

## **Three generations of Polish transformation. The analysis of social change in the cohort perspective**

### **DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC**

The aim of the project is the analysis of mechanisms binding time and social change on the basis of cohort data. It will at the same time serve as systematic empirical description and theoretical interpretation of the process of transformation in Poland as seen from sociological perspective (a long-term process of structural and mental change in society). A generation is often deemed a basic unit of analysis of such change (Eisenstadt [1956] 2009, Bengtson, Furlong, Laufer [1974] 1983), therefore looking at differences between people born in various historical periods – which in fact means that their upbringing and adulthood took place in changing socio-economical contexts – is an important element of sociological diagnosis of the changes. There is much speculation on generations in Poland, there are notions like “generation 84”, “generation Y”, “generation JP2” which are based on common sense, not on precise measurement of the distinctiveness.

From strictly scientific point of view, on the basis of new, relatively small-scale study conducted in the cohort plan, data will be obtained that would enable reaching many years back analysis of the "cohort effect", but also "age effect" and "period effect" – i.e. changes associated, respectively, with socialization, life cycle (aging) and the impact of the current genius saeculi (Riley 1973, Glenn [1977] 2005, Rodgers 1982). Using conventional survey data we can observe differences between various age groups, yet we cannot precisely attribute it to life-cycle moment or different socialization. Also with a study following one particular cohort we would not be able to discern between differences in age (inherent changes) and differences in the context (concurrent changes). Proper cohort study allows to make such substantial inferences.

An important feature of the project is the use of existing data sets, therefore it will constitute a scheme of cumulative data collection and thus allow – at relatively low cost – for broad intergenerational comparisons. The proposal involves conducting a survey on a nationally representative sample of the members of the 1987-9 cohort, and questionnaire modules for the 1956-58 and 1970-72 cohorts. The collected data, together with the results of previously conducted sociological research ("The social structure and mobility" 1987/8, "The generation of historical hope and everyday uncertainty" 2000/1), will allow to do precise inter- and intra-cohort comparative analyses and analytical specification of period, cohort and age effects.

The mentioned three generations permit to describe recent Polish history as a “saga” of three generations, namely: the “disillusioned generation” (they began their adult life in the mid-70s and therefore experiences of economic crisis, Solidarity movement and 1981-83 martial law were in large extent formative for them), the “generation of historical hope” (they began their adult life in 1989 so their first important decisions coincided with early stages of systemic change in Poland) and the “generation of open borders” (their adulthood started after 2004, when Poland already accessed EU). We can expect that between the three cohorts there are significant differences (statistical and substantive), both in the course of their careers, as well as in terms of mental orientations, and those differences are associated with each other and with dramatic institutional changes taking place in Poland since the 70s. The youngest of the three, "generation of open borders", is the first to be growing up practically completely outside the context of communist regime. Its members approached adulthood at the beginning of XXI century and dealt with specific challenges and opportunities set by the changing situation of Polish state and society.