

## DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

This project aims to investigate how a range of manufacturers, governmental institutions and societal organizations attempted to turn their own ideologies into material culture artifacts by inscribing home appliances with cultural meanings in Poland in the 1970s and 1980s. The main research objective of the project is to answer the question, how actors which took part in the “politics of consumption” were capable of exercising their power by influencing other actors.

From the turnover of the 1960s and 1970s we can observe a process of mobilization of a cluster of actors: manufacturers of home appliances, trade organizations, institutions which formed expert cultures such as the Institute for Industrial Design, and societal organizations such as the Committee of Household, in a campaign of stimulating manufacturing and appropriation of durable goods. The mobilizing ideology of this campaign was drawn upon a slogan of the imaginary “social progress.” Further, the regime of Edward Gierek in the early 1970s brought the slogan of “securing material conditions necessary for the fostering of social progress” as one of the ideological guidelines and an aim for economic planners and the whole state apparatus.

In the vocabulary of historical sources relevant to the policy towards “social progress” three key terms: “modernity,” “quality” and “aesthetics” have been used abundantly. In such sources all three terms are deeply embedded in broader imaginaries of technological and social progress. Those three slogans organized discourse towards material culture and were used as goals which have to be appropriated into work routines by actors which operated within the state apparatus: manufacturers, industrial federations, and trade organizations, in order to secure the social progress. Furthermore, a number of intermediary actors and expert groups used those three slogans as key points in the production and dissemination of knowledge used in their attempts to facilitate the flow of consumer goods. We argue that terms: “modernity,” “quality” and “aesthetics” were key spaces of negotiations of cultural meanings related to manufacturing, distribution and use of home appliances in the late state socialist Poland. Actors which took part in the politics of consumption by manufacturing and distributing appliances themselves, or producing and communicating knowledge about them, used such slogans to inscribe their own visions about the future of the socialist society.

The project is designed to cover the time period 1970-1989 which include both the époque of Edward Gierek regime and the decade of political, social and economic crisis of the 1980s. Investigating the continuities and changes in practices of inscribing ideologies into material culture between both decades enable us to grasp a significant reconfiguration of power relations in state socialist Poland which took place during the crisis of 1980-1981. While investigating the 1970s we consider how ideologies inscribed into material culture were relevant to the broader vision of “the second Poland” – the core slogan of the political rhetoric of Gierek’s technocratic regime. Further, during the economic crisis of the 1980s securing access to such goods for all social strata was widely accepted in the public discourse as a method of securing the functioning of households as basic social units and keeping the pace of the social progress despite the odds.