

The aim of the project is an innovative analysis of the political and social processes taking place in Poland after the end of the Second World War through the experience of politically engaged individuals in the Warsaw Province (not including the capital city itself) in the years 1944–1956, i.e. in the period of the "Polish road to socialism", Stalinisation and Destalinisation. The research assumes a combination of orientations characteristic of political history, social history and sociology, as well as, on the one hand, a profound insight into the specificity of a particular region, and, on the other, embedding this analysis in much broader processes affecting the whole – albeit in different ways – Central European countries at that time.

The project will be based on two pillars. The first is to study the biographical experiences of members of local political elites, i.e. people holding top positions in parties, national councils, state and economic administration at the voivodship, county and community level. Both what happened in the lives of individuals and how it was experienced and interpreted will be analysed. This means that the analysis of e.g.: education or social origin of the studied group will be accompanied by a reflection on what it meant to grow up in the 1930s in a poor Mazovian peasant family or what hopes, emotions and attitudes were associated with the notions of "socialism" or "modernity". The second area is the analysis of practices – the actions of political actors confronted with such challenges as terror and violence, reconstruction from the war damages, land reform and collectivisation, strenuous industrialization, social advancement, the search for an "internal enemy" in the party, etc.

The preliminary research hypotheses state that 1) the studied group, i.e. the local political elites, is an example of a group intermediating between social structure ("ordinary people") and the political structures and individuals detached from their social background by participating in the exercise of power; 2) the picture of Polish post-war reality was a resultant of top-down and bottom-up factors and was characterised by constant tensions between the model of the "revolution in a county" imposed from above and the "county revolution" emerging from local conditions.

The project will serve to fill the blank spot, which to a large extent is the post-war history of Warsaw's nearest vicinity. Unlike most of the current studies, which put emphasis on structures and organisations, in this research the perspective will be reversed – the activities of institutions, their various policies will be shown as an element of the experience of individuals. At the same time, these will be people, whose fates and activities are still poorly recognized field, about whom much less is known than about politicians of the highest level, intellectuals: first secretaries of PZPR county committees, directors of industrial plants in Mińsk Mazowiecki or Błonie, etc. For the first time, theoretical categories drawn from the area of sociology, especially Pierre Bourdieu's tradition, will be used for historical analysis in this field. The study will also bridge the gap between the analysis of pre- and post-war experiences and set the processes of the 1940s and 1950s in the context of earlier local conditions, such as the situation of the poorest strata of the rural population or political radicalization in the 1930s.

The main source of research material will be archives – the resources of such institutions as the Central Archive of Modern Records, the State Archive in Warsaw (and its local branches, e.g. in Mława or Pułtusk) or the Institute of National Remembrance. I will analyse questionnaires, resumes, characteristics, self-criticisms, denunciations, transcripts of meetings and public speeches, reports, correspondence etc. I will also conduct interviews with the last living (born in the 1920s and 1930s) participants or witnesses of the analysed processes, as well as their descendants. The collected material will be organized into two tabular databases: the first one will contain information about members of studied group, the second one – about processes and events.