capital, and the thesis on the sociological vacuum, cited Putnam's influential theory without any criticism. Putnam's work being very influential was also highly criticized (see Section 7.2 of this chapter). These considerations are highly dramatic and describing the state of affairs in a very pessimistic manner. Yet, on the theoretical level, it is apparent that the authors struggle with the theoretical problems of linking micro- and macro-levels of analysis. In their reading, Putnam's conception is built on two elements: participation in associations and trust. The first element (analyzed in more details in Chapter 6) reveals a very straightforward way of thinking: an individual (micro-level entity) participates in association (meso-level entity), and thanks to that the society (macro-level entity) may work properly. This mechanism is very basic and does not take into account, for example, that density of associational life might also be a manifestation of conflicts and ruptures in the society, as in the case of Polish – German antagonisms in interwar Silesia (Chałasiński 1935), which I have also discussed in the previous chapter.

Another issue is a very simplistic understanding of trust used in operationalizations of social capital by Kubiak, Miszalska, and Czapiński. The authors built their indexes of trust on the declarations of respondents about their trust towards certain institutions or entities. In that manner, the strategic and interactive components of trust are lost. According to Cook, Hardin, and Levi (2005), trust is a phenomenon working only on the micro-level of interactions between individuals. All uses of this concept on other levels of analysis are of an allegorical character. Their work is a strong critique of theories based on assumption that trust is indispensable for social order. The message of their book is that complex societies need institutions allowing co-operation and collective action regardless of the levels of trust on the micro-level of interactions of individuals (Cook et al. 2005). This issue is of a huge importance for the relation between social capital, trust, and the sociological vacuum: many readings of Nowak's concept explain lack of identification with institutions, or the alienation from them (Nowak 1979b) with the lack of trust. It is important to remember that in his original work Nowak did not write about trust – this concept came to the

minds of sociologists later in the beginning of the 1990s, under the influence of Putnam's (1993) work on social capital and the work of Fukuyama[58] (1995), who set an agenda for sociological celebrations of trust as something pivotal for efficient social order. This was later highlighted in the context of transition into democracy by Sztompka (1996; 1998; 1999), and in this context it is going to be discussed in Chapter 8.

Cook, Hardin, and Levi (2005; see Hardin 1991) proposed a conception of trust as an encapsulated interest, which is a phenomenon existing only on the level of interacting individuals, who are capable of evaluating the interest of the interaction partner. Their perspective is sociological, because trust requires a dyad – it cannot emerge without a relation. This is different to psychological conceptions of trust, in which only the individual's capability to trust or to be trusted is taken into account. On these theoretical grounds, the authors criticize the concept of "generalized trust," usually measured by the level of trust to abstract macro-level institutions or generalized others. Firstly, it is impossible – in their opinion – to talk about trust without considering actual interactions of two parties. Trust must be something particular – not general. Secondly, the survey method of measuring trust towards the government was designed to measure cynicism, and it is both methodologically and theoretically incorrect to consider cynicism as simply equal to distrust or the lack of trust.

In my opinion, this is the critical weakness of comparing the sociological vacuum with low levels of trust. Only when the possibility that trust may be generalized and extended beyond the micro-level phenomena is taken into account, it is possible to think of using the conception of social capital as tying the micro- and macro-levels of analysis. What can be learned from Cook, Hardin, and Russel's (2005) critique of such kind of uses of the notion of trust is that other devices are needed in order to cooperate. In consequence, other concepts to describe the link between micro- and macro-structures become necessary. Pointing to collectives (as large as societies) as possessors of social capital is a naive solution to the theoretical problem. It does not mean that the lack of "something" in between is an artifact. Both the lack of identifications with middle-level structures and the low level of generalized trust (and other aspects of social capital as

---

58 It is worth noting that Fukuyama's (1995) book title was translated into Polish as "Zaufanie: kapitał społeczny a droga do dobrobytu," which retranslated into English would be "Trust: social capital and a way towards welfare." "Social virtue" was replaced here by "social capital," and in Polish sociological discourse this work is treated mostly as book on social capital (equal to trust), and often recalled together with Putnam's (1993; 2000) works on social capital.

defined by Putnam) reveals something about Polish society. Perhaps, they are even somehow connected, although saying that low level of social capital equals a sociological vacuum is just a rhetorical trick. The lack of identifications and the lack of social capital seem to be so problematic because there is a lack of other theoretical tools to describe the micro-macro link. The real vacuum is not in the society but in the theory forged to describe it.

7.4 What do we know about the social capital in Poland?

The variety of concepts under the common label "social capital" received enormous attention in the studies of Polish society. Describing the state of affairs of this research would require a huge effort and a separate book. However, since the main topic of this book is not social capital but the problem of linking micro- and macro-levels of analysis, and the intractable problem of the sociological vacuum, I will limit myself to an arbitrary selection of the most important studies on the social capital in Poland, which are also relevant to the key-problems of the present book. I will also pay attention to the findings that contradict the described above discourse on the alleged negative syndrome of low social capital in Poland. First, I will discuss the findings of other researchers who treat social capital as an attribute of collectives. Then, I will discuss the findings of studies in which social capital is regarded as an attribute of individuals.

There are different sizes or ranges of collectives considered as possessors of social capital that have been analyzed during its studies in Poland. In the above discussion of the uses of the sociological vacuum thesis in the context of social capital, the latter was attributed to the whole society. The dramatic assessment of the condition of Polish society is supported by the data on low level of social capital in Poland – thus, it is regarded as a feature of the whole society. Perhaps, this is one more remark that needs to be added to the critiques of the social capital conception: the larger the collective regarded as a possessor of social capital, the less useful the explanatory capacities of the concept. Other streams of studies focus on the social capital as an attribute of regions or local communities. Interestingly, the collective which is supposed to be bearer of a social capital is usually defined territorially.

Tomasz Kaźmierczak and Marek Rymsza (2007) attempted to merge the social capital perspective with the social economy perspective. Their work is worth noting as an example of an applied program for the new development of local communities grounded in their own social resources, but facilitated by the European Union programs. Similarly, Maria Theiss (2007) described the social capital as a context of local social policy. According to her findings, social capital of the

local community, together with institutionalized intervention of social welfare, have a synergic effect. At the same time, social capital on the level of households has strongly unequalizing effect as it is correlated with education and position in social structure. Ireneusz Sadowski (2011), building on theoretical framework of Putnam (1993), demonstrated that local governments in active communities do not commit spectacular failures. This does not mean that inactive communities sometimes do not have successful local governments, yet their efficiency is only a function of decision-makers' efficiency, and these communities are not immune to failures.

In the afterword to the large volume entitled *Kapitały ludzkie i społeczne a konkurencyjność regionów* [*Human and Social Capitals, and the Competitiveness of Regions*] (Szczepański, Bierwiaczonek, Nawrocki 2008), the authors concluded that although much of the research in Poland focuses on the theoretical considerations or on the causes of social capital, there is no convincing evidence for conversion of social capital into other forms of capital (Lewicka et al. 2008: 518). Similarly, Cezary Trutkowski and Sławomir Mandes (2005) came to the conclusion that the relation between the strength of social capital and economic development is not so apparent. In these studies, social capital was considered as an important context of collective actions taken by different agents located in the structures of local governments. This links the social capital research with the research on democracy, which I will analyze in Chapter 8. Locating social capital as a property of local (or regional) community is an attempt to tie together micro- and macro-levels of analysis and set the intermediary meso-level of community. Indicators and based on them indexes of social capital usually aggregate the individual level of analysis (i.e. number of participants in associations, or number of respondents declaring trust) and sometimes the group level of analysis (i.e. number of non-governmental organizations in a given community). The above-mentioned researchers were testing the hypothesis stating that social capital is a feature of the local community that translates (or is at least correlated) to other aspects of its wellbeing, such as economic development, quality of local government, or efficient social policy. On this level of analysis, the results are very ambiguous. Contrary to sociologists' expectation that social capital – this truly social attribute – of local community is a crucial coefficient explaining their situation, it seems that social capital is not a key factor for the wellbeing of communities. Of course, this understanding of social capital is not totally redundant, yet it is rather useful in describing the context of the local situation – not in explaining it.

The importance of social capital on a regional level has been demystified by Jarosław Działek (2011). According to his findings, there are no patterns of regional variety of social capital in Poland. Against assumptions that alleged different levels of social embeddedness in various historical parts of Poland are not connected with differences in the social capital. Polish territories that in the past have been occupied by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as well as Prussia and Russia, are very much heterogonous regarding the levels of social capital. The same is valid in regards to western and northern territories of Poland incorporated after World War II (so-called "Ziemie Odzyskane"). Against the assumptions and evidence from USA and Western Europe (Sabatini 2008; Woolcock 1998), the levels of social capital in Poland are not correlated with economic development. According to Działek's (2011) analyses, the indicators of social capital are statistically insignificant in models explaining the economic development. Economic development in Poland is conditioned by the levels of human capital and economic capital.

Much different are the conclusions from studies considering the social capital as a feature of individuals. The conversions of social capital into other forms of capital are also not so obvious, yet studies made in Poland allow to understand both the sources of social capital and its benefits for individuals, without much doubt that social capital is beneficial for individuals.

Similarly as in other countries, in Poland the level of social capital of individuals depends on variables such as sex (man have more social capital) and age (elders have less social capital). Moreover, people with more cultural capital have more social capital, and various occupational groups have different amounts of social capital (entrepreneurs possess the largest amounts). The size of the locality does not matter for the amount of social capital in Poland. Participation in religious rituals is correlated (although not very strongly) with the amount of bridging social capital (Growiec 2011).

Ireneusz Sadowski (2012) highlighted the uneven distribution of social capital in Poland. According to his analyses, on the panel survey of the generation of people who became adults at the fall of the communism, the distribution of individual social capital between members of Polish society is similar (in terms of Gini coefficient) to the distribution of other forms of capital: human and material. Sadowski (2012) also found correlations between individual social capital and income, and psychological wellbeing. Social capital in Poland is not simply transmitted as such between generations. As Sadowski (2012) noticed, the cultural capital mediates in this process, and high schools, as institutions forming ties, play in it a crucial role. The mechanism is as follows: children of parents

174

with a better social position do not simply become members of parents' social networks, but follow their educational path and build their own social capital thanks to the participation in the educational institutions. As a result, their social capital and social position is adequate to the cultural capital of the parents.

Social capital was also studied in regards to Poles who migrated from Poland. Louise Ryan and colleagues (2008), using qualitative research techniques, investigated the different ties sustained by Polish migrants in the UK. According to Ryan, social capital is a complex phenomenon. Polish migrants possess social ties of different strengths and lengths – (connecting them with new neighborhood in UK but also with the family and friends back in Poland). The rivalry between Poles is perceived mostly by the ones who do not speak English and are dependent on "Polish" networks. Yet, there are high levels of trust and support in close groups and, on the contrary, there is no trust to the members of the imagined community of Poles. Interestingly, the Poles who have extra-ethnic ties do not perceive the threat or competition from their co-ethnics. The lesson from this study is that in order to understand the gains from the individual's location in the social structure, it is necessary to take into consideration the complexity of this structure and also the attributes of the individual. In the case of Polish immigrants to UK, the knowledge of English was crucial for their capability of creating new ties. Again, cultural capital seems to be synergetic with social capital.

On the individual level, there is evidence that social capital influences income attainment in Poland. Kazimierz M. Słomczyński and Irina Tomescu-Dubrow (2005) operationalized social capital as participation in the social network of multiple structural holes, and in their analysis of panel data they showed that larger amount of social capital is correlated with an increase in income. Similar positive correlation of social capital (this time defined as membership in associations and meeting friends socially) and income was found by Jan Fałkowski and Beata Łopaciuk-Gonczaryk (2010). These economists used the same Social Diagnosis data, which let Czapiński (2006) announce that in Poland there is no society. The same data of Social Diagnosis allowed Jakub Growiec and Katarzyna Growiec (2010) to conclude that bonding social capital has negative impact on income, while bridging social capital has a positive impact on income and other variables representing respondents' wellbeing.

A comparison of above-presented selection of studies on social capital is a hard task, because of a plethora of used indicators and differences in operationalization of the concept. The methodological complexity magnifies the complexity of various theoretical frameworks applied. Without a quite long explication of what is actually meant by social capital in a given study it is impossible to

assume, if this is the "same social capital" that other researchers studied. Social capital, understood as property of individuals, is also a strictly sociological concept which allows to understand gains (and sometimes losses) caused by a person's position in a social structure. Such an understanding of social capital has the virtue of connecting the micro (individual and her immediate relations with other individuals) and the macro (structure). It is clear that the proper location in structures is beneficial to individuals. The outcomes of studies of social capital defined on the level of individuals (and informed by the network tradition of understanding the notion) in Poland are coherent with the outcomes of the studies in other countries.

7.5 Concluding remarks

Social capital is an extremely fuzzy concept. Some of its definitions and applications are very useful in understanding the benefits of position in social structure, but some other are just noisy misinterpretations of properties emergent from the participation in social settings. In this chapter, I have reconstructed the most influential definitions of social capital with a focus on their relation to the micro-macro problem in sociological theory. I am convinced that the erroneous perceptions of social capital supported by the references to the sociological vacuum may be corrected, when the cautious understanding of the micro-macro relations is applied. I truly believe that the definitions of social capital as an attribute of collectives are not bringing too much new value to theory. On the contrary, the definitions of social capital as an attribute of individuals (but an attribute derived from participation in networks of relations) are useful in linking micro- and macro-levels of analysis. By the same virtue, they are useful in refuting the problem of the sociological vacuum. The problem of the sociological vacuum was defined in terms of aggregation of attitudes and identifications of individuals. Social capital puts the attention to relations between social actors, not only the imagined bonds social actors maintain with social groups. Social capital is an attribute of an individual, but it cannot be simply possessed like material capital – it can be best defined as resources embedded in a network of relations. Thus, social capital, in its social network understanding, is next to the conception of embeddedness (discussed in Chapter 3) one of the promising lines of framing the micro-macro link. Social capital is a mediation between individuals and the society.

In this chapter I have discussed the most influential variants of the social capital conception with special focus on the problem of the micro-macro link. For Pierre Bourdieu, social capital is a link between individual and her homogenous

social group, so it has a segregating character. In Bourdieu's theoretical enterprise, social capital is the least theorized concept which is actually understood intuitively. James Coleman's approach brought the micro-macro link into the theoretical framework because, according to him, social capital allows actors to capitalize their participation in social structure. Robert Putnam received a lot of attention and contributed to the popularization of the concept of social capital. Yet, from the theoretical point of view, Putnam's approach was strongly criticized for romanticizing communities, overlooking some of the negative aspects of social networks – such as reinforcing traditionalism and localism – and naive understanding of generalized trust. Alejandro Portes criticized the idea of pointing to collectives as possessors of social capital. Social capital's macro aspect is to be rather seen as emergent from the relations of individual possessors of social capital who need to interact in order to mobilize resources embedded in their networks. Although Michael Woolcock perspective on social capital treats it as an attribute of collectives, it provides an interesting combination of micro-level and macro-level factors. This approach was influential for studies on the interrelation of social capital and regional development. Ronald Burt treated social capital as a mediator between the micro-level (understood as the level of individuals whose actions depend on their location in social network) and the macro-level (understood as the norms and the structure of the network). Nan Lin started with a conception of social resources and then transformed it into the network approach to social capital and highlighted that social capital is connected with social action. Nan Lin also created the concept of the invisible hand of social capital which allows to grasp the benefits of participation in networks which were not mobilized by purposive action. As it can be seen in various theorizations, social capital is always a mediation between individuals and larger structures. Although the concept is extremely ambiguous it helps noticing the feedbacks between the actions of individuals and their aggregation on the structural level.

In this chapter I have discussed how the thesis on the sociological vacuum was connected by scholars with the conception of social capital. The important conclusion is that some researchers treat the sociological vacuum as a proxy for social capital. The notion of social capital coined in the second half of the 1980s was obviously not used in studies conducted during the period of communism in Poland. Currently, in analyses of genealogy of social capital in Poland, the statement about the sociological vacuum is used as evidence for the low level of social capital in Poland before 1989. Another conclusion that requires highlighting is that authors citing the thesis on the sociological vacuum in context of social capital usually tend to follow its normative definition proposed

177

by Putnam. Bonding capital is then associated with strong identifications with primary groups, while bridging capital is associated with weak identifications with intermediary groups. Therefore, the use of the sociological vacuum concept in connection to social capital concept merges the theoretical shortcomings of Putnam's theory with the abuses of Nowak's thesis. This is clearly illustrated by the example of papers written by Miszalska and Kubiak (2004), and by Czapiński (2006).

The studies of social capital as a property of collectives that have been conducted in Poland are in my opinion inconclusive. The findings from other countries about the correlation of social capital with regional development were not confirmed in Poland. On the other hand, the findings of studies of social capital as an attribute of individuals conducted in Poland are congruent with the outcomes of studies conducted in other countries. This allows to speculate that the larger the subject regarded as a possessor of social capital, the less explanatory capacities of the concept. The studies which regard the whole society as a possessor of social capital, have minimal explanatory capacities.

Social capital is the notion that gained enormous attention and since the 1990s has become one of the hallmarks of sociology. Ironically, its roots are in economics. Social capital is an attempt at measuring, in quasi-monetary terms, the advantages of having social relations. Yet, social relations have always been an element of human environment, while capital is a relatively new invention. Social capital is regarded by some optimists as a condition for social wellbeing but, in my opinion, it should not be overestimated. Successful cooperation between humans is possible without social capital.

8 Quality of democracy: social base for political institutions

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter I deal with the concept of democracy from the perspective of connecting micro- and macro-levels of social phenomena. Democracy is a central notion for the Western culture and a proper discussion of its roots and history would be a life-time project. In literature, it is possible to find at least six general understandings of democracy, which in some aspects contradict each other (Coppedge, Gerring 2011). Thus, I limit my considerations to the aspects important for the problem of the way in which political system is capable of transforming the will of individuals into the action of a whole state; in other words: the way in which the micro-level is linked to the macro-level by mechanism of democratic decision-making. In the studies of democracy, the micro-level is very often identified as the

178

level of individual – it is the basic assumption of modern democracies, that each individual has an equal vote. For some scholars, the micro-level in studies of democracy is the level of interactions in which decisions might be taken after direct considerations, or interactions which shape opinions then influencing political acts of individuals. The macro-level is usually located on the level of state or whole political system. The micro-macro issue in studies of democracy is, to some extent, overlapping with the individual-society issue. In this chapter, however, there will be no considerations about the agency-structure pairing.

I start with an excursion into the classic writings in the field of political science and sociology of politics, which contain traces of meso-link between individuals (micro) and the state, decision-makers, or elites (macro). Then, I move to the analysis of literature on the quality of democracy in Poland for which, according to the discussed authors, the sociological vacuum is an important context. As I will demonstrate, there is a strong connection between this chapter and two previous chapters (6 and 7) because weak civil society and low levels of social capital are often perceived as obstacles for the desired development of democracy in Poland. The chapter is concluded with remarks on the problem of linking micro- and macro-levels in understanding democratic processes.

8.2 Democracy: aggregating individual wills into collective action

One of the huge problems with concepts such as democracy is their fuzziness. For intellectuals, political scientists, and sociologists it is a fuel for eternal debates. Yet, clashes between different ways of understanding democracy can lead to actual political conflicts and influence state governance.[59] In this section of the chapter I attempt to locate the issue of the micro-macro link in considerations of

---

59 This present book is written at the time of the constitutional crisis in Poland, during which two main political forces are both convinced about being democratic and their opponents being anti-democratic. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość [Law and Justice] political party understands democracy according to the electoral conception, while the supporters of the independence of the Constitutional Court understand democracy according to the liberal conception. Interestingly, the egalitarian conception of democracy has its supporters only among some marginalized political parties (such as Razem [Together]). Moreover, the main opposition party – Platforma Obywatelska [Civic Platform] – when ruling the country, also had a strong tendency to support the electoral conception of democracy, and Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, being at the time in opposition, was calling for a stronger control of the majority.

classic authors writing on democracy.[60] The authors whose various perspectives on democracy I arbitrarily chose to analyze are: Benjamin Barber, Robert Dahl, William Kornhauser, Arend Lijphart, Charles Lindblom, Seymour Lipset, Adam Przeworski, Giovanni Sartori, Joseph Schumpeter, and Charles Tilly. According to Michael Coppedge and John Gerring (2011), in literature there are six different conceptions of democracy: electoral; liberal, majoritarian, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian. Among these six conceptions there are some overlaps and similarities, but some of them are contradictory to each other. It is not a classification or outcome of a conceptually constructed grid.

8.2.1 Six conceptions of democracy

In the electoral conception of democracy (equivalent names are contestation, competition, elite minimal, realist, or Schumpeterian), parties and elections are crucial elements of the democratic process. Elections are the mechanism of aggregation of preferences of individuals (micro-level) to produce one outcome: a mandate for a certain group among elites to lead the state (macro-level). Parties (meso-level) are means of accumulating individuals of more or less similar preferences, which compete for power. The authors, whose works on electoral (minimal) conception of democracy I am going to discuss below, are Adam Przeworski (1991), Giovanni Sartori (1987), and Joseph A. Schumpeter (1942).

In the liberal conception of democracy (equivalent names consensus or pluralist), the political power is assumed as something that must be distrusted, and for this reason arrangements such as transparency, civil liberty, rule of law, effective checks on rulers (like strong constitutional tribunals), and minority rights are not just add-ons to the rule of the people, but lay at the heart of the democracy. In this case, it can be said that the meso-level between individual freedom and state authority is located in the institutions and organization securing the proper (according to the supporters of this conception) functioning of the political system. Among many authors writing on this conception of democracy, here I will pay attention to the works of Robert A. Dahl (1971; 1998) and recall the theory of mass society built by William Kornhauser (1960).

---

60 This strategy is indebted to Cześnik's (2008a) idea expressed in the article in which he attempted to answer whether the presence of the sociological vacuum is problematic for democracy by searching for clues in the writings of classical authors. Here, I am answering the broader question of the way in which different classical authors address the problem of the micro-macro link in their writings on democracy.

180

The majoritarian (or equivalently responsible party government) conception of democracy is in opposition to the liberal one. The government needs to be effective and it is simply fulfilling the will of majority. The government, as an emanation of the sovereign, is to be trusted, so there is no need for building the institutions limiting its powers. The link between the micro and macro-levels here is to be conceptualized similarly as in electoral conception of democracy: on the one hand, as an election mechanism, and on the other hand, as parties competing for the right to represent the sovereign. I will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of putting into practice of majoritarian model of democracy in the latter part of this book referencing the work of Arend Lijphart (2004; 2012).

The participatory conception of democracy is based on criticism of the idea to pass the rule to the elected representation of voters, thus, it may be considered as an opposition towards the electoral conception of democracy. Instead, all other institutions of consulting decisions with citizens are to be employed – referendums, public hearings, social movements – as well as all other vehicles of engaging the citizens into the control of government and influencing its decisions. Here, the meso-level of analysis ought to focus on collectives such as social movements or civic organizations of different sorts, and institutional mechanisms providing participation, which means different than election ways of aggregating individual opinions into the decisions on the state level. I am going to look at the participatory conception of the democracy through the critical eyes of Giovanni Sartori (1987) and the enthusiastic eyes of Benjamin Barber (1984).

The deliberative conception of democracy is process-oriented. Here, the elections are not enough to secure the democratic outcome, because they are an automatic way of aggregating preferences. According to the deliberative conception, democracy requires a continuous dialogue between the citizens, performed on different levels of decision-making. Thus, the deliberative conception stresses the salience of institutions of public consultation, but also invests much hope in the possibility of running a rational public debate in the mass-media. These institutions might be considered as meso-level transmitters of individual-preferences into collective decisions. Although the father of the deliberative conception of democracy is undoubtedly Jürgen Habermas (1984), in this chapter I will pay attention to the process-oriented conception of democracy presented by Charles Tilly (2007) which, although not equal to the deliberative conception of democracy, is an interesting case for analyzing the micro-macro link.

In the egalitarian conception of democracy, the key concern is the equality of citizens. The political equality is not possible to be achieved without social equality. The goal is to achieve equality in domains such as participation,

representation, protection, and resources. Although, ideally, the equality is to be achieved between individuals, the most visible inequalities to be fought by democracy are between social categories. The meso-level in this conception of democracy is the level of categories which sometimes achieve subjectivity and turn into social actors. In order to discuss this issue, I refer to the works of Charles Tilly (2007) and Charles E. Lindblom (1988).

In the following review I pay unequal attention to the conceptions of democracy. I focus more on the electoral, liberal, and participatory conceptions than on the three others because they are more often used by scholars studying the interplay of quality of democracy and the sociological vacuum. In this manner, the review of the six conceptions of democracy prepares the ground for the proper interpretation of the use of the sociological vacuum in the research on democracy in Poland.

8.2.2 Electoral conception of democracy

Even in the most minimalist definitions of democracy there is a space for considering the micro-macro link. Adam Przeworski (1991: 11) phrased the definition of democracy in nine words saying that "democracy is a system in which parties lose elections." Thus, democracy requires elections and protagonists who compete for the votes. As Przeworski (1991: 11) highlights, these protagonists are collectively organized and capable of coercing those whom they represent. This means that democracy requires elections as a mechanism of translating individual preferences into a common will, as well as leaders – members of elites – who represent and organize the masses. The link between micro and macro is achieved thanks to the elections as a translation mechanism, and thanks to the intermediation of organizations. The consequence of this arrangement are expressed in the famous dictum of Przeworski (1991: 12) stating that democracy is an institutionalized uncertainty "because it is a system of decentralized strategic action in which knowledge is inescapably local." Again, an entity from the macro-level – "a system" – regulates and is regulated by actions which are embedded in local knowledge (micro-level).

Electoral democracy requires two steps: reduction of preferences to a reasonable number, and choosing between the alternative preferences. Both of them require some kind of intermediary mechanism. The most often pointed intermediaries between the individuals and the state in a democratic process of reduction of preferences and then choosing between them are political parties. There is an old sociological tradition of analyzing parties as organizations (see Michels 1915), but they can also be seen as mechanism of gathering individuals

182

of more-or-less similar preferences, and then allowing the competition between these generalized preferences, personalized in their leaders, as in the understanding of democracy by Schumpeter (1942: 273), who defined the principle of democracy as follows: "the reins of government should be handed to those who command more support than do any of the competing individuals or team." Parties not only gather the voters of similar preferences – they also shape these preferences, therefore, the mechanism is interactive.

The second step – choosing between alternative preferences – is achieved through some form of voting mechanism. It could be achieved in a referendum, which to some extent could be compared to elections, yet the majority of decisions in representative democracies are taken in parliaments and are not directly consulted with voters. The mechanism of consulting the decision involves such actors as media, trade unions, social movements, interest groups, non-governmental organizations, local governments, agencies researching public opinion etc.

Sartori (1987) saw a difference between the democracy and other political systems in the fact that it is – at least in its ideal model – a horizontal system. Politics is determined by the relation between the ones who govern and the ones who are governed, so it is a vertical system based on hierarchy. Democracy is the only political system in which the governed are sovereign to the ones who govern. Yet, it is only an ideal and, according to Sartori, the border line between the governing and the governed – even if it is blurred – exists. The vertical aspect of democracy seems to be in constant tension with the horizontal aspect. The former has its historical roots in previous, non-democratic forms of government. What is crucial for the subject of this book is that the vertical aspect of democracy is related to the problem of linking individuals (micro-level) with the societal (macro-level). Horizontal aspect is the ideal of democracy, which is impossible to be achieved from the organizational point of view. For example, it is an often recurring argument that the "real" kind of democracy is direct democracy, in which decisions are taken in referenda by citizens. It is a utopian argument derived from the wrong assumption that the organization of a collective of a large number of people is possible according to the same principles as the organization of a collective of a small number of people, as in the mythologized Greek polis.

Thus, in democracy there is a need to create representation. Representation is created in elections, in which decisions of voters are registered and their opinions are aggregated. The election system is an important mechanism allowing the emergence of the macro from the micro. From this perspective, the analysis of mechanisms and entities engaged in electoral procedures is an analysis conducted on the meso-level. Elections are the mechanism of democracy, but the opinions aggregated during them are not constant. Voters are reflexive individuals and

the micro-macro link here does not work only in one direction: from individual voters to the elected representation. Opinions are formed on the basis of evaluation of the present government's actions and, again, individual voters usually do not shape their own opinions without the influence of others. Here, as concludes Sartori (1987), the free public opinion is another necessary condition for democracy to work properly. Opinion forming is a three-fold process: opinions are transmitted from the elites; opinions formed at the bottom are transmitted to the elites. Sartori refers to the cascade model of opinion forming, described by Deutsch (1968), in which opinions are first transmitted from the elites via mass-media, and then are disseminated by opinion-leaders, who operate on the level of micro-relations and, in the course of daily routines and interactions with others, transmit their interpretations of what they had learned from the mass-media. The opinions are also formed on the micro-level and then transmitted to the elites. This process is often observed during mass protests and the formation of social movements. These instances, however, seem to be incidental.

The third process described by Sartori (1987), in reference to the work on voting and public opinion by Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954), is essentially important for the conceptualization of the micro-macro link. Opinions very often are not formed as an outcome of information evaluation, and they are simply evaluations without information formed as outcomes of identification with a reference group. The opinion of an individual is formed because of his or her attachment to a given group: family, group of friends, occupational category, party, or social class. Membership in this groups (or at least identification with them) mediates the membership in the polity. Yet, identification with them tends to influence the opinions in a way which, according to Sartori's considerations, is not quite rational because it is not based on information. Below I am going to discuss the work by William Kornhauser (1960), who saw the loss of community and the lack of groups influencing opinions as a threat for democracy. This problem is very relevant to the conception of the sociological vacuum and I will turn to this link at the end of this chapter. In this process, the identification with a group influences the opinions of an individual, which are then aggregated in elections and create the macro-level dispositions for the action of the state. According to Lipset (1981), for a very long time, voting was a phenomenon determined by social class membership – so-called "class voting." Yet, since the 1960s, in the majority of democracies, class voting has decreased in its intensity. An oversimplified understanding of the mechanism in which political preferences are determined by the membership in certain categories would allow to take the individuals out of the equation and treat democracy as an interaction of large-sized groups.

I find the problem of opinion (or preferences) crucial for the discussion on democracy in context of the micro-macro link in sociological theory. The minimalistic understanding of democracy, in which elections are the event of translating individuals' opinions into dispositions for the elites of decision-makers, tends to focus on the electoral mechanism. Yet, opinions are formed and transmitted, or they may be "read" by elites. In order to understand these mechanisms, one needs to take into account the following institutional domains: field of the media, educational system, and higher educational system. Educational systems shape capabilities for formation of opinions by citizens. Higher education produces professionals, who create opinions in certain fields of activities – they transform uncertainties into risks (Bromley, Meyer 2015). Yet, the universities and other higher education entities are homes for the public intellectuals taking part in mass media opinion formation. To understand the design of media and education domains, it is useful to apply one of the social field theory approaches (see Chapter 2). Then, the meso-structures of certain social fields become pivotal for understanding the connection between individual opinions and actions of the elites.

8.2.3 Liberal conception of democracy

William Kornhauser (1960: 228) defined mass society as a society in which "both elites and non-elites are directly accessible to one another by virtue of the weakness of groups capable of mediating between them." Both Western societies and communist societies from the period of the late 1950s, discussed by Kornhauser, were getting closer to the model of mass society, in which an individual is faced with the totality of the state. According to him, mass society was lethal for liberal democracy, in which medium-sized groups or communities became vehicles for expressing the interests and context to form political opinions. Thus, for liberal democracy, one of the mechanisms of controlling those in power is the pluralism of groups and categories among society, which prevents the elites from steering the whole society in a direct way.

According to Robert A. Dahl (1971: 1), the key characteristic of democracy is "the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals." Focusing only on the political systems of modern states and putting aside democratic institutions in smaller collectives or historical Greek polis, where it was possible to exercise the responsiveness of the leadership to the preferences of the members of collective directly, will allow to see that the conceptualization of the micro-macro link is necessary to understand how the government – the entity located on the macro-level – is capable of responding to the preferences of individuals (as individuals located

on the micro-level), and how the individuals are capable of communicating their preferences to those in the government.

As I have pointed above, the first step that needs to be taken in all democratic regimes (also the ones among small numbers of people) is the reduction of the number (possibly at least as large as the number of members of a given polity) of individual preferences to a comprehensible selection of alternatives for action. The second step is the mechanism of choosing between these alternatives. For democracy to work "among a large number of people," Dahl (1971: 3) provides eight requirements that need to be met: 1. Freedom to form and join organizations; 2. Freedom to expression; 3. Right to vote; 4. Eligibility for public office; 5. Right of political leaders to compete for support; 6. Alternative sources of information; 7. Free and fair elections; 8. Institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference. The electoral conception of democracy discussed in previous section takes into account all of these factors, yet they are perceived as secondary. In case of the liberal conception of democracy, they are crucial in securing checks on those in power (Coppedge, Gerring 2011: 253).

If there is an agreement on Dahl's requirements, it is possible to operationalize the quality of democracy according to his definition. Of course, there are other indexes of democracy, such as the ones performed by the Freedom House or the Economist Intelligence Unit. Here, the idea is not to take part in the debate on how to measure the quality of democracy (assuming that it is possible), but to discuss how the key elements for the democratic process are related to the problem of the micro-macro link in social theory.

8.2.4 Majoritarian conception of democracy

I have already discussed that in democracy the mechanism of choosing is a form of election. In definitions of democracies, elections are usually mentioned directly, but the details of the voting system are left as a technical issue – even though they have profound consequences for the political life of a given nation. Arend Lijphart (2012: 47), following American President Abraham Lincoln, as a definition for democracy used the sentence "government by the people (or by the representatives of the people) and for the people." From this short definition, he arrives to considering elections and their organization as a central problem of democracy studies. The threshold criterion for him to evaluate the country as democratic is the universal suffrage. Arrangements for electing representatives allow Lijphart to investigate the patterns of democracy, in which he distinguished two elementary models: the Westminster (majoritarian) model of democracy, and the consensus model of democracy. The applied models of democracy,

according to Lijphart's analyses of 36 states, have serious consequences: consensus democracies (against common sense) outperform the majoritarian democracies in effective government and effective policy-making. They are also democracies of a higher quality. Thus, the central institution of democracy – the elections – which translate the preferences of citizens into the decisions of elites, have consequences for other aspects of institutional design and performance of a given country. Lijphart also pointed to the fact that majoritarian democracies fit better homogenous societies, and the ones with significant minorities require a consensual electoral system. If the electoral system of heterogeneous society is majoritarian, the minority is likely to be marginalized. In the practice of political life, the majoritarian conception of democracy may also legitimize the politics of the majority in parliament elected in proportional elections. Yet, in that case, the discourse about legitimacy is in conflict with institutional arrangements of elections and government.

8.2.5 Participatory conception of democracy

Sartori's (1987) considerations on participatory democracy also shed light on the problem of linking the individuals with macro structures. Sartori was a great supporter of representative democracy, in which citizens delegate their preferences to elected leaders to make decisions for them. Next to representative democracies, it is possible to imagine (imagine because, at present, no such political system exists) direct democracies. Literally understood, direct democracy is possible only in a small collective of people capable of discussing together decisions to be taken during a gathering – it is a micro-level phenomenon.[61] Therefore, Sartori (1987: 112) divides direct democracies into two general sub-types: one, in which there is possible face-to-face contact and direct interaction with all members of polity, and the other in which there is no possibility to interact with all members of a collective and there is a need of some form of mediating its directness. The phrase "mediating the directness" sounds paradoxical, but it

---

61 Anyone who took part in a gathering of a small number of people who were supposed to make a common decision knows how much depends on the social definition of situation, exercise of power etc. Still, someone presides the gathering, someone sets the agenda, and so on. Both the institutional setting of such a situation and the skills of the actors involved in the gathering – the way they express their preferences, their use of rhetoric and persuading fellow participants – are a fascinating topic for studies of interaction process on the micro-level. The conclusion from this short excursion is that the arrangements of small-scale direct democracy do not secure democratic outcomes.

is crucial for the problem of the micro-macro link in social theory. One of the forms of mediation in direct democracies is the referendum. Sartori highlights that although technically, at present, thanks to electronic devices, a direct democracy based on referendums considering all decisions to be taken by a political system is possible, this type of democracy is a contradiction of democracy. Democracy via referendums is named by Sartori a "macro-democracy." According to him, it would be only an illusory direct democracy – there would be a need for some institution or committee to set the agenda and edit the questions to be voted.[62] Yet, what is even more worrying for Sartori, a democracy via referendum would be a zero-game decision mechanism: it would literally be a government of the majority with a very limited space for consensus between political preferences. This kind of democracy would maximize conflicts and mechanically lead to the tyranny of majority. In this reduction *ad absurdum*, Sartori presents his support for representative democracy, in which the intermediation between individuals' preferences and decisions is supposed to be "smarter."

Next to direct democracy and representative democracy, Sartori (1987) considers also participatory democracy, towards which he is skeptical as well. The problem of participatory democracy is presented at the transition from the level of small groups to the level of political system. Sartori admits that participation is the essence of micro-democracy and contributes to the working of the whole super-structure of the democratic regime, yet he also points to the contradictions in the reasoning of the advocates of participatory democracy. Participation is a personal experience of taking part in something in an active way. Thus, according to Sartori's reconstruction of the theoretical concept, participation assumes intensity. Engagement is presented as equal to intensity and easily leads to extremism, which prevents people from recognizing the complexity of the matter. Sartori, in reference to Berelson et al. (1954), speaks with irony about the image of democracy in which all citizens would be deeply interested in politics. It does not mean that Sartori is calling for apathy as a basis for democracy, yet he is far from lamenting about the lack of engagement of huge parts of society in political life. As he comments, it would be ridiculous to require citizens to be capable of making all the political decisions rationally – as the imagined proponents of direct democracy do – but it would be appropriate to focus more on the rationality of decision-makers. The inference drawn from these considerations

---

62 Thus, even in the most radical direct democracy that we can imagine there would be still a need for some kind of representation to deal with selecting the issues from which to choose, editing the questions, and managing the technicalities of voting.

might be that the vertical link between limited rationality of voters and the limited rationality of decision-makers may sometimes lead to collective rationality.

Benjamin R. Barber (1984), as an enthusiast of participatory democracy, which he described as "strong," opposed it to liberal democracy, which he called "thin." In his opinion, liberal democracy was a democracy of elites and masses, and the participatory democracy, in which politics is a way of living, was challenging this divide. He defined the central problem of politics as a conflict between private interests. According to Barber, liberal versions of democracy were eliminating conflict (the anarchic disposition), repressing conflict (the realist disposition), or tolerating the conflict (the minimalist disposition), while participatory democracy should transform the conflict – "[seek] to create a public language that will help reformulate private interests in terms susceptible to public accommodation" (Barber 1984: 119).

The key notions used by Barber (1984) in his thinking about democracy are: action, publicness, necessity, choice, reasonableness, conflict, and absence of independent ground. It is clear here that this conceptualization of democracy requires the conceptualization of the micro-macro link as well. Private "actions" sometimes have "public" consequences, which creates a "necessity" of "reasonable choice" in order to transform the "conflict." Defining what is – and what is not – public, and what is the community of people calling themselves "we," are the subject matter of one of the key debates of democratic politics which, according to Barber, can never be settled – the debate about drawing the boundary between private and public, aggregating private into public is the core of democracy. As the most original and central to his thinking about democracy, Barber announced the element of the "absence of independent ground" – the idea that the public always needs to be defined and that it is not something stable – and neither are the all problems that need to be politically solved. When there is an absence of independent (external, metaphysical) ground, all conflicts need to be solved in an ongoing participation and collective search for solutions. Thus, unlike in the earlier mentioned (and praised by Sartori) approach of Berelson, politics is to be done by citizens – not for them. The crucial difference, in contrast to other conceptions of democracy (especially the electoral, majoritarian, and liberal ones), is that – according to Barber – participative democracy does not only concern choosing between solutions or interests, but through citizen participation, public deliberation, and civic education it transforms the possible profile of choices. In his metaphor of a collective choice in restaurant, Barber (1984: 136–137) describes other forms of democracy as bargaining what to order

from the menu, while in participatory democracy a collective is inventing new recipes and creating a new menu.

The crucial element of thus understood participatory democracy is establishing an institutional platform allowing citizens with their private interests (micro) to transform the conflict and, by overcoming it, to create the community (macro). The micro-macro is connected in institutional venues – among others, neighborhood assemblies, national initiative and referendum process, or electronic balloting. In Barber's idea, these venues were to supplement and then transform the institutions of liberal democracy. In my opinion, Barber's proposals of turning participative democracy into a practice are a bit naive and are very vulnerable to critique such as the one coming from Sartori. The weakness of Barber's proposals on how to amend democratic institutional arrangements lies also in their under-theorized micro-macro connection: they are an interesting proposal for experiments with democratic participation, but it is hard to imagine that a national referendum with a multichoice format (Barber 1984: 286) would solve the problem of translating divergent private interests into public action. In many aspects, participatory conception of democracy overlaps with the deliberative conception of democracy, which is going to be discussed in the next section on the example of Tilly's (2007) considerations.

8.2.6 *Deliberative conception of democracy*

Charles Tilly (2007: 7), in his considerations on democracy, points to the tradition of distinguishing four possible ways of defining it: constitutional, substantive, procedural, and process-oriented. Tilly pursues his analysis according to the process-oriented understanding of democracy. According to him, democracy is about the relation between state and its citizens, which exist in four dimensions: breadth, equality, protection, and mutually binding consultation. In all countries it is possible to notice a constant and parallel presence of processes of democratization and de-democratization. In this sense, democracy is not a defined state of political affairs, but rather an equilibrium of on-going processes.

In Tilly's (2007: 22) understanding, high-capacity democracy involves the presence of frequent social movements, interest group activity, political party mobilization, and formal consultations (which also include elections; consultations are not limited to elections). The state, according to his definition, is capable of monitoring the public politics but there is also a requirement of low levels of political violence. From this point of view, the strong intermediary collectives such as social movements, mobilized party electorates, and the mechanism of consultation expanding beyond elections are prerequisites of a good democracy.

190

Tilly's sociological process-oriented approach to study democracy focuses not only of political parties but also on social movements and various mechanisms of consultation. This shows that the problematization of the micro-macro link is crucial.

Tilly claims that in order to understand democracy one needs to take into account interrelations of trust, inequalities, and autonomous power clusters. Trust networks are "ramified interpersonal connections, consisting mainly of strong ties, within which people set valued, consequential, long-term resources and enterprises at risk to the malfeasance, mistakes, or failures of others" (Tilly 2007: 81). Tilly also takes part in the debate between Putnam (1993; 2000) and Jason Kaufman (2002)[63] regarding the actual role of associations in civil society. In Tilly's view, Kaufman is right in saying that the particularistic interest of associations was not contributing to common good as such, yet all in all, participation in these associations is beneficial for democracy because it includes to public politics people who were outside the trust networks and it provides them with an experience of civic life.

According to Tilly (2007), the role of trust networks in democracy is ambiguous. The democratic dilemma of trust consists of a tension between competition of collectives internally bonded by trust. Democracy involves making decisions about limited resources and it is a reason for the emergence of conflicts. One may say that it means that democracy requires a larger amount of trust. Yet, Tilly claims that while trust networks enable democracy, democracy requires as a necessary condition also distrust. Thus, to conclude, in his process-oriented understanding of democracy, democratization in regards to trust relies on including to public politics trust networks.

Another mechanism of democratization is a decrease in autonomy of power centers, which are organizations of different types, capable of influencing the state or exercising their power outside of the state (like criminal gangs or local warlords). Tilly (2007) remarks that a decrease in autonomy of these actors does not always contribute to democratization – in some sequences, in strengthens the authoritarian state. From the perspective of the central problem of this book, particularly important is the issue of constellation of social actors (often being large organizations capable of mobilizing individuals and resources). Autonomous power centers could be also considered as entities linking the micro- and macro-levels.

---

63 This debate is presented in Chapter 6.

8.2.7 Egalitarian conception of democracy

Another important mechanism seen by Tilly (2007) as a part of the democratization process is an eradication of inequalities between different categories of members of society who, as a result, should fall into one category of citizens. In that sense, democratization is achieved thanks to a weakening of intermediary structures such as ethnicities or social classes (but also gender, race, caste etc.), which in unequal societies defined the position of an individual in the state and his or her relations with individuals from other categories. Usually, these categories were grounds to form collective identities, and a source for mobilization for collective action.

Charles E. Lindblom (1988), in his remarks about the relations between democracy, market, and policy-making, stated that in the course of theorizing democracy the views on the conflict between values of freedom and equality have reversed. In the 19th century, in liberal thinking, equality was perceived as a constraint to freedom, and the only acceptable form of equality was the equality of opportunities. In the late 20th century, an increasing number of thinkers (also, but not only, thanks to the Marxist inspiration) started perceiving equality as a precondition of freedom. As Lindblom (1988: 98) stressed, freedom is about being able to make choices, and inequality means making some categories of citizens incapable of making choices, or at least limiting their range of possible choices. In relevance to the micro-macro debate, Lindblom added that political system forms individuals who participate in it, thus the free market creates individuals who believe that they are free.

In case of the egalitarian conception of democracy, the role of the state is to apply policies securing the equality such as income, education, or health. These might be secured thanks to the welfare systems of redistribution. Systems of redistribution are another possible micro-macro link in the theories of democracy. Building on the assumption that society with large differences in opportunities, resources, and access to services is not truly democratic, there is a need for designing a system in which taxes are collected from individuals and corporations. Then, the common large pool of financial resources is divided between various branches of the welfare state, which supports the individuals or nuclear families.

8.2.8 Summary

To conclude the brief review of six conceptions of democracy with a focus on the role of the micro-macro link in their construction, connections between the level of citizens and the level of political system are present in all of them. Theorizing how to connect the individuals and processes shaping their opinions with

the government requires solving the micro-macro analytical problems. For the majority of the discussed scholars, regardless of whether they concentrated on elections, consultations, institutions securing participation or deliberation, and systems of redistribution, the micro-macro issue was not the center of attention. Yet, as I tried to persuade, without the proper grasping of the mechanisms connecting the micro-level with the macro-level it is not possible to understand the democracy in any of its definitions.

8.3 Democracy in the vacuum?

After the fall of communism in Poland, studies of democracy became a focal topic for social scientists. The country started its transition from the mono-centric order to the poly-centric one (Ziółkowski 1993), which involved undergoing two most important transformations: the economic one, from the planned economy to the capitalist one, and the political one, from the communist totalitarian (at least in its ambitions) to the democratic one. Sociologists made the transformation the main subject of their studies (Kolasa-Nowak 2010). The huge interest in the study of politics has always been a peculiarity of Polish sociology, yet just after 1989, the formation of the democratic system was one of the most interesting social phenomena. Sociologist also felt more competent and legitimized than political scientists[64] to study democracy and its institutions. For this reason, it is not surprising that in some of the analyses the problems of democratic political institutions were considered in the context of the alleged sociological vacuum.

The works dealing with the sociological vacuum thesis in context of democracy may be grouped into three categories: those considering the electoral mechanisms (close to the minimal and electoral conceptions of democracy); those dealing with the problem of checks on the government (close to the liberal conception of democracy); and the ones dealing with the problem of participation and involvement of civil society in democratic processes (close to participatory conception of democracy). This working typology is proposed by me only in order to emphasize some patterns in discussions about the sociological vacuum and democracy. I start this section with a presentation of concepts like the

---

64 From the point of view of sociologists in Poland, political science was a communist project which as a tool of ideological propaganda was not worth the attention. The present book is not a place to discuss the grounds for this perception, yet it certainly had actual consequences: sociologists in Poland felt more competent and legitimized to study and comment on politics. To this day, sociologists hold key positions as public intellectuals "explaining" politics in the media (Warczok, Zarycki 2014).

missing-middle approach and the hour-glass society, which are often regarded as theoretical kin of the sociological vacuum. Then, I move to the sociological vacuum itself and start with an analysis of works, in which scholars consider the sociological vacuum as an obstacle for the electoral system. Subsequently, I briefly focus on the sociological vacuum as a space for corrupting political institutions. The next discussed problem is the sociological vacuum and political participation. Finally, I consider the insightful work of Mikołaj Cześnik (2008a; 2008b) on relations between democracy and the sociological vacuum.

8.3.1 Post-communist Eastern Europe and insufficiencies of the micro-macro link

The problem of insufficient meso-mechanism transmitting between individuals and state institutions, as well as the elites, was mentioned in a number of works focusing on the post-communist zone in particular. Geoffrey Evans and Stephen Whitefield (1993) attempted to answer the question about the conditions for the emergence of stable party systems in Eastern Europe. In their literature review, they identified three models which explained the formation of party systems in the region: modernization approach, missing middle approach, and comparative communist approaches. The latter was pointed by the authors as the most suitable approach to study the post-communist democracies which, according to them, were somewhere between the extremes of missing middle and modernization. According to the missing middle approach, reconstructed by Evans and Whitefield, in Eastern Europe there was an absence of stable cleavages and based on them intermediary structures, which allowed to articulate interests only on the level of mass collectivism of the nation or state. The reason for this situation was the fact that the communist system perceived all intermediary structures as a threat. The lack of the meso-structures blocked the articulation of interests of narrower groups. In consequence, it was impossible to establish stable political cleavages, and a stable political system could not emerge (Evans, Whitefield 1993: 528–529). Evans and Whitefield did not agree with the missing middle approach and, what is often forgotten, they highlighted that the approach did not suit the Polish case to which the modernization model applied better.[65] Similarly to the reconstructed missing middle approach, Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan

---

65 As I have discussed elsewhere (Pawlak 2016), Evans and Whitehead did not refer to the thesis on the sociological vacuum, yet they reconstructed the missing middle approach seeing it also in the works of Polish authors, such as Lena Kolarska-Bobińska (1990), Mirosława Marody (1990), or Marek Ziółkowski (1990), who were either citing

(1992: 132) described the landscape of Eastern European civil societies as very flat and as such negatively affecting the development of political systems.

Richard Rose (1995) coined a notion of the "hour-glass society" to describe the conditions for building democracy in Russia. The lower part of the hour-glass was the vivid life of informal networks of acquaintances and kin active in small social groups. The upper part of the hour-glass was the political life of elites competing for authority, wealth, and prestige. The contacts between the two parts were very limited, as in the narrow neck of hour-glass through which sand trickles. In Russia, according to Rose, there was no citizen community. Its hour-glass-like structure was beneficial for elites, because it made it hard to control them. Yet, paradoxically, it also protected regular citizens from the excessive control of the state: citizens coped with everyday life not thanks to the state, not against the state, but despite the state. Rose's metaphor of hour-glass society has been quoted many times not only in the context of Russia but also other post-communist societies.[66]

The issue of the micro-macro link has been traditionally analyzed in studies of democracy and it was also pointed as a problematic question in regards to the Eastern European political systems emerging after the fall of communism. I will now discuss how the conception of the sociological vacuum was placed in this context.

8.3.2 The sociological vacuum and electoral system in Poland

If the model of democracy in which individual wills are transmitted through political parties competing for power to make decisions concerning state policies is considered, the weakness of political parties is to be pointed as a crucial problem. In this approach, individuals (micro-level) sharing similar interests, ideologies, and views are gathering as electorates of parties (intermediary level) which influence state policy (macro-level). Mirosława Grabowska, for instance, calls attention to the vacuum as a condition of emerging party electorates which needed to be "glued" together by political entrepreneurs (2004: 163). Hieronim Kubiak explicates the weakness of the party system by the fact that people do not identify

---

Nowak directly, or were at least very much influenced by the intellectual climate in which existence of the sociological vacuum in Polish society was regarded as a fact.

66 Some authors writing about Poland perceive the similarities between the hour-glass society metaphor and the sociological vacuum (see Dzwończyk 2009; Lasinska 2013; Szczegóła 2013). Indeed, both ideas consider the somehow defined meso-level, yet the difference is crucial: hour-glass society concerns communication between elites and society, while the sociological vacuum concerns identities with medium-size social groups.

themselves with political parties – thus, again, the sociological vacuum mechanism appears (1999). The unstable party system was often pointed as a weakness of the young Polish democracy. For Grabowska and Kubiak, its weakness was connected with the sociological vacuum, suppressing the emergence of strong parties embedded in the socio-political system. According to these authors, week parties are dysfunctional for the proper functioning of democratic institutions.

Jacek Wasilewski's (2006) introductory article "Wprowadzenie. Elita polityczna średniego szczebla – problematyka badania" [Introduction. Political Elite of Middle Level – Problematics of Research] is a fine example of the ability of Nowak's conceptual framework to inspire and guide further research. Wasilewski coined the notion of "political vacuum" in order to describe the hiatus between the central political elite and the masses (2006: 16). Accordingly, there is no communication between these two layers, because the political life on the local level is underdeveloped (Wasilewski conducted his studies on the level of the Polish *powiat*, the closest equivalent of which is "county"). Notwithstanding the terminological resemblance, the political vacuum is not a direct transposition of Nowak's idea, but rather a new research direction inspired by this. Wasilewski's presentation of the sociological vacuum also assumed the shift-in-meaning: it got "translated" into a claim regarding the lack of institutions between families and national community, and the paucity of civil society (Wasilewski 2006: 16). According to the author, the political vacuum resembles the sociological one in the sense that there is a sort of paresis of political society and that the political structures on the local level are of a vestigial character. This situation is defined as alarming, and it is suggested that should the vacuum become filled, it would be beneficial for political life. The conception of "political vacuum" empirically and conceptually is, in fact, quite far from the conception of the sociological vacuum, yet they are both built on the common theoretical problem of framing the relation of the micro-level and the macro-level. For political theory, it is crucial to understand the transmission from the masses (these I paradoxically treated as being on the micro-level as they are an aggregate of individuals) to the elites which make the decisions and conduct the policies on the macro-level of the state. In this conception there is a need for actors who would transmit the will and desires of the masses to the elites, and then translate the decisions and their justifications from the elites to individual voters. These actors, according to Wasilewski's assumptions, should be the members of local political elites remaining in contact both with individual citizens and members of the leadership. The weakness of the local party elite is perceived not only as a weakness of a particular group of political activists, but also as a weakness of the mechanism

196

of transmitting information and mobilization between the levels of action. The local political elite plays the role of the micro-macro link in this approach.

8.3.3 The sociological vacuum as a space for corruption of democratic institutions

A different problem was pointed out by Andrzej Zybertowicz, a sociologist and political advisor interested in studying conspiracies and hidden agendas of interest groups. Zybertowicz (2009) stated that there is no proper social control and regulation in conditions of a sociological vacuum, and therefore Polish democracy is open to abuse by anti-development forces. This remark binding the sociological vacuum with the favorite subject of Zybertowicz, shows that the meso-level could be also treated as a space for social control. Zybertowicz builds on Podgórecki's (1976) conception of the third order of social control. The first order is the social control of members of a small group exercised in direct interactions. It is possible to treat it as a micro-level phenomenon. The second order of social control appears with specialized and (usually) formalized institutions, designed to control (i.e. police, judicatory system etc.). It could be said that this is a macro-level phenomenon. The third order of social control is the capture of the second order institutions by their officers in order to achieve individual goals, perverting the formal goals of these institutions. Both Zybertowicz's and Podgórecki's considerations are essayistic and do not provide deep empirical analysis, yet they also point to the problem of relations between the micro- and macro-levels of analysis.

8.3.4 The sociological vacuum and participation in political process

As the construction of this book and the organization of its chapters suggest, the works discussed below consider democracy as a phenomenon which interplays with the civil society and the social capital. Many of these works discuss society and social capital as such, which I have presented in earlier chapters (see Chapters 6 and 7). The decision to place some of these works rather in context of democracy and political institutions, and not in the context of the former two issues, in some cases, needed to be taken arbitrarily as some of studies discuss the mutual relations of civil society and democracy conditioned by the level of social capital. This issue is also very relevant to the problem of the micro-macro link because social capital and civil society were often pointed to as the intermediaries between masses of voters and country decision-makers.

Lech Szczegóła (2013) took an effort to explain the passivity of Polish citizens and its impact on democracy. According to his diagnosis, Polish society suffers

197

from the lack of participation. He attempted at tackling the reasons for such a situation from different perspectives, one of them being the heritage of the communist time. The sociological vacuum, according to his considerations, is to be blamed for the lack of social bonds, which then block the emergence of civil society (see also Szczegóła 2003), and the civil society, in turn, is the condition for the proper development of democracy. As the work is much influenced by the theoretical framework of Putnam (1993; 2000), the social capital as one of the aspects of civil society is present in it as well. Thus, according to Szczegóła's (2013) remarks, Solidarność was only the movement of features of citizenship, which quickly eroded. The strong micro-level bonds (resembling bonding capital) are not supporting citizen participation, but rather fostering backing from any public activity. Szczegóła (2013: 200) treats voluntary associations as structures on the meso-level of analysis, yet the sociological vacuum is the reason for their weakness in Poland. As a consequence, democracy has a very weak basis. Along with the sociological vacuum, Szczegóła also mentions other features of Polish society such as amoral familism (Tarkowska, Tarkowski 1990) and lack of trust (Sztompka 1999). Together, they create a syndrome which is an explanation for the lack of participation: "the suggestion about the existence of the culture of distrust, the atomization on the meso-social level, is connected with a long-lasting influence of many factors which have been disturbing the processes of citizens' socialization" (Szczegóła 2013: 203).

In Szczegóła's reasoning, the understanding of meso-level is quite plain and follows Nowak's original articulation – it is the level of broader groups between the small groups and the whole society on the other side of the continuum. Inefficiency of the meso-level is crucial for the inefficiency of democracy because it results in the lack of support for the mechanism of translation of aggregated micro-wills into one macro-act. This cannot just happen mechanically: keeping to that metaphor, the political mechanism of appointing representation needs the meso-level lubricants of participative civil society and social capital.

Recently, in studies of Polish political life there has been a growing turn from the focus on politics to the focus on policies. The conditions of translating political decisions into the actual plan of actions and policies are studied under the label of public policy studies. Recently, Andrzej Zybała (2015: 59) has stated that "the type of relations and social bonds present in Poland is a source of many salient problems with carrying out public activities". According to Zybała, the cultural context of creating and implementing public policies influences their quality. In Poland, this cultural context is said to be the key reason for the low quality of public policies which, as he points out, results from the presence of the sociological vacuum. Zybała's (2015) work impresses with the number of

references to analyses of historians, in which he traces the antecedents of the sociological vacuum: the weakness of the court system in the 18th century; the lack of strong state structures uniting the independent folwarks[67] in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries; or relations about the disappointment with social engagement in the late 19th century and inter-war Second Republic of Poland. In the descriptions of the state of public and social affairs in post-communist Poland, Zybała finds "dirty togetherness" (Podgórecki 1987), "amoral familism" (Tarkowska, Tarkowski 1990), "soft state" (Hausner 2009), or "cottage-made society" (in Polish, "społeczeństwo chałupnicze") (Giza-Poleszczuk 2009) responsible for the low quality of political life in Poland. What is important for Zybała's considerations is that he goes beyond explaining the sociological vacuum only with the features of the communist state. He traces the causes of its existence in the long *durée* of Polish post-serfdom culture.

Yet, Zybała's reconstruction of the sociological vacuum syndrome is rather vague. He certainly shifts the meaning of Nowak's original thesis and treats it as a statement on the weakness of bonds, not as a thesis on the weakness of identifications. Zybała also focuses mainly on the strong bonds within families and other primary groups, yet he does not build any conclusions on the strong national identifications, revealed by Nowak. The weakness of meso-structures (understood directly as medium-sized groups or associations) and the lack of culture of participation is perceived by Zybała as an obstacle for the proper creation and implementation of public policies. This claim is built on the conception that public policies are not only transmitted top-down from the decision-makers, but their proper design, consultation, and implementation requires coordinated action of different actors embedded on various levels of public life. These considerations correspond (although without direct reference) with Szczegóła's analyses of low levels of citizen participation in Poland. In the culture of the sociological vacuum described by Zybała, it is very hard to pursue public policies requiring a coordination of actions of many entities or planning in long time perspectives. The culture is a context, but it has structural consequences such as statism, in which policies are implemented on the basis of regulations, and not cooperation of different actors. According to Zybała, public policies in Poland are not evidence-based, and they are reactive, therefore strategic planning occurs very rarely.

---

67 I use the term "folwark" because this serfdom based large agricultural grange is recognized as something typical for the First Republic of Poland's history of economic and social organization (Wyczański 1960).

Zybała's use of the sociological vacuum concept is also connected to the theoretical problem of the micro-macro link in the analysis. In Zybała's understanding of public policy, influenced much by the work of Wayne Parsons' (2001), the style of policymaking is conditioned by culture which regulates the participation of individuals in public sphere intermediated by medium-sized structures. These medium-sized structures are necessary for the expected public policy efficiency. Zybała's work reveals disappointment with the sphere of social life in Poland and again, as in many other examples quoted in this book, the sociological vacuum is to blame.

8.3.5 Meso-level identifications and quality of democracy

One of the deepest analysis of the sociological vacuum thesis was performed by Mikołaj Cześnik, political scientist and sociologist studying political participation. In his two successive papers – "Próżnia socjologiczna a demokracja" [Sociological Vacuum and Democracy] (Cześnik 2008a) and "Próżnia socjologiczna a demokracja – analizy empiryczne" [Sociological Vacuum and Democracy – Empirical Analyses] (Cześnik 2008b) – he discussed the possible impact of the sociological vacuum on the quality of democracy. He approached the issue with the often-encountered assumption that the existence of a sociological vacuum has a negative impact on the quality of democracy. Cześnik started with a thorough interpretation of the sociological vacuum thesis, which he read without shifting its meaning and without selective focus on the micro-level part of the thesis.

Cześnik began with an analysis of the state-of-the-art in democracy research and pointed out that in the most influential political conceptions of democracy there is no indication that the low level of identifications with meso-structures has a negative impact on the quality of democracy. What could be seen as a paradox, too strong identifications with intermediary structures (like regions or social classes) might even prove jeopardizing for the democratic process, and disruptive for the states where the macro-level identities have to compete with the meso-level ones (Cześnik 2008a: 32). This argument was built on Lijphart's (2012) analyses of patterns of democracy, according to which the Westminster model of democracy (government by the majority of people) applies to homogenous societies. The plural societies – divided along some lines[68] – under the Westminster model might be excluding a substantial minority from taking part in decision-making. Thus, Lijphart (2004; 2012) states that for plural societies the consensus model of democracy applies better.

---

68 Lijphart (2012: 31) enumerates the following lines of divide: religious, ideological, linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and racial.

Cześnik also highlighted that the sociological vacuum thesis has two parts: one on the strong identifications with primary groups, and the other on identifying with the nation, respectively. He commented that the latter is rarely taken into consideration when analyzing the problems of political institutions – thus, he drew attention to the process depicted earlier in this book as selective or partial implementation of Nowak's thesis. The author argued that strong macro-level identifications are expected to exert a positive influence on the quality of democracy, due to the fact that they strengthen the polity. Solidarność is a case in point: Cześnik argued that its explosion in the 1980s is actually validating, rather than falsifying, Nowak's thesis – the movement was built around strong national identification (2008a: 44–45).

In addition to the theoretical review, Cześnik also tested the hypothesis on the correlation between the indexes of quality of democracy and the existence of the sociological vacuum (2008b). Accordingly, there is no empirical evidence suggesting the positive impact of the existence of intermediary level identifications on the quality of democracy. Examples of countries which are indicative of a sociological vacuum, but also of efficient democracy (i.e. Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon ones) can be given along with countries with strong meso-level identifications, yet low index of quality of democracy (2008b: 21). Another empirical finding of interest for the purposes of this chapter is that there are countries with lower levels of intermediary identifications than Poland. This challenges the perception of the sociological vacuum as a Polish peculiarity (Cześnik 2008b: 22).

Cześnik's theoretical refinement and empirical testing of the sociological vacuum are important for the debate. He was the only scholar who analyzed the thesis in a comparative perspective. This was accomplished in two ways: the confrontation of Nowak's thesis with available theories of democracy, and the comparison of empirical data from different countries. Cześnik also followed the elements of the thesis scrupulously – neither a shift-in-meaning nor a selective and partial implementation occurred.

Cześnik's theoretical analysis allows to draw a very important theoretical conclusion on the relations between the micro-level and the macro-level of society, which is embedded in Lijphart's (2012) conceptualization of homogenous and plural societies. If the participation in the polity is intermediated by participation in some middle-range structure, it might not necessarily have to be so beneficial for the democratic system. In case of the majority of works building on the sociological vacuum, the alleged weakness of middle-range structures is perceived as problematic. Cześnik highlighted the other side of the coin: too strong middle-range structures might be lethal for many social processes, including

democracy: indeed, a crucial one! The theoretical conceptualization of the meso-level here is also quite straightforward – it is a level of groups, strong enough to create their own "political parties, interest groups, and media of communication" (Lijphart 2012: 31). These intermediary structures may not always simply enable transmission between individuals and decision-makers, as the majority of the authors linking the sociological vacuum with the analyses of democracy claim. The intermediary structures might be also causes of ruptures and conflict.

8.4 Concluding remarks

Democracy is a key concept for the Western civilization and a fiercely discussed topic in sociology dealing with the transition – as is the case of Polish sociology. One cannot forget that democracy is conceptualized in different – sometimes contradictory – ways. In this chapter, I have looked at the six conceptualizations of democracy enlisted by Coppedge and Gerring (2011) in order to tackle this complexity. The two main issues being brought into consideration regarding democracy emerging in the context of an alleged sociological vacuum are: the forming of political institutions connecting masses with elites, and participation. In both cases, the problem of the micro-macro connection in social theory is salient, because it is impossible to understand macro outcomes on the state level without conceptual tools linking them with actions of individuals on the micro-level.

For authors interested in the elections as a key institution of democracy, the sociological vacuum is a problem because it is recognized as an obstacle for creating communication channels between the masses and the elites. The lack of stability of the party system in Poland was mentioned to be influenced by the sociological vacuum in which solid party electorates do not exist (Grabowska 2004; Kubiak 1999). According to this perspective on the elections, unstable party system is a disadvantage for the democracy. Another problem with communication between the masses and the elites was pointed in the conception of political vacuum (Wasilewski 2006). Here, the problematized obstacle for the proper functioning of a democracy is the weakness of the local elites who could bridge the gap between masses and the political elites of the state level.

A different stream of work considers the problem of participation. In this case, the base for democracy is an active civil society. The focus is not on the elections and actors of political institutions, such as political parties and branches of government, but on forms of discussion and collective action. Szczegóła (2013) pointed to the sociological vacuum as one of the explanations of citizens' passivity. Zybała (2015) claimed that public policies cannot be properly designed and executed in the conditions of the sociological vacuum, in which there is not

202

enough participation of various social actors. This perspective on democracy is closer to its participatory and deliberative conceptions than the electoral or liberal ones. The "problem with democracy" here is rather located in the vertical relations between various stakeholders than on the horizontal relations between masses and elites, as in previously mentioned works on electoral aspects of democracy. The problem of the lack of participation, or of passivity, is very much connected to the works on civil society inspired by Putnam (1993; 2000), which influenced Polish scholarly discourse on social capital as well (these problems were discussed in Chapters 6 and 7).

Cześnik (2008a) noticed that in the theories of democracy the lack of intermediary level identifications is actually not recognized as something troubling. I would like to amend his point by saying that the existence of a sociological vacuum for some conceptions of democracy is an advantageous factor, while for others it might be a disadvantageous one; there are also other conceptions for which it might be irrelevant. It all holds true, if the strong consequences of lack of identifications with middle-range groups are assumed. The authors concerned about the quality of Polish democracy usually shift the meaning of the sociological vacuum thesis and claim that it describes the landscape of weak middle range actors. In this case, participatory democracy might have even weaker grounds. On the other hand, as Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954) noticed, identifications often influence judgments of voters, who are incapable of rationally processing all the information relevant for taking political decisions. As a consequence, political decisions are identity-based not rational-assessment-based. Similarly, with this line of thinking, Lijphart (2004; 2012) pointed that too strong identifications on the meso-level are dangerous to the polity, because they cause tensions in order to rip it into smaller polities.

It seems that the problem of the sociological vacuum's influence on democracy depends on which model of democracy is taken into account. The sociological vacuum then becomes a problem, or maybe an advantage, when considering ideal types. Yet, the empirical cases of democracy are always hybrid combinations of the conceptualizations.[69] Concluding this chapter, it is worth noticing that the syndromes of a sociological vacuum may be simultaneously positive for some aspects of functioning of democracy and negative for others. It could hold true that the lack of strong meso-level identifications at the same moment supports the unity of polity and discourages the participation in deliberations. According

---

69 Ironically, Lijphart (2012) mentions that the political regime which is the closest to the Westminster model of democracy is New Zealand, not the United Kingdom.

to the quantitative analysis made by Cześnik (2008b), there is no correlation between the level of the sociological vacuum and the quality of democracy indexes. Yet, the indexes usually are designed in line with certain conceptualizations of democracy (Coppedge, Gerring 2011).

I assume that the influence of the sociological vacuum (if it exists at all), on the one hand, varies in degrees and, on the other hand, depends on the aspect of democracy. Yet, besides the work of Cześnik (2008b), there are no empirical studies investigating these two factors. The majority of the works on the relations between the sociological vacuum and democracy are considerations about ideal types. The only sincere conclusion to this chapter is that the relation between the sociological vacuum and democracy is ambiguous and one has to be very cautions before stating that the sociological vacuum has a negative impact on democracy in Poland.