

The goal of the project is to solve the following problem: How was the formation of Polish national habitus after 1989 related to the process of civilization, or: what is the civilizational outcome of 1989-transformation? The concept of civilization used here comes from Norbert Elias, a German-Jewish sociological classic who believed that civilization means a gradual elimination of interhuman violence by normative regulation of both formal and informal kind, supported by state formation processes leading to state monopoly of physical violence and fiscal power. The elimination of violence is achieved by raising sensitivities and refining emotional standards as well as standards of behavior: civilization means more attention to detail, more differentiated and nuanced feelings and more behavioral complexity, as well as less direct connections between affect and behavior. It is due to civilization that humans can organize into ever more intricate networks of positions called figurations which undergo constant changes as a result of balances becoming unbalanced in the course of power struggles. Depending on the state of internal interdependence of figurations and on their interdependencies with external world, figurations change as a result of power struggles. In the process of civilization, individuals in figurations become more standardized emotionally and behaviorally, and the influence of physical force on social matters is reduced. Thus, more vulnerable social categories gain a level of protection against the stronger as a result of civilizing. The efficiency of civilization depends on internalization of ever finer normative standards of feeling and behaving, which in turn depend on the stable cognitive-behavioral structures which Elias called habitus. Habitus is a set of patterns of human experience and action, conditioned biologically and ecologically, but regulated by the influence of culture, history and social dependencies. Habitus is formed in a particular society and in a nation state may with time come to include a layer which is referred to as “national habitus”. None of the processes in question, either the civilizing process nor the state formation or national habitus formation, are irreversible: history has known many decivilizing processes. However, any habitus, once formed, has a drag-effect: its influence on the behavior of individuals outlasts the figurational conditions which determined its formation.

An international team of seven researchers working for 60 months (including two post-docs employed for two years and two Ph. D. students employed for four years), will conduct large-scale empirical work to apply this theoretical framework to the experience of Polish transformation.

We will focus on the components of habitus triggered, evoked or substantiated by belonging to a group identified as the Polish nation. We will study three “normativity spheres” (law, politics and religion), as well as no less than six “inequality spheres” (the treatment of women, children, sick and disabled persons, the elderly, the dying and terminally ill persons, animals, ethnic, religious, sexual and other minorities, other socially deprived categories and/or strangers (migrants, foreigners)), working with mixed methods on secondary data and primary data generated by interviews. Our goal will be the assessment of civilization and decivilisation tendencies in all these spheres, as well as of civilizing or decivilizing impact of politics, religion and law after 1989. We will compare Polish results with the results for no less than two other former Eastern bloc countries, to enhance explanation by including figurations exposed to a similar transformation impulse.