

The main objective of the project is to build a model of the emergence of basic social meanings in modern societies. The project will investigate how fundamental oppositions between what is considered moral and immoral, rational and irrational or just and unjust are socially constructed and how they are linked to lines of the key political conflicts and other debates in public sphere. Special focus will be on the role of the social elites in the production of these basic oppositions. Elites will be theorized through the notion of the "field of power", which will be borrowed from the famous French sociologist - Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu has studied the field of power in France, which is one of the strong Western countries, of the so-called European core. It is our hypothesis that the structures and mechanisms he identified in France may not necessarily be so evident in the case of more peripheral countries, an example of which Poland will be used in the present study. It is in particular assumed that the basic structure of oppositions in the Polish field of power will be considerably different from that observed in France, where a clear conflict between economic and cultural elites is present and produces the classical opposition between political left and right. In Poland, as it is suggested, the main opposition in the field of power may be between those supporting the openness of the country to global/external trends (e.g. Western domination, Soviet domination, Russian and Austrian domination etc.) and those opposing it under the slogans of defense of national interests. In order to test that hypothesis and to see how universal this mechanism can be, the project envisages studying the structures of the Polish field of power over four periods: the last years before the outbreak of the First World War, when the Polish territory was divided among three empires: Austrian, Prussian and Russian, the interwar period, the late communist era and the post-communist period. The study will focus first of all on structure of the elites (political, economic, cultural, academic and others who are the members of the field of power), biographies of its members, their trajectories between fields, and first of all divisions, conflicts and alliances. This will allow to study how the main lines of social conflict were changing and how public debates were evolving and along them the meanings of what is considered just and unjust etc. Such a systematic study should help to propose a new theory of meaning, showing how specifically social meanings are constructed in the public arena in a long-term perspective.

Another component of the project will be the study of three academic disciplines: sociology, linguistics and law. Their "fields" in Poland (or on Polish territories) will be studied in a similar way that general fields of power in the same time periods (starting with late 19th century). This way the main lines of conflicts/discussions in the three disciplines will be reconstructed on the basis of the study of academic debates and biographical trajectories. These findings will be compared with the above mentioned results of the study of the fields of power to see what are the relations between the general public, in particular, political debates, and academic debates. The more general goal of this project is to study the relationship between social sciences and the general public sphere; that is the forms in which social studies are involved in the production of social meanings. We expect these mechanisms not to be direct, but the role of the academia, in particular in the legitimization of public debates, is expected to be considerable. We will also show how these mechanisms differ in the case of a peripheral country like Poland from what was described in the academic literature in the West.