

Popular summary

The primary goal of the project entitled 'Values in the age of the (global) crisis' is to examine the nature and direction of changes that occurred in the Polish society over the past 30 years and concern the values shared by the Polish society. As a European country and part of the global system, Poland is subject to a wide range of social and economic processes that affect Europe and the world. Among them, particular attention should be given to modernisation processes (chronologically divided into periods of early and late modernisation), the persistence of the global economic crisis and the rise and development of new communication networks. Their interaction influences both the content and the hierarchy of values in the society, their structure and connections with actions.

We can fully pinpoint change in values and assess the scale of that change only when we can run comparative analyses. The significance of this project lies, among others, in the possibility to draw such multifaceted comparisons. The Polish team has continuously participated in the European Values Systems (EVS) project since 1990, so we have data for Poland from the consecutive EVS studies, which means we can analyse trends. Participation in the next, fifth edition of the EVS will help us to make comparisons across countries and place the values shared by Poles in the European and global context (the latter thanks to the comparison with the World Values Study).

However, the reconstruction of the transformations of values in the Polish society cannot be confined to the study of trends over time. Instead, it should also identify the mechanisms underlying the current landscape of values which unite the society and are responsible for its diversity. This effort should also reveal the relationship between those values and actions, whether individual or collective. In this part of the project, we draw theoretical inspiration for the proposed analysis from Alain Touraine's work. According to him European societies have entered a phase of development which he labels 'a post-social situation'. In such a situation, the dynamics of the society is no longer determined by activities of structurally defined social forces, driven by socio-economic interests but, instead, by actions of forces integrated around specific values. In other words, social actors are being replaced by 'moral actors'.

Touraine's conceptualization is a starting point for us to formulate a number of specific research hypotheses concerning, on the one hand, the values that underlay the identity of the Polish society and, on the other hand, the position of those values within Europe-wide trends. One such trend, which has already become visible, is the activated need of safety, leading to a decline in solidarity and a growing resentment towards strangers. As regards changes which are specific to Poland, we believe—and we are going to address this issue further in our analysis—that the needs of belonging and respect have remained largely unmet in many segments of the Polish society: this results from the country-specific transformation trajectory in Poland and clearly influences both the values accepted today and the manifestations of those values. The continuing consolidation of values in certain areas of life leads to the emergence of diverse 'good society' projects.

We will seek answers to these research questions by applying a variety of methods suited to problems we would like to address. The core of the project consists in a quantitative survey on a representative sample, conducted according the methodology agreed within the international consortium of the EVS study. The mechanisms underlying the formation of values will be studied using qualitative methods: we plan to hold focus group interviews and individual interviews. We will also run computer-assisted analysis of discussions in selected social media. Our findings will be supplemented with the analysis of previously collected data from research on values, comprising all editions of the EVS and selected editions of other international research projects where the issue of values was addressed (ESS, Eurobarometer, Social Diagnosis, ISSP).

The essential value of the project lies in its contribution to research on the transformation of values in Poland and the mechanisms which modify, accelerate or decelerate those processes. The proposed analysis should also provide data which will enable us to propose a theoretical refinement (or even modification) of Ronald Inglehart's theory (the most popular one in sociological studies on values) as well as theoretical reflection on the connection between values and actions.