

## **Wealth inequalities in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and their socio-political consequences**

The aim of the project is to examine the problem of wealth inequality in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Due to the lack of some sources to study this problem for all social groups, attention will be focused on dominant groups – nobility and clergy. Since the members of these groups had a monopoly on land ownership and participation in the political life of the country, an analysis of their wealth inequality should make an important contribution not only to the economic history of the region, but also to its political history. The key outcome of the project will be a database of wealth diversification in selected regions of the Commonwealth. It will be based on information from censuses of nobility and church taxpayers.

The database will also serve as a basis for further analyses, going beyond the simple reporting of wealth diversity indicators. During the second phase of the project, three research hypotheses from the social and political history of the Commonwealth will be verified on the basis of collected data.

- A. Between the 16th and 18th centuries wealth inequality among nobility increased considerably.
- B. Individual regions of the Commonwealth were characterized by very diverse levels of wealth inequality. The lowest values were in the western provinces of the Crown and the highest in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.
- C. Phenomena described in hypotheses A and B determined the degree of political activity of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility as a whole. In regions and periods characterised by greater inequalities, the importance of clientelism increased, while the actual political activity involved only a narrow group of the richest representatives of the nobility.

Tak, The research on wealth inequality has a well-established position in world historiography. In comparison with rich and still growing world literature, Polish research on wealth inequality has to be described as quite scarce. In the absence of extensive research on Commonwealth's wealth inequality whose methodology could be comparable to that used in world science, analyses conducted for the purposes of this project are likely to contribute significantly to our knowledge of the economic and social history of contemporary Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus. The results will be of interest not only to international economic historians seeking new comparative data from new regions and periods, but also to sociologists and political scientists involved in debates on the historical roots of contemporary inequalities.