

Democratic transformation from an intersectional perspective: exploring the impact of socioeconomic status and social identity on women's experiences of the Polish transformation

Historical transformations from authoritarian rule to democracy are often perceived as uniformly positive and leading to improvements, including in the area of gender equality and women's rights. However, in post-socialist states, which both limited civil rights and introduced policies which granted women certain rights unheard of in the West, the transformation led to ambiguous results from a gender perspective. It saw women disproportionately bearing its negative consequences, with a rise in women's unemployment, conservative political turn and declines in state support for care tasks.

The main research question guiding the project is: **What was the impact of holding different social identities on women's experience of democratic transformation?** Past literature has recognised that women from different social groups may have drastically different experiences of the transformation (Kowalska et al., 2015). In particular, it has been suggested that such transformations often end up benefitting well-off women and exacerbating inequality between women belonging to different social groups and classes (Taylor, 2010). This exploration will seek to address a gap in existing studies, which have often acknowledged these differences but either had not consulted the groups in question directly (drawing instead on other sources) or did not account for differences between women in a more in-depth and intersectional way. The following characteristics, identified in the course of the literature review, will be used as a starting point: age, socioeconomic status (income level, level of education, occupation), place of residence during the transformation (urban or rural).

A literature review will be conducted to synthesize the findings of past oral history research, refine the preselected characteristics and identify the relationships and intersections between them in the context of the Polish transformation. Particular attention will be paid to who is represented and who is underrepresented. The preliminary characteristic selection may be subject to some changes following the in-depth literature review or themes which come up in the course of interviews. Next, oral history interviews with women who were adults and resided in Poland throughout the transformation will be conducted. The sample will include at a minimum 36 participants, with each group consisting of at least 12 individuals to ensure adequate representation. Interviews will be structured around areas such as the labour market, informal care work, health and reproductive rights, life satisfaction. An intersectional perspective will be built into the project design (e.g. interview plan, analysis), to account for how multiple marginalised identities can compound themselves and create complex experiences, which may not be captured by simply analysing each held identity individually.

Data collected will be analysed using thematic analysis utilising an inductive (bottom-up) approach to identify themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). In the course of this analysis, common themes, similarities and differences in experiences and subjective perception will be identified. Thus organised results will then be contextualised using findings from the literature review, existing oral history recordings from the Polish Oral History Archive and supplementary publicly available statistical data sources from GUS, OECD and Eurostat (e.g. Labour Force Survey, Life in Transition Survey). The data will be disaggregated by gender and, where possible, by other characteristics identified as key in the previous steps.

While oral history interviews as a source are inherently subjective, they also offer an opportunity to include those previously left out as narrators. The results of this study will shed light on the differential impacts of transformation which may have been missed by available data (e.g. because of lack of disaggregation or unreliable data prior to the transformation). They also promise to add new insights into how belonging to different groups or holding a marginalised identity affects experiences of transformation and may spur further research. Amid concerns for equality in the context of present-day transformations, such as the (just) green transition, this topic holds continued relevance. Finally, such a study might serve as a blueprint and encourage similar studies in other countries, preserving historical records through first-hand accounts.