

# Types of Rationality in Discourses on Work in (Post)Transformation Poland

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**Abstract:** Rationality is the key concept for understanding the reproduction of social life in the era of reflexive modernization. A fusion of lessons learned from the constructivist view of the world and analysis of the hermeneutic category of pre-understanding has become the basis of my belief that rationality is nowadays the basic modal concept, and the forms of its existence shape the order of social life. In my research practice, rationality has become a link between my interest in work and the theory of social order development. In this paper, I briefly present the relations between the notion of rationality and the theory of reflexive modernization. Then, I present my research path and the tools used in the analyses. The most important part is devoted to the effects of the conducted research. I classify and describe the types of rationality present in discourses on work in Poland. The discourses of politicians, experts, and the so-called “ordinary people” were analyzed.

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## Rationality in the Era of Reflexive Modernization

The following article attempts to summarize the research presented in detail in the book *Racjonalność w dyskursach o pracy w Polsce (po)transformacyjnej (Rationality in Discourses on Work in (Post)Transformation Poland)*. Thus, it is the result of work inspired by many years of theoretical interests and research activity related to three issues: rationality, work, and reflexivity. The belief in the anthropologically fundamental importance of the phenomenon of work

and the studies on the status of the concept of work in critical theory and the theory of economics was accompanied by the conviction that it is necessary to identify the links between this activity and the mechanisms of social order reproduction. I was, and still am, interested in attempts to understand research, often detailed, in the context of macro-systemic processes of the reproduction of social life. On the other hand, attempts to implement theory into the empirical experience at a mezzo- or micro-systemic scale are equally fascinating in terms of research.

The constructivist tradition of understanding the social reality, adopted in most of my analyses, has given rise to my conviction that it is necessary to search for essential explanations in various forms of contemporary social communication and its effects in the form of creating and reproducing definitions of phenomena and processes that play a key role for the organization of social life. For this reason, it seemed interesting to me to undertake a research challenge of providing an empirical foundation for the development of a promising yet still incomplete theory of reflexive modernization (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994). One of the basic assumptions of this quasi-theory is the discursive recreation of social order, and the key tool for the reproduction of order consists in the management of the processes of institutionalized reflexivity (Wynne 1996). The authors of the theory of reflexive modernization raise the issue of terms that are extremely important for the organization of social life, including, undoubtedly, the terms of security and threat or trust and risk (Giddens 1997). Repeated reading of the literature devoted to the theory of reflexive modernization, discussions with colleagues during seminars, practical seminars with students, moderation of thematic groups at the Congresses of the Polish

Sociological Association (PTS), and participation in conference discussions led me to the conclusion that the empirical supplementation of this theory should be sought in analyses of all kinds of linguistic and non-linguistic practices and rituals through which a sense of reality is constructed, along with a specific vision of society (including the economy). Questions of no less importance concern the problem of maintaining such a sense of reality.

Analysis of public discourse, together with conclusions from the history of concepts, allow me to believe that **rationality** is the key concept for understanding the reproduction of social life in the era of reflexive modernization. A fusion of lessons learned from the constructivist view of the world and analysis of the hermeneutic category of pre-understanding have become the basis of my belief that rationality is nowadays the basic modal concept, and the forms of its existence shape the order of social life (Foucault 1988; Habermas 2007a; Weber 2019). Therefore, rationality in my research practice has become a link between my interest in work and the theory of social order development, that is, what we define as real at the ontological level, what seems justified from the cultural perspective and has been institutionally legitimized. The assumption regarding the fundamental relationship between these three areas gave rise to the research and analysis that I commenced in 2010 and have continued until today. In an attempt to provide an empirical basis for a popular theory of reflexive modernization, which is hardly verifiable, I use both desk research on existing data (policy speeches delivered by prime ministers, economic broadcasts), as well as generated data (focus groups). The fruits of a closed stage of this work, together with my proposal for a research path corresponding to the assumptions of the theory, have been presented in this article.

## Research Goals and Tools

The objectives of the article can be referred to in three areas. **At the theoretical level**, it was the conceptualization of rationality intended to contribute to the development of the theory of reflexive modernization. My point of departure was the assumption that the mode of reference truth, which is crucial for the processes of reflexive institutionalization, is based on the concept of rationality. The study of the dominant *types of rationality* was supposed to enable me to determine the key directions of developments in social life and the circulation of power. I assumed that the development of the theory of reflexive modernization was possible only by building a medium-range theory. **At the methodological level**, my goal was to develop a research path using interdisciplinary discourse analysis tools and focus group interviews, enabling the development of a popular and cognitively promising quasi-theory of reflexive modernization. The research work was intended to help obtain empirical foundations necessary for the existence of a scientific theory. I assumed that the theory of reflexive modernization would not come into being without developing and defining a system of concepts of fundamental importance to the organization of social life in all its aspects. If reflexive institutionalization is the main mechanism for recreating social order in late modernity, defining “what is rational” is the basic tool for directing the dominant forms of reflexivity. It was, therefore, necessary to propose a research procedure that would take into account the need to analyze the *defining relations*. The **scientific goal** was to create an empirical foundation for testing the theory of reflexive modernization and to reconstruct *defining relations* regarding rationality, that is, “the legal, epistemological, and cultural [power] matrix in which risk politics is conducted” (Beck 1998:18). Defining rela-

tions as power relations means that specific social actors in specific social contexts gain an advantage in problematizing and defining what is socially important, thus becoming “owners of defining means.” I assumed that disputes concerning labor organize the most important elements of permanent socialization to define social relations in a specific way, with the associated risks of unemployment, social exclusion, and others.

Given the assumptions made and discourse analysis, as the research method applied, the objectives of the work were descriptive. In other words, I did not seek to verify any hypotheses. I believe that Norman K. Denzin’s statement still holds, that is, that interpretation is the most important thing in social sciences for qualitatively-oriented researchers. The result is an organized, structured, and purposeful description that reveals the relations of power, the hierarchy of goals and values, the status of knowledge, as well as disclosed and covert beliefs in the community where the discourse is pursued.

The subject of my research consisted mainly of patterns of producing certain *types of rationality* in public discourses on work and their reception by media audiences. The pattern consisted of: thematic-rhematic organization of discourse (Fairclough 2003), presuppositions that make it universally understandable (Woroniecka 2003), implicatures (Grice 1980), conceptual frames, rhetorical/contra-rhetorical sets applied by the main discourse actors, types of linguistic operations on “us-them” categories, SEP-ization and contra-SEP-ization practices (Czyżewski, Dunin, and Piotrowski 2010), modality of utterances, and other elements of discourse analysis (Dijk 2001; Chouliaraki and Fairclough 2002; Fairclough 2003; Duszak and Fairclough 2008). I reconstructed

the processes and mechanisms of the creation of reality through the use of specific communication patterns concerning discourse understood as a sphere of public communication (Czyżewski, Kowalski, and Piotrowski 2010). I classified the *types of rationality* together with the specification of each identified element concerning the basic approaches to this issue present in the sociological and philosophical literature.

### How to Analyze Discourses on Work in Reflexive Modernization? A Proposal for a Research Path

In pursuit of my theoretical goals, I started with the analysis of inter- and intra-disciplinary differences in defining rationality, and then looked at the conceptualizations present in the works of Max Weber (2002; 2019), Talcott Parsons (1991), Alfred Schütz (1982; 2008), Harold Garfinkel (1984), Michel Foucault (2010), Jürgen Habermas (2007a; 2007b), Charles W. Mills (2000), Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (2008), and Niklas Luhmann (1995). Based on the review of meanings, I concluded that it was necessary to define rationality primarily through the characteristics of its “systemic” properties. At the same time, my theoretical research led me to the conclusion that, as a consequence of the impact of structures (understood as wholes connected in time and space) appearing at the level of individual behaviors, rationality should be treated as a result of adaptation to specific symbolic and material dispositions. In this context, the tradition of relational thinking proposed by Bourdieu meets Weber and Parsons’ value-normative concept of rationality and Garfinkel’s ethnomethodological approach to the issue. Within such a framework, perhaps outlined in a somewhat risky way, I traced the existing material-symbolic structure in which the actions

of individuals took place. At the same time, I was no less interested in the strategic rationality of actors (conditioned by their position in the structure), present in their cognitive apparatus and, more specifically, in categories organizing the social reality as seen through their eyes. This conceptualization, although not directly related to Foucault’s concept, draws on it to the extent that I use his findings concerning different types of rationality characteristic of modernity. In the critical aspect, it was my choice to refer to the programmatically non-normative concept proposed by Luhmann, that is, when attempting to explain the social reality, I departed from the assumption that it is necessary to repeat the question as to whether systems can make self-corrections of their functioning based on the introduction of environmental problems they caused into the social communication process.

I solved the issues with the application of the concept of rationality to the research practice by conducting the research through the following stages: (1) selecting the discursive fields that would bring me closer in my research procedure to reconstructing the dominant types of rationality (with justification); (2) selecting texts for detailed analysis (with justification); (3) selecting research methods and tools; (4) conducting the analysis; (5) conducting descriptive and exploratory work with the use of selected research tools; (6) attempting to reconstruct the dominant types of rationality in Poland with the use of concepts and definitions developed at the beginning. As a research corpus for the analysis, I chose the fields of political discourse, expert discourse, and “everyday life” discourse. I was convinced that the need to give “systemic” properties to the concept of rationality, which are only manifested in a secondary way at the level of individual behaviors, had to start with the selection of two ma-

trices of meanings of fundamental importance for social life, that is, politics and economy. If research aimed to reconstruct the types of rationality present in the discursive reproduction of social reality, the choice of these two institutional orders guaranteed that the researcher would obtain an insight into the macro-systemically established structures of meanings also present in the “life-world.” To satisfy this condition, I decided to choose all the policy speeches delivered by prime ministers’ during the period of the so-called “Third Republic of Poland” (an example of political discourse) and one hundred and four radio programs from the series *EKG – Ekonomia, Kapitał, Gospodarka* (EKG—Economics, Capital, Economy) in *Radio TOK FM* (an example of expert discourse).

The choice of prime ministers’ policy speeches as a key material for understanding the mechanisms of the discursive production of reality was related to my interest in what the authorities wanted to tell the public about selected topics at the moment of ceremonies that played a key role in democratic social life. I analyzed all inaugural speeches of the prime ministers (policy speeches) delivered after 1989.

The choice of the *EKG* radio series was also purposeful and well-thought-out. The programs gathered experts who best meet the criterion of “owners of the means of definition,” important from the research perspective. Programs hosted by Tadeusz Mysz largely monopolized public media discourse since the experts invited to the program appeared alternately in public and private media, even when invited by other anchors or, equally importantly, when they commented on the reality with the use of the new media. I analyzed 104 economic radio broadcasts.

To have a representation of “everyday life” discourse, I used ten focus group interviews. The discussion guide for the groups was written after an analytical procedure in the areas of politics and expert discourse. I used this method because focus groups create spaces for generating collective testimonies. From the perspective of the research objectives, the most important element of these testimonies is their structure, equivalent to the effects of individual entanglements in a complex network of intersecting social and material spaces. Moreover, this type of interview allows researchers to observe and reconstruct the processes of negotiating meaning along with their dynamics and says a lot about the past, as well as the strategies of activities, that is, what our socio-material entanglements allow us to do (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2014:351-379). Therefore, it seems that this was the best way to reconstruct the dominant types of rationality. These interviews were used as a basis for assessing the affinity of the content and linguistic strategies presented in mass media by the authorities and the expert elites with the language of the target audiences of such content. The focus group interviews were carried out with the following groups:

- owners or managers of small and medium-sized enterprises: 25-40 y/o and 41-65 y/o; all types of education—2 FGIs;<sup>1</sup>
- white-collar workers: 18-34 y/o and 35-65 y/o; secondary and tertiary education—2 FGIs;
- blue-collar workers: 18-34 y/o and 35-65 y/o; vocational and primary education—2 FGIs;

<sup>1</sup> Increasing the lower age threshold for this group of respondents (from 18 to 25 years of age) was based on the assumption that it would be difficult to find such young people performing such functions in the labor market, and even if they could be found, their professional experience would be marginal.

- self-employed individuals: 18-34 y/o and 35-65 y/o; secondary and tertiary education—2 FGIs;
- unemployed respondents: 18-34 y/o and 35-65 y/o; all types of education—2 FGIs.

The reason behind this selection of the respondents was the possibility of differences in defining “what is rational” in the labor market (socialization in different conditions, diverse biographical and professional experience) and their realistically different interests. I assumed that this would affect their definitions of economic reality. Each focus group was attended by 8 participants.

Discursive exemplifications allowed me to generalize the conclusions in each, and on this basis, I built models of the sought types of rationality.

### Social Diagnosis: Key Findings and Conclusions

A collective summary of prime ministers’ policy speeches called for a specific rule for this procedure. Given the descriptive-explanatory focus of the analysis, within which I was reconstructing rationality in the discourse of power, I identified two basic areas of communication activity—subjectivity and agency. The former one, referring to the analysis of transitivity to the greatest extent, was divided into two categories of entities mentioned in the policy speeches, and who are the targets of such speeches, that is, an individual addressee and a collective addressee, respectively. In the area of the agency, I distinguished between external and internal agencies, as well as individual and institutionalized agencies. These are the basic orders that emerged from the analyses that were carried out. An insight into the individual speeches helped to identify the subcategories supple-

menting this picture. A meticulous analysis resulted in the reconstruction of three types of rationality:

- individualized historical necessity, characterized by the notions of society as the sum of individuals, relatively unlimited agency of social actors, freedom as a lack of institutional regulations of social life, social justice as a result of personal involvement and the real qualities of social actors, and the suggested personal responsibility for most of the social risks to which the actors are exposed;
- individualized social assistance, characterized by ideas of society as a community of interests, freedom as the ability to undertake entrepreneurial activity, social justice as a result of personal involvement and attributes of social actors, and the securing function of the state (only in borderline situations), as well as suggestions regarding the personal agency of social actors who find support in state institutions and personal responsibility of actors for social risks with marginal support of state institutions (always addressed only to those most in need);
- communal moral agency, characterized by the notions of society as an axionormative community, agency of social actors as a consequence of the axionormative tradition, freedom as a fusion of personal choices and the ability to manifest subjectivity and cultural distinctiveness, social solidarity as a result of redistribution of capital, and a suggestion of political responsibility of the authorities for any risks emerging in social life.

Each of these types of rationality is associated with a different type of political promise, although

a “common denominator” can be found for all of them in the form of images of a prosperous life. It should be remembered that the reconstructed types of rationality perform three functions: (a) they are a kind of *ad hoc* political justification of the adopted goals and means to achieve them; (b) they are an indispensable part of holistic stories about Poland, extended in time and space; and (c) they offer a symbolic and structural background shaping the identity of social actors.

Nearly all policy speeches offered a varied yet intensifying economization of the key premises of social life. The problematization of the definition of policies, transferred to the public discourse, was based on a deeply ingrained belief that it was necessary to find only “technical” answers to the question of *how to live our lives*. Therefore, the tradition of axial thinking about social development was abandoned. Until 2015, one could get the impression that the rationality of individualized historical necessity, perpetuated as a consequence of patient neoliberal “grammatical exercises” undertaken by the symbolic elites, was displacing the real dispute on defining political activity and tasks assigned to the state as an institution. The political successes of political formations invoking this type of rationality seemed to confirm this diagnosis. The language based on this particular type of rationality seemed to resonate very well with beliefs expressed by citizens at the level of the “life-world.” The alternating presence of two types of rationality in political discourse before 2015, that is, individualized historical necessity and institutionalized social assistance, does not change the assessment of this period. The characteristics of the latter type of rationality leave no doubt as to the directions of the proposed policies. Assistance was always defined as an optional form of support in difficult situations or emergen-

cies. The impression that emerged from the Polish political discourse was unambiguous: social inclusion was not a political goal, but only a temporary attempt to cope with the consequences of policies whose systemic properties necessarily entail the intensification of exclusion processes. A divide in the political rhetoric referring to individualized responsibility came with Jarosław Kaczyński’s policy speech. The rationality of communal moral agency was a proposal that might have been surprising at first glance. Built on a complete reversal of the logic of the world image that had been ubiquitous during the first sixteen years of the transformation process, this proposal could seem archaic. And yet, it turned out to be more than functional. When analyzing the linguistic idiom of the Law and Justice party (PiS) in the understanding of the new meaning-making proposal of symbolic structures, one can put forward a claim that the success of this political formation sprang out of two complementary facts: the relatively common feeling of social and material dissatisfaction among many Poles and the contradictory, discomfiting political rhetoric built around the rationality of the individualized historical necessity. The rationality of individualized historical necessity, which had prevailed for twenty-six years, effectively marginalized the ethos of communality in Polish society, with all its ethical variations. As a result, social assistance became a stigmatizing element, while entrepreneurship became an “ontological” categorical imperative of modernity. Law and Justice reached for rhetoric that introduced some errors into the communication system, made as a result of certain forms of aleatoric organization of the political/systemic transformation. Sets of symbols supported by the rationality of communal moral agency represented a promise of restitution of a state that would undertake aggressive political activity to diversify the living space.

Analyses of the 104 radio programs in the *EKG* series prove the domination of a single type of rationality, understood as a type of justification together with the agreements between the elites, defined as the owners of the means of definition. The radio program did not offer competing types of meaning-making to the listeners. The reconstructed, hegemonic structures of meaning underlying the analyzed acts of communication were subjected to the order of **individualized supra-historical rationality**. It is characterized by the following: an image of the society as a syndicate of egoisms; an axiom of personal agency of social actors who freely and actively create the rules and who are equal in the use of resources; an axiom of the personal responsibility of actors as a result of the aforementioned definitions; a synonymous understanding of freedom and entrepreneurship; an axiom of social justice understood as a consequence of systemic deregulation of social life; and personal involvement/agency. The construction of the narrative about the reality of “rational labor relations,” present in the radio program, was based on the pre-assumptions that enabled its logical structure to be sustained. Thus, the ethical message of the argumentation used by the owners of the means of definition consists of the need to maximize competition to fulfill the promise of global (local) justice. Moreover, a key role in this idiom is played by the assumptions of the rationality of purely post-political forms of activity, where political guarantees should concern only ownership rights, compliance with agreements, and a guarantee of organizing background for capitalist production relations in the form of infrastructure. The differentiation of rules and resources solely around the parameters of economic science is connected with the process of economic rationality being likened to personal identity. This entails an ontological assumption about humanity that is realized through

entrepreneurial activity. This model of humanity entails the economization of the priorities of the social and political project, which is by no means an attribute of all forms of political rationality that we can identify when analyzing the institutional foundations of the social and political order in other economic configurations. The universalization and popularization of this model of civilization and development are supported by two operations: capital being likened to the law and capital being likened to the state. Only in such a configuration do the expectations of political authorities become implicit—the authorities do not demand primacy over the dynamics of the markets, they do not define their functions through an active attitude towards market-oriented capital accumulation, and care to meet the imperative of competition on the global market of countries (Burszta et al. 2017). All governmental concessions, restrictions, interventions, regulations, as well as financial measures, are unavoidable limitations to the “emancipation from the states.” At the same time, in this type of rationality, the active role of the state is to ensure the political legitimacy of *post-hoc* global solutions, which cannot be influenced by the state in conditions of turbulent and market-oriented modernization (Beck 2005:86-221). The rationality that emerges from the discourse produced by the guests of the *EKG* program, considered by myself as owners of means of definition, can be characterized as a constitutive element of the capitalist formula of organizing the world, gradually subordinating other social systems, imposing its “logic,” criticizing the self-referentiality of activities that are initially conditioned differently in terms of everyday existence. This rationality included in the reflexive processes becomes the basis of a unique historical experiment, that is, an experiment consisting of a dilution of social relations. While globalization annihilates the ontological premises of

solidarity, the new capitalism intensifies multi-egoistic processes. Furthermore, the universalization and naturalization of this type of rationality mean that we all become cogs subjected to the power of processes without a specific center, actively deconstructing the tradition of morality that has been applicable since antiquity. In the context of questions about the ethical consequences of the domination of this type of rationality, what becomes central is the question about its internalization at the level of the "life-world." To determine the consequences of this type of rationality, it was necessary to look at the analysis of the focus group interviews.

The self-knowledge of the focus group respondents as regards the shaping and functioning of labor relations did not differ particularly from the images of labor emerging from the discourses of the symbolic elites. The differences in the languages used can be seen, rather, as a testimony to the "translation" of the technical expert language into the jargon of ordinary people. It was not difficult to find links between the aseptic expert discourses seemingly lacking ideological premises (ignoring the need for the ethical assessment of the consequences of the solutions being introduced) and the blunt and direct language of those affected by the changes introduced. To illustrate this state of affairs, I proposed analogous enumerative characteristics of the type of rationality that dominates at the level of the "life-world." I decided to identify only one dominant type, which defines the perceptions of reality across traditional class divisions related to the labor market position. Despite repeatedly returning to the source materials, and subsequent insights into their content and shape, and despite making the necessary summaries, I concluded that the ways of negotiating the meaning of the surrounding reality and the final result differ only in nuances. The analyzed interviews revealed

reflections of actual class tensions, but they were effectively transposed into the sphere of identity-related tensions, and the common affirmative acceptance of the order of explaining reality in contemporary capitalism completely obscured the systemic nature of the problems generated by its successive configurations. This nature is related to the effective reification of many institutional aspects of social life related to discourses about work. The existence of one type of rationality, evoked by unemployed, blue collars, white collars, and managers, is related to discursive advantages embedded into the structure of public communication. The final shape of the discourse on labor at the level of the "life-world" revealed the asymmetry in the representation of interests of individual interviewed groups. On various occasions, unemployed respondents and blue and white collars repeatedly stressed the need to "get into the shoes" of an entrepreneur and to understand the problems entrepreneurs are facing. One could say that there was far-reaching self-discipline in defining reality in this respect. I did not find any traces of this use of language and imagination among entrepreneurs. In terms of SEP analysis, their definitions of reality were mostly built around images of individuals who were "demanding," "cunning," or "lazy," and the state that was "plundering." In other words, entrepreneurs' systemic problems were noticed and symbolically legitimized by employees and the unemployed. Therefore, I categorized the type of rationality dominating the focus group participants as the **rationality of individualized agency and personal responsibility**. It is characterized by the ideas of society as a space of competition between individuals, beliefs in the individual agency of social actors who have no influence on rule-making, personal responsibility of actors despite the adopted definitions, synonymous understanding of freedom and entrepreneurship, and definition of social

justice as a consequence of personal involvement/agency and systemic deregulation of social life. The reconstruction of beliefs about work, common at the level of the “life-world,” rendered several conclusions. The discursive landscape created by the Polish symbolic elites results in a single type of rationality for all, with no relation to the class status of the participants in social life. If we were to search for a frame of meaning as proposed by George Lakoff (2014), then the logical value of the statements made by the focus group participants was upheld by the belief that social responsibility is a simple equivalent of personal responsibility. The absence of “class language” enables structural problems to be presented as individual concerns. The sum of all basic discursive ideas, that is, the society as a collective syndicate of egoisms and politics as a set of technical solutions, results in the disappearance of social solidarity, and in establishing conditions for the dehumanization of others, in “separating the wheat from the chaff,” in distinguishing between “people whose life is valuable and those whose life has no value at all” (one of the respondents expressed the issue of social work in this way, to the overall approval for this definition: “if they rely on social welfare, they are not useful and can be sent to work at quarries, at best”). All the interview participants easily accepted the popular explanation regarding superfluous/overspending social welfare or, in effect, the impossibility of running social policy. To characterize the dominance of this idiom in ethical terms, I will once again refer to the problem of social responsibility, which is among the keys to understanding the relations presented. There is room for using this term in social linguistic practice as a “fig leaf” for many economic activities that accelerate the emergence of existing income inequalities, while the habit of treating this term as synonymous with mutual care is disappearing. In the so-called “late capitalism,” the term “social re-

sponsibility” seems to be a tool for the reproduction of many structurally embedded injustices that affect our societies. The dominance of this idiom does not stimulate efforts aimed at institutionalizing cooperation as a substitute for competition. If we start thinking about society with the belief that was popular among focus group participants, namely that “it is so inhuman to give money to people in exchange for nothing,” we can be almost certain that a human being is only a function of capital in this world, and social responsibility stands for measurable, monetary usefulness. Repeated cyclical dissatisfaction with the existing living conditions, manifested both through support for the forms of political activity that are foreign to the “enlightened citizen,” and through daily rituals of linguistic and non-linguistic hatred should be sufficient testimony to the weakness of the system we reproduce. Similarly, such testimony should be sought in “tables with hard numbers” (created, after all, by “enlightened citizens”) reflecting the scale of growing social inequalities, progressing degradation of the natural environment, or the rising percentage of people affected by diseases triggered by modern civilization. And yet, we are unable to effectively introduce them into our communication milieu. In this context, “effectively” means that they could give us the ability to differentiate the existing environment, thereby restoring the basic human ability to shape the living environment. I believe that the reasons for this state of affairs can be found in the discursive and non-discursive hegemony of the most popular type of rationality, that is, individualized supra-historical necessity—a set of symbols legitimizing the *status quo*.

The types of rationality described here are the background for the struggle for symbolic dominance among the actors of social life. Contrary to the conceptualization of competitiveness popularized in

public discourse as a means to achieve individual and national successes, the explanatory orders based on the three types of rationality largely complement one another. While individuals internalize the knowledge of the natural foundation of the winner-loser order, the meta-insights into the operation of symbolic systems at the different levels analyzed here lead to different conclusions. In the summary of the work, I analyzed the basic categories that, together with the domination of particular types of rationality, undergo a change in their traditional scope of meaning. Conclusions from the performed work indicate that it is a two-stage process. The first stage consists in popularizing at least partially new definitions of terms that are important for the formation of social life. The second stage reifies the meaning of these terms so that they gradually cease to be part of a set of meanings that can be negotiated in discourse.

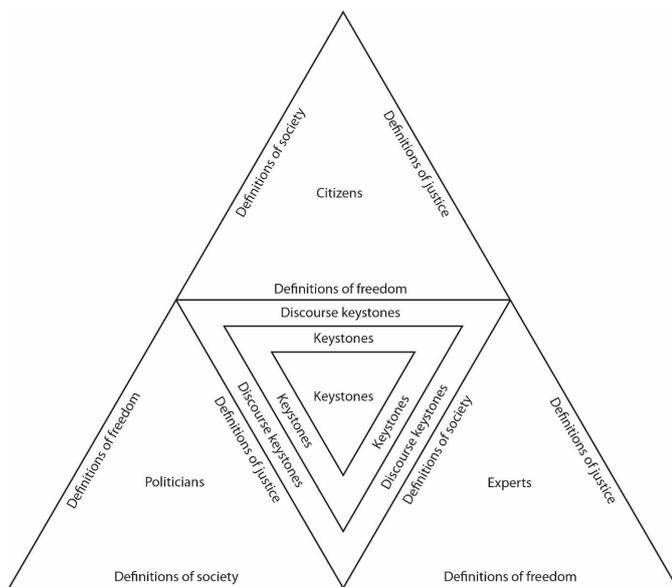
As a result of my research work, I identified a grid of such terms (keystones) that are common to discourses that invoke all the analyzed types of rationality. These include: investing in oneself; competitiveness; innovativeness; creativity; success; responsibility; self-discipline; self-development; self-control; trust; flexibility; self-discovery; decency; pragmatism; and efficiency (Kubala 2019:315-322). The fundamental importance of these terms in defining rationality lies in the fact that the meanings negotiated in individual groups would not exist without them. At the same time, the grid of these notion-symbols represents the “common denominator” for all types of rationality. The meanings attributed to each of them can be found in all of the analyzed discourses. Some, such as “investing in oneself,” are more commonly used in the expert discourse while gaining secondary importance in the discourse of the “life-world,” but the elements of each form a common symbolic structure. Following the observation that the per-

versity of late modernity consists in “deriving” notions that are relevant for the reproduction of social order from their previous meaning, it is necessary to look at the scope of meaning of different pillars of the symbolic construction supporting the common notions of rationality in Polish discourses on work.

To explore the real status of public discourse and its dominant types of rationality, I proposed reconstruction of “what is rational” for politicians, experts, and citizens. In my opinion, the empirical testimony of the content and structure of public discourses is an essential element in the development of the theory of reflexive modernization, which I see as an intellectually interesting proposal for understanding the processes that are taking place in the surrounding world. The analysis of late modernity and institutionalized reflexivity will always be connected with attempts to resolve the following dilemma: does the vector of change consist in the reification of the spectrum of meanings of symbols that are crucial for the constitution of the society, or does it consist in the social emancipation that, out of “necessity,” occurs through negotiation of the meanings of these symbols? To resolve this dilemma, the structure and content of the studied discourses should be reproduced. The model that is common to all types of rationality was created during the “pendular movement” between the repeated study of theoretical materials and the analysis of research materials and an attempt to generalize conclusions. The model is an analytical construct built around meta-messages arising from the analyzed discourses. Following the old Enlightenment-like tradition, this kind of summary enabled generalizations that give an insight into the immediate content of the subject of research, but, above all, it enabled evaluation based on categories not strictly related to specific time and space, that is, it could be applied to the different contexts. External figures cor-

respond to the discourses of social actors, in this case: politicians, experts, and citizens. The inner figure reproduces the system of keystones characteristic of each of the analyzed discourses. The central keystone is the key topic invoked during the social negotiation of the meaning of “what is rational.” To find elements common to all, I decided that the arms of the triangle making up the inner figure will be marked by references to the characteristics that are relevant to the different types of rationality and, at the same time, common to all the groups studied.

**Figure 1. Diagram representing the model common to all reconstructed types of rationality**

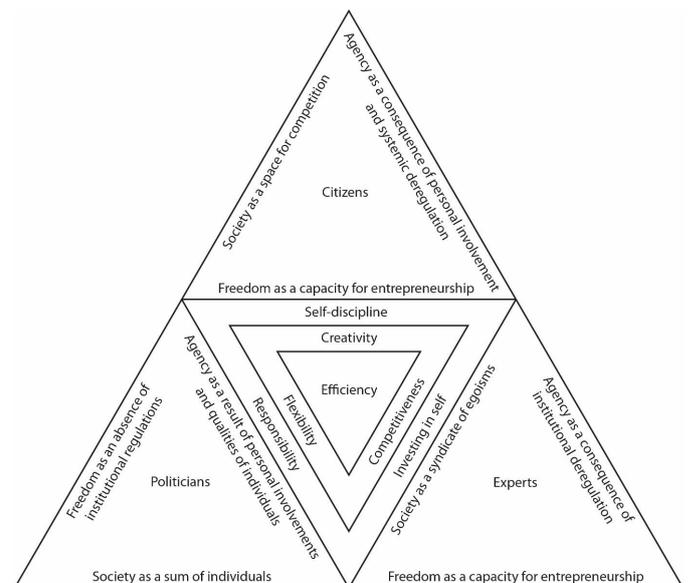


Source: Self-elaboration.

Summary graphs are intended to reveal common and different content, tensions, and harmonies relating to the negotiation of meanings at three different levels of social life. At the same time, they are intended to enable a diagnosis concerning the balance or dominance of socially negotiated meanings of symbols that play a fundamental role in defining the subject mat-

ter of the analyses, that is, rationality. It would seem that since three types of rationality that structure the policy discourse have been identified, it would be necessary to present three graphic variants, where only the component related to the question “what the authorities want to say to the citizens” will change. Reconstruction of the content and the meaning attributed to it in expert discourse and the “life-world” discourse resulted in one dominant idiom with one type of rationality attributed to it. Distinctive features of two out of three distinguished types of rationality characterizing the Polish political discourse, that is, the rationality of individualized historical necessity and rationality of individualized social assistance revealed a far-reaching similarity in ways of defining the key ideas for the emergence of society and the social reality itself. Given the similarities and analogies evident during the analysis, I decided that the summary would become more conclusive if I reduced it to two graphs. The first one is as follows:

**Figure 2. Model of reconstructed types of rationality prevailing before 2005 and in 2007-2015**



Source: Self-elaboration.

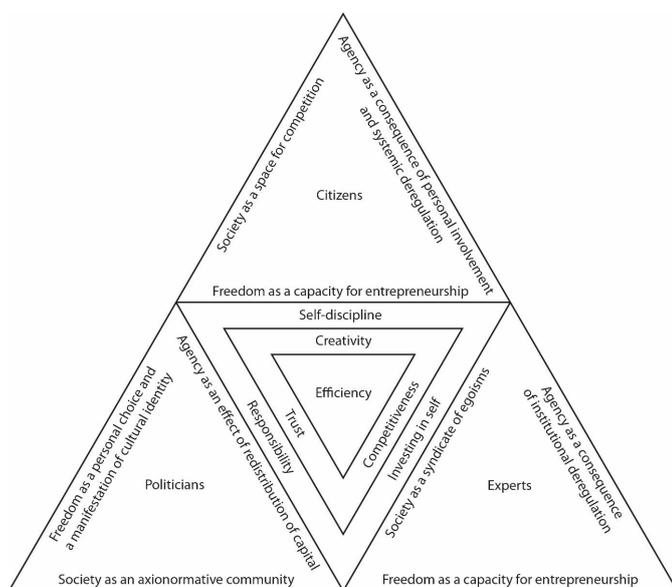
At the level of symbols that are the most important for the reproduction of the self-knowledge of social actors about the circumstances in which they live, the authorities created and recreated one message until 2005: abdication from the regulatory functions supporting the institutionalization of communal life. This is interesting both in the context of universal expectations articulated towards political authorities and the local context. As a rule, people expect politicians to be able to differentiate the existing reality. Without risking a far-fetched statement, we can also put forward a claim that based on the Polish experience before 1989, people expected political agency connected with promises of social advancement. In return, citizens received discursive training in individualization. During the first sixteen years, in the most important moments of democratic governance, the authorities told the public about the need to successively abandon specific institutions of social life in favor of an effective mechanism of the market agency. All the basic symbols that make up the public interpretation of sense were redefined in the way presented above in the description of meanings, where the keystones of the discourse “on what is rational” were found. The political naturalization of ideas about society as a space for competing individuals gained enough popularity among the elites of the Third Republic of Poland that it became an inertial collection of explanatory orders for subsequent prime ministers. The definitions of reality and rational action, negotiated in the political, expert, and “life-world” discourse described were so similar that a claim about their reification should be considered in the recapitulation. The rationality, expressed via following accumulation of competitive advantages, is not, and cannot be, the only form of human activity through which social actors gain self-awareness of the social life. And yet, this is what effectively happened in the Polish public dis-

course. Hence, we made the thesis of the subversive use of the concept of policy, aimed at the expansion of explanatory orders characteristic of late modernity (including capitalist relations of production and labor).

In the summary of the analyzed discourses, it should be clearly stated that the first sixteen years of the political/systemic transformation involved the dominance of the rationality type built almost exclusively around the symbolic figure of the individual, together with their freedom, responsibility, and agency. Until 2005, expert discourses and political discourses consistently built the ethos of the society as a sum of individuals (albeit it is not clear to what extent this was intentional). It will not be an exaggeration to say that nearly all meaning-making structures of social life were maintained solely through references to individuals. Individuals were asked to be patient at the time of political change, called to be reasonable in situations of political crises, determination and steadfastness were invoked whenever it was necessary to adapt to the new order, and thanks were offered for the hardships endured when favorable economic trends prevailed. This picture continued for the next eight years after a short interval of Law and Justice coming to power in 2005-2007. Communication was targeted “at each person separately,” to quote the thank-you for the perseverance in the crisis offered to Poles by Donald Tusk in his second policy speech as a prime minister. Today, we can get the impression that the arrangements as to “what is real” were based only on one entity. No wonder words such as “responsibility,” “trust,” “effectiveness,” or other keystones in the discourse on rationality, as described in my book, gained a new meaning. In this light, the use of symbols by the Law and Justice party revealed a completely different quality. These comments are

not about evaluating this party's policy, its proposals, or normative assessments of the consequences of its decisions. The proposed model of analysis enables the assessment of how symbols are used in the service of the power agents, and this is the only purpose. In my opinion, it can be used as a basis for attempts to understand attitudes in various configurations of late modernity, together with the constitutive processes of institutionalized reflexivity. An illustration of the fundamental change in the use of symbols in the public negotiation of meanings can be presented in another graph.

**Figure 3. Model of reconstructed types of rationality prevailing after 2015**



Source: *Self-elaboration.*

The core of the change that can be reconstructed in the analysis of public negotiation of meanings of “what is rational” is the restitution of the institution of the state, together with its traditional geopolitical characteristics of subjectivity and sovereignty. Another element that seems important is the aggres-

sive definition of the figure of the omnipotence of the state itself. After twenty-six years of individualization of social life, the offered set of “new/old” meanings may seem like naive symbolism since social actors had probably deeply internalized the explanatory orders based on the rationality of individualized (supra)historical necessity. On the other hand, however, as I wrote a few paragraphs earlier, the meanings of symbols offered in the set characteristic of this type of rationality have been, and increasingly are, falsified when they are referred to the non-discursive reality. In these circumstances, proposals for a new reading of “what is real” and “what is rational” may become cognitively and ontologically attractive. In this view, humans cease to be just independent entrepreneurs and begin to feel like a part of a symbolically delineated community, which takes on the well-known form of a nation. If we look more closely at the content and structure of what the authorities want to say to the citizens, then, in my opinion, we will see something much more important, that is, a redefinition of almost all the ideas essential for defining rational behavior. The ideas of society, freedom, justice, agency, and responsibility are an entirely new proposal in light of the idiom used by the Law and Justice party. Perhaps the emphatic empowerment of the state in the political rhetoric of Law and Justice can only be read and understood in close connection with the exaggeration accompanying the silent yet inevitable reification of the set of meanings characteristic of the situation preceding this party's coming to power.

The hybrid form of rationality arises from the habitual use of terms such as “freedom from” and personal responsibility, and the transfer of ideas of agency to the level of the state that represents the nation. All this, presented in a dignity-filled idiom, helps explain the reality using the dichotomy that can be

reconstructed from the discourse of the “life-world.” Participants from all the focus groups, from the unemployed to owners of small and medium-sized businesses, invoked the “familiar-alien” dichotomy despite the discursive pressure on the “cosmopolitization” of ideas about relations in the social world (Kubala 2019:243-301). This dichotomy was the main tool for structuring the meaning of reality, enabling them, on the one hand, to maintain the existing definitions of explanatory orders in contemporary capitalism without undermining their structure, and, on the other hand, to organize the tension arising from the disappointments with capitalist production and labor relations. The analyses conducted do not represent empirical proof for the intentional/sociotechnical use of the “familiar-alien” dichotomy by Law and Justice, which governed Poland from 2005 to 2007 and after 2015. To my deepest belief, however, they represent evidence of a political response to a specific kind of symbolic deficiency that characterized the Polish public discourse (including the discourse

on work) after 1989, together with the accompanying type of rationality. This deficiency was (and still is) a consequence of the experiment involving a dilution of social relations and, consequently, the images of social life as a sum of individual projects. The naturalization, universalization, and internalization of such knowledge of society can only succeed in Sloterdijk’s “comfort zone,” and this is not certain, either. Otherwise, the symbolic project of the atomization of social life cannot withstand a confrontation with reality. The discursive and identity-building transfer of tension from actual structural inequalities characteristic of contemporary labor relations to a simple “familiar-alien” dichotomy seems to be the only effective linguistic tool for maintaining the *status quo* on a local and global scale. All possible weaknesses of this tool are of secondary importance if we consider its political and operational ability to mystify reality based on the structure of individualized supra-historical necessity, that is, the type of rationality described in this article.

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