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THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF SOCIAL INVESTIGATIONS  
IN POLAND

One of the problems connected with relations between individual and social institution is institutional context of sociological inquiry. It is very important thing to know how members of the society define sociology and sociological studies, how they perceive the role of these studies in making decision by authorities of the country, what they think about institutions and agencies which introduce social investigations and, last but not least, how their acting during interview reflects obtained results.

There are in sociology numerous models of the role of the respondent. The American model, which functions in the context of almost completely acculturated interview techniques, has been created in a liberal-democratic society, and it assumes the respondent's strong motivation for giving "true" answers deriving from a belief in the usefulness of social studies and of the expression of one's own opinions. Such views are a constituent part of the role of a citizen in a "democracy through public opinion" and a role of a consumer of goods and services [G o s t k o w s k i, 1966, pp. 23-26].

The socialist model of the respondent, represented by Friedrich and Hennig [1975, p. 380] in GDR or by various Soviet theories assumes that the respondent has a positive attitude towards the interview and is ready to express his opinions since social research contributes to the solution of social problems. According to these authors the interview

unites both participants as partners in their efforts to improve social life.

We shall start this discussion of the respondent's attitudes towards social research with a brief description of the concept of science, including sociology, which functions in our society. Data referring to the problem come from a study by Giza and Worotyńska of a 300-person sample, representative of the whole country. The research was conducted in 1979, after a period of intensive sociological exploration of the 1970s. The authors have observed in the Polish society a specific perception of science. "SCIENCE is what refers to the study of space, the structure of atom, or the organs of human body". Considerably less frequent are opinions that SCIENCE studies "human characters"; the study of social life - alcoholism, prostitution, market supplies, or the work of the health service is not SCIENCE. Problems of social life are dealt with by the STATE and its specialized agencies and institutions - among them perhaps also sociology (like statistics), and maybe also some sociological institutes (like GUS - Central Bureau of Statistics [W o r o t y Ń s k a, 1980]).

It is notable that Poles closely associate sociology and sociological research with the State, its institutions and the system of political power. As a result, questionnaire studies are treated not as means of data collection but as a tool in making decisions on social matters. Sociology supplies a rationality for these decisions or serves for their verification. It helps to evaluate the public feelings and reactions to actions taken by authorities. According to the authors "it was seldom possible to extract such definitions of questionnaire research in which respondents agreed to treat questionnaire as a scientific method. Yet, an acceptance of sociology as a science, or of the questionnaire as a scientific method of research is very uncomfortable for us, sociologists, and for our self-perception. The respondents tell us that "if sociology exist, it's got to do something, and questionnaire studies is precisely what it does". According to Giza and Worotyńska the results of their research may point to a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness among people and institutions

in the face of a disorganized, disorderly and inert state which creates an absurd net of institutions and positions whose only task is to exist. Sociology and agencies which practice it are such hopeless institutions, created because they have to exist also in this country, and having no practical role or task. They conduct questionnaire studies because they must do something in order to exist [W o r o t y Ń s k a, 1980].

An analysis of numerous research results indicates that a positive or negative attitude of respondents to sociological studies is determined by evaluation of their practical applicability. Once introduced, a research should serve for some purpose; its task should be to induce changes aimed at improving social life, the material situation of people or their standard of living in general. The adoption of the criterion of applicability as an indicator of positive or negative attitudes of respondents towards the research remains in close connection with the acceptance of sociology, especially in its institutional aspect, as an element of the power system and decision making. It seems to be confirmed by the results of research that definite attitudes towards social studies are a function of respondents convictions as to the possibility of positive changes in the mechanisms of the society or in their personal situation. Of equal importance is whether the respondents believe in the possibility of changes or improvements resulting from decisions of authorities, and whether they believe that results of sociological research are considered in the process of decision making. In the light of available data such beliefs are 'uncommon' among Polish respondents (to put it mildly). Their attitudes vacillate according to rapid turns in the official policy, which take place at every change of the power elite. A good example of a clearly positive attitude towards a research is provided by a survey referring to social and economic problems of farmers, conducted in December 1971 and in January 1972, following a governmental bill abolishing compulsory supplies of farming produce and introducing a health insurance program for farmers. The interviewed farmers perceived the study as yet another element of the new agrarian policy of the State, and sometimes even as an opinion poll preceding further, beneficial changes [B o c z k o w s k i, 1975, p. 159].

It is obvious that besides applicability, people's attitudes towards sociology and social studies are based on some other criteria as well. In a research, from 1964 Słomczyński noted that in the stratum of intelligentsia 50% of studied population defined sociology as an academic science whose sole purpose is to satisfy intellectual curiosity, and to form world-views for the use of men. This group of respondents were better disposed towards sociology than those who perceived it as a tool of social politics, yet they also denied it any practical value [S ł o m c z y ń s k i, 1966].

Giza and Worotyńska argue that the criterion of applicability becomes especially valid whenever research deals with these social problems which come close to the respondent's experience (e.g. the work of a polyclinic, a housing project in the area etc.). On the other hand when research concentrated on attitudes, values or social structure in general, respondents reacted in three different ways. Most of them were convinced that it was aimed at verifying some basic tenets of the system or, even more frequently, at diagnosing global social problems. Respondents with such attitudes accept as proper the sponsor's intentions, feel favoured to be offered the role of "experts" and perceive the research as a potential tool of social change. They usually say the research could be useful, but "under present conditions" it is not.

Less frequent is a conviction that the research is state-sponsored in order to check on the citizens' loyalty and to control their consciousness. "They've got to know even our thoughts" - says one respondent. According to this view research questions are captious since through them the citizen is being forced to exhibit his true - disloyal - opinions.

The third view is least frequent of all. Those who express it treat the so-called basic sociological research as a study of human characters and categorize it together with psychological studies.

The last two variants contain certain phobo-genic elements: they are associated with a conviction that the interview is designed in order to find out some hidden features or opinions of the respondent. Thus biased respondents try to discover what

the authors call "a false bottom, a sphere of indefiniteness" which is connected with the interview situation and which makes them afraid of revealing their psyche, their ignorance, or - worse still - their opinions which might incriminate them in the face of the State and its institutions [W o r o t y ń s k a, 1980].

Also other authors point to the element of apprehension in the respondents' attitudes towards social research. In a study by Lutyńska a group of clerks granted interviews with some reluctance and fear of negative consequences in their jobs, as well as an apprehension of sanctions of a "more general" social, political, or occupational character [L u t y ń s k a, 1966]. G o s t k o w s k i [1962, pp. 100-124] observed similar attitudes among respondents coming from a small community and noted, that besides fear and apprehension resulting from ignorance of the purpose of study, or lack of culturally sanctioned social norms of behavior in the situation of interview, a part of respondents treated the survey as "official registration constituting a threat to their well-being (an increase in taxes, eviction etc.).

Under present circumstances it seems that this conviction of respondents that an expression of opinions is likely to bring sanctions from the part of some vaguely defined authorities is one of the major problems for social researchers. Privately, people offer views which differ from those expressed in official situations (e.g. during an interview). This hypothesis is partly confirmed by the results of a study by S ł o m c z y ń s k i, [1966] in which an interviewer, who introduced herself as an agent of a state institution, asked questions related to the official ideology and thereby made her respondents define their role (more or less consciously) as citizens acting in the context of large social organizations. During the interviews a part of respondents presented opinions which were closer to the official state line than views presented by them as members of informal groups.

It is thus natural to ask: How is it possible that interviews are granted at all in this society which is so unfamiliar with sociological research, in which (due to the lack of ade-

quate cultural norms) respondents are unable to define their role correctly, in which the purpose and character of research are misinterpreted, where there is hardly any conviction as to the use of such research (especially in respect to its application by authorities in order to improve social life), and in which granting an interview requires a suppression of fear or apprehension?

The following hypothesis may explain this seeming contradiction as well as the fact that the proportions of interview refusals were minimal in Polish surveys.

On the one hand it seems that respondents act according to a traditional and deeply internalized cultural norm requiring of them to be hospitable to everyone, including strangers, which makes them let the interviewer into their homes. On the other hand the interviewer is usually treated as a public officer, a representative of some state institution which constitutes a part of the power system. It is thus possible that fear of running into troubles or of being called to account for a refusal of interview dominates over the feeling of apprehension resulting from participation in the interview. It is also probable that this feeling of apprehension is partly neutralized by other psychological factors like curiosity of the new social situation (so far unrecorded by the respondent's experience), the impression of being favoured by the fact that an official, even scientific, institution asks him for information and treats him as an expert on social matters etc.

The above types of respondents attitudes towards the sociological research are of definite consequence for the evaluation of research results. In surveys aimed at describing broadly defined sociopolitical and economic situation of the country or the individual situation of the respondent against this broad background, respondents, let alone their informational incompetence, express "official" views, in agreement with currently accepted political line, expected by authorities and different from private opinions expressed during informal contacts. Equally disadvantageous from the point of view of results are cases in which respondents are not afraid of anything but supply answers in order to maintain the conversation

since they are convinced that their opinions are of no practical importance with regard to possible changes in the conditions of life. We may thus say that the Polish respondent before 1980 was a man who easily granted interviews, but seldom met the requirements of a good interview.

The situation described above underwent a modification in the period of "Solidarity". On many occasions interviewers recorded opinions not in line with official views. We were obviously facing a retarded reaction to the previous blockade of possibilities for authentic expression. It might have been connected with a common, at that time, conviction that living conditions were going to improve, and that the common man would have some influence on the situation of his country. Accordingly, his views presented in an interview were to be taken into consideration in the process of decision-making.

It is worth recalling that in 1956 a similar hope for changes in the execution of political power and prospects for gradual democratization of social life and for free expression contributed to, and facilitated the introduction of opinion polls. Since then until 1980 the situation in which sociologists had to work fell short of those expectations. August 1980 made the way for free expression and revived the belief in usefulness of social research - a trend confirmed in all surveys in that period.

Enforcement of the martial law gave rise to suspicions among a part of sociologists that positive tendencies in respondents' attitudes towards social studies can be stopped. Some of them supposed at that time that clear connections between social investigations and system of political power through announcement of creation government Opinion Poll Center may result a growing number of attitudes of the period before August 1980, in other words it may bring about an increase in the number of refusals. Other sociologists supposed that changes which occurred in August 1980 and the resulting transformation of the society (democratization) have penetrated deeply enough into the social consciousness as to promote further free expression of opinion regardless of political conditions.

Experiences of the years 1981-1987 show us that neither of

these suppositions were entirely right. Created as early as the martial law Opinion Poll Center (CBOS) plays a significant role in the formation respondents' attitudes. Aims and tasks of CBOS are widely discussed and popularized through mass media and results of its inquiries constitute a main source of information for the society about itself (among other things through tv reports of press conferences of a government's spokesman). In the first number of its Bulletin the director of the Center (CBOS) declared: "Through investigation of public opinion our Center should help to optimal decision making and collect evidencies its social effects. He writes: Frankly speaking, we are the institution which serves authorities but we are not complaisant" [K w i a t k o w s k i, 1985, pp. 1-4]. So, respondents serves giving answers to interviewers CBOS should have no doubts that surveys of this Center should help in rationalizing political decision-making.

In this situation it seems that positive attitudes toward these studies will be determined by respondents' convictions that surveys are realized honestly, that their results supply a rationale for decisions of authorities which may improve a level of living. However the result of sociological research are contradictory to this opinion.

The analysis of numerous research results made by Krystyna Lutyńska indicates that since 1982 the proportion of refusals as extremely grown in some surveys. It is notable that differences between studies are very great (from 3 to 50%) and depend considerably on investigating institution. The greatest proportion of refusals is observed in Press Research Center in Kraków (28-50%) and in government Opinion Poll Center (23-44%), the lowest in academic institutions (3-14%). According to L u t y Ń s k a [1987] the sponsorship may affect on respondents in different ways. People may react to nothing but the name of institution associating, for example Press Research Center newspapers many of them distrusted. They did not want to talk to press' representatives because they were affraid of a tendentious distortion of their answers in surveys.

The problem of accordance of opinions expressed in interview with respondents' attitudes expressed in everyday life re-

mains an open question. In comparison with the 70-ties we can now observe the development of score of information on social-economic and political life of the country, the increase of possibilities of expression in public critical opinions. We may suppose, thus that intensity of threatening resulting in presentation in interviews opinions which are not close to official state policy or party line decreased in some circles of our society. The question is whether the changes in social consciousness which has taken place during last years are reflected in spontaneity and openness of respondents during interviews.

One of the researchers from CBOS Jan P o l e s z c z u k [1987, pp. 86-88] remarks that conscious avoidance of answer in spite of having definite opinion be determined by respondents' reluctance to investigating institution and belief that his own opinion differs from common attitudes, social norms and values.

In the 80-ties Jerzy P u c h a l s k i [1987, pp. 66-82] made very interesting observations of workers' reactions during social research on the premises of factory. According to him many social studies carried in the factory by various institutions penetrated worker's consciousness deeply enough as to standarize perception of research situation so that they treat survey like institution by itself with its own name "polling". Workers do not differentiate investigation problems and research institutions. If sometimes happens that workers define institution carrying a study as hostile, threatening their goals, the collective reaction may be symbolic refusal-boycott of survey. The same reaction may elicit workers' conviction that the survey may be a strategic action of factory administration to manipulate the staff's opinion. In this case treat the sociologist as a "man of administration", officer from control department. More often participation in studies bring about a modification in attitudes towards social inquiries, treating the interview situation as more neutral. However for many workers sociological surveys are still ineffective and unreasonable, they have no influence for administration decisions, they are sign of extravagance and cognitive aim of study is for them as enigmatic as intelligibile.

Remarks of Lena K o l a r s k a - B o b i ń s k a and Jerzy W e r t e n s t e i n - Ż u ł a w s k i [1987, pp. 140-151] are connected with problems mentioned above. The authors argue that in our country respondents very often misunderstand their role in interview situation and treat interviewer as a representative authority. In Poland many people consider that social inquiries serve political control or in contradiction they think that survey is good opportunity to express their lamentations and wishes to the power.

Another problems is permanent increase a number "don't know" in recent years. Many investigators suppose that in situations in which respondents are afraid or do not want to refuse an interview, escape in "don't know" is for them a last line of defense. It is interesting that definitely the greatest proportion of this answer occurs in questions of political issues.

Reliability of institutions which carry social studies in eyes of respondents is connected with all these problems.

Many members of our society suspect that these institutions are, more or less, submitted to the administration of a state and political power. Thus, people doubt often about impartiality, honesty and reliability of investigators and scientific purposes of studies.

In spite of the probability that a rapid increase in the number of sociological studies and the gradual popularization of sociology trough presentation of its results in the mass media influenced the spread of knowledge about sociology, research institutions, the results of many studies are quite discouraging for sociologist active in the field of scientific inquiries.

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## INSTYTUCJONALNY KONTEKST BADAŃ SPOŁECZNYCH W POLSCE

Artykuł zawiera próbę przedstawienia instytucjonalnego kontekstu badań socjologicznych w Polsce. Autorzy wskazują na powiązania między społecznym odbiorem socjologii, badań socjologicznych i ich wyników, a systemem instytucji, włączając w to bliżej nie zdefiniowane w świadomości społecznej "państwo" czy "władzę", jak również instytucje badawcze działające w ramach systemu - takie jak Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej czy instytuty naukowe.

Przegląd problemów związanych z nastawieniami respondentów do badań społecznych powstał w oparciu o opracowania i raporty metodologiczne wielu autorów polskich. Obejmuje on lata 1956-1987 i wskazuje na wpływ zmian w polityce i życiu społeczeństwa PRL na oddziaływanie tzw. efektu sponsoera na wyniki badań, liczbę odmów oraz stosunek do badań socjologicznych. Stwierdzono m. in., iż w okresach częściowej chociażby demokratyzacji życia publicznego występują wśród respondentów tendencje do bardziej szczerego wyrażania własnych, prywatnych opinii niż w okresach, w których władze powracają do autokratycznych metod sterowania społeczeństwem. W artykule wskazuje się również na środowiskowe uwarunkowania tendencji do prezentowania autentycznych opinii, na wzrost ostatnimi laty liczby odmów udzielania wywiadów dla instytucji utożsamianych z oficjalnymi instytucjami prowadzącymi badania.