

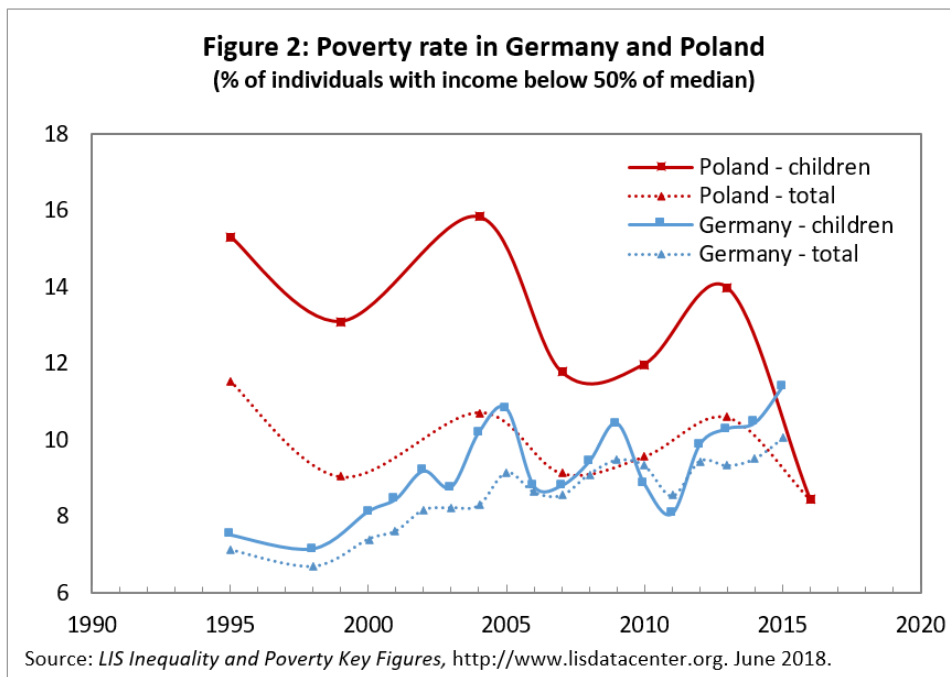
## **Country Report Poland: mass mobilizations in the context of shrinking civil society space**

### **Elżbieta Korolczuk**

#### ***Brief review of elite structure (inequality patterns, class differences, a national elite model)***

The level of economic inequalities in Polish society, measured by Gini's coefficient, was 0.299 in 2013, but 5.1% of Polish households were still living in extreme poverty and 44.7% lived below “the prosperity level”, meaning that they could not afford to spend money on education, culture and leisure (Czapiński and Panek 2013). Moreover, according to the Polish Central Statistical Office, the percentage of Poles living in extreme poverty rose a bit in 2013, indicating that there is a group of people who are affected by a long-term social and economic exclusion (CBOS 2013). Another dimension of economic inequalities pertains to the labor market, e.g. the rate of temporary employment in Poland is around 27% which is almost twice the EU average (EUROSTAT 2013). International studies show that individuals' levels of education and income have a profound impact on participation and political activism on an individual level. The rapid and thorough economic transformation initiated in 1989 resulted in relatively high levels of economic inequalities in contemporary Poland. Neoliberal reforms prompted many Poles to focus on the economic survival of their families rather than social activism on behalf of others. Such an interpretation, stressing the economic factors behind the lack of social engagement of Poles, is partly confirmed by the surveys showing that people who earn above the average incomes tend to engage in some sort of social activism more often than those who earn below the average; that they are more likely to accept helping others and to think that people acting together can bring about positive social change. Nevertheless, Kiersztyn (2017) demonstrates that in the Polish context economic determinism may be less important as a factor explaining political and civic involvement than is assumed, even though the statistical analyses reveal a positive relationship between household income and civic activism, showing that precarious employment causes the equalization of participation rates across social groups with different levels of education by leveling down.

The level of economic inequalities has changed after 2015 due to reforms implemented by the Law and Justice party. One of the first Law and Justice reforms, implemented shortly after the party took power in 2015, was the 500+ program of direct monthly cash transfers of 500 PLN for the second and each next child, for all Polish families (in low-income families, also the first child is eligible). This resulted in inequality measures going rapidly down, which also helps to understand the scale of popular support for this party: “The decreasing poverty levels and income inequality are most likely due to the redistribution: as a matter of fact, the percentage difference between the Gini index for disposable income and market income (defined as the sum of labor income, capital income, occupational pensions and private transfers) increases in Poland from 35% in 2013 to 39% in 2016, which signifies an increased effect of the public transfers redistribution.” (<https://www.lisdatacenter.org/newsletter/nl-2018-6-h-3/>). Comparison with Germany shows the scale of changes taking place in recent years.



Research on elites in Poland focuses either on political or on business elites, there are no studies focusing on civil society elites. Polish scholars Jacek Wasilewski and Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński, who wrote an interesting analysis of the elites in Poland observe that:

In a historically short period of a half century, Polish society has experienced two radical changes of social order and two equally radical of power elites. The first shift took place in the mid-forties, the second at the turn of the eighties and the nineties. The aftermath of the Second World War brought about not only political elite, but also entirely new conditions and rules of social political life. (1995: 669)

They discuss historical development of elites in Poland and major historical changes, the characteristics of elite recruitment and circulation, as well as provide data for analysis of elites, pointing to the formation of new post-1989 elites in the country. Sociologist Jacek Raciborski (2007) in his study on the recruitment to government position analyzes how political elites are formed. He shows that “the main path to the highest government posts passes through high party posts and the parliament” or the academic-expert path which strengthens legitimization by giving at least “the appearance of meritocratic recruitment.” (38). He also observes that the competencies of the new political elite are weaker than in the case of post-communist governing elites, who had the more experience in administration, the economy, or politics.

More recent study on political elites by prof. Rafał Matyja included MPs, Ministers, people elected and working at state institutions such as Human Rights Defender, as well as the representatives of local elites. The study showed that the average member of the elite was 52 years old (58% are over 50), 79% are men, and most of them were born in big cities (over 500.000 inhabitants). Most have higher education (university): University of Warsaw is overrepresented for national elites, while local elites went to universities in other cities, e.g., University of Gdańsk, Lublin and Toruń. Due to the specificity of Polish history political elites have rather short careers (9 years on average) – vast majority started their political life after 1989, and they hold their current position for 5 years on average.

There are also studies on economic elites, and their changing role in a globalizing economy. Polish sociologist Krzysztof Jasiński studies new business elites in the employs “the three-elite-generations metaphor: breakthrough elite, transition elite and consolidation elite.” He traces the evolution of elite’s role pointing to the fact that states like Poland “are at the stage of development combining characteristics of post-communist, neoliberal and globalised capitalist societies.” (2008: 237). Blum et al (2011) provide data on who are the leaders in business in East Central Europe 20 years after 1989, and attempt to “shed more light on elites’ concepts of the role of companies in the broader society, their perception of companies’ goals and responsibilities, and of collective and state regulation.” They challenge the notion of a ‘neo-liberal’ attitude of a ‘consolidated’ business elite in East Central Europe.

The debates on elites in civil society usually focus on the role of post-communist vs post-1989 divide. Even today the claim that specific groups, e.g. judges represent post-communist elites is used as a political weapon in debates. In reality the average age of a judge in Poland is 42, so it is unlikely most of them hold any professional position before 1989. As observed by Raciborski “The basic division in government elites is of an historical nature, dividing into the post-Solidarity elite and the post-communist elite. This means that selection into elites is over-reliant upon the political decisions made by young, ambitious and active people during the 1970s and 1980s.” (2007: 39)

This is partly understandable given the turbulent history of Poland. There is evidence that already in the wake of the transformation new Polish political elites did not support spontaneous grassroots activism of workers or women’s groups, fearing mass protests and uncontrollable mobilization (e.g. Ekiert and Kubik 1999). A well-known example of such a dynamic is the case of local citizens’ committees, which emerged at the end of 1988 as semi-legal organizations supporting the democratic opposition, and spontaneously evolved into a nationwide movement (Borkowski and Bukowski 1993). Soon after the elections in 1989 local committees collided with the Solidarity Union, and due to the conflicts between Solidarity’s leaders they were partly centralized and dismantled within a year. This case illustrates a broader trend in that “both political options dominant at the time were deeply distrustful of the vibrant grassroots ‘civil society’. First, the elites attempted

to take over and use these initiatives, and when it proved to be impossible ... they were extinguished and the whole issue (of bottom up civic activism) put aside” (Gliński 2008: 16).

There is also evidence that after 1989 the democratic state discouraged mass mobilization and channeled social activism into NGOs. Gliński (2008) claims that distrust towards mass mobilization and the elitist vision of civic organizing were also common among scholars, thus explaining why there was relatively little interest in studying Solidarity and social activism throughout the 1990s. The renewal of interest in civil society by both scholars and practitioners in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century resulted from new trends emerging in the country, but it was also linked to the process of EU accession, when promotion of civil society emerged as a response to the democratic deficit of European institutions and the challenges of the integration process (Lane 2010).

### ***Historical development and discourses on civil society***

Poland is a particularly interesting case to focus on not only because of the legacy of Solidarity but also due to the long traditions of social activism, and its fairly well developed and diverse associational sphere during the years of state socialism. Some scholars propose to go even further back and study the influence of the long-term historical processes dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when Poland lost its independence and was divided among the three neighboring countries. They argue that until today there are significant differences pertaining to social capital, level of socio-economic development and vitality of institutions of local democracy and self-government, which are rooted in the period of partitions. Social activism on the local level is significantly stronger in Galicia, Greater Poland, Pomerania and Upper Silesia, the regions with long-term traditions of local associationism. Bartkowski concludes that until today the “local press is much more developed in these regions and there are more local and regional associations, which not only help to uphold ‘civic spirit’ but also serve as schools of social activism” (2004: 298). The legacy of the past is also significant when it comes to material resources, e.g. availability of spaces where people can gather. According to Bartkowski, today 85% of all so-called people’s houses (*dom ludowy*), which are buildings owned by local rural communities where meetings and festivities can take place, are located in the Galicia region, where traditions of associationism and local government dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the period of the Galician autonomy introduced by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, are the strongest (2004: 291).

Civil societies in post-state socialist countries are often perceived as built “from scratch”, but recent scholarship indicates that they can be better understood as “recombined” (Ekiert and Kubik 2014, and 2017), meaning that new and old organizational forms and types of civic engagement co-exist, combine and sometimes compete, within a transforming political, social and economic environment. Civil society under state socialism, of course, was not autonomous in relation to the state, but took the character of what Kubik (2000) names “imperfect civil societies”. Apart from the state-controlled associational life (sport clubs, youth clubs, professional associations, etc), the church, families, and informal groups existed, as well as networks anchored in informal economic activities, clandestine civil society (everyday resistance, youth subcultures, religious groups, etc.) and dissident circles (anti-socialist illegal opposition, intellectuals, the Workers’ Defense Committees of the 1970s and Solidarity in the Polish context) (Kubik 2000; see also Buchowski 1996). Even the state-controlled associations were, as Buchowski put it, “political at the top and non-political at the bottom” (Buchowski 1996: 84), enabling activity and relationship-building at the local level. Thus, we agree with Ekiert and Kubik’s contention that while Poland did not inherit a full-fledged civil society from the previous regime, it “inherited a comprehensive and solidly institutionalized associational sphere” (2014: 4).

Most international readers associate Poland with the mass movement capable of mobilizing grassroots as well as challenging the socialist regime (Arato 1981). Founded in the Gdańsk Shipyard in 1980, the Independent Self-governing Trade Union Solidarity (*Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy Solidarność*) reached 10 million members in 1981, which at the time constituted one third of the total adult population of Poland. Despite the introduction of martial law in 1981, and the period of abeyance that lasted almost a decade when thousands of activists were forced to emigrate or to go underground, the mass mobilization was an important factor in bringing regime change in 1989. In the long run, however, Solidarity's legacy remains contested, mostly due to "the inability of the Polish elites and the population at large to formulate once and for all a clear and broadly accepted interpretation of the movement's history, its heroes, and its most significant successes" (Kubik 2010: 3). This trend stems partly from the fact that even though, thanks to Solidarity, Polish workers seemed to have won the battle, it soon turned out that the newly introduced capitalist system led to growing inequalities, and economic and political marginalization of the working class. Ost (2005) argues that these developments left many workers frustrated and angry, thus enabling the right-wing nationalist groups to take over the leadership in the Solidarity union and form political opposition to liberal elites.

Post-1989 civil society was characterized by emergence of new associations and networks, whereas many of the old ones continued to function in some form or were dismantled. However, after an initial period of enthusiasm Polish civil society stated to be depicted it as relatively weak, non-participatory in nature, still in need of "catching up" with Western Europe, and Polish civil society organizations are frequently conceived as NGO-ized, that is donor-dependent, bureaucratic and apolitical (e.g. CBOS 2014; Czapiński and Panek 2014; Gawin and Gliński 2004). Indeed, most quantitative indicators show that the number of Poles engaging in any type of social activism remained low. According to recent studies, the percentage of Poles who participate in voting and volunteering, who are members of non-governmental organizations or who take part in demonstrations, is the lowest among EU countries (BBVA International Study 2013). The Social Diagnosis Report shows that 86% of Poles do not belong to any organizations (Czapiński and Panek 2013: 289; cf. GUS 2013). Only 13.7% declared that they belong to "organizations, associations, parties, committees, councils, religious groups, or clubs", of which the most commonly mentioned are religious organizations (23%), sports clubs (15%), and hobby clubs (13%). Only 2.5% of Poles belong to more than one organization. Another popular measure of civic engagement is participation in activities for the benefit of one's community, including "commune, housing estate, town or neighborhood" in which only 15% of respondents took part during the last year (2013: 291). In general, participation is said to be more popular among well-educated persons living in big cities than for other parts of the population (Czapiński and Panek 2013: 290).

Conceptualization of civil society and its relation to political sphere, that was developed predominantly in the context of state socialist regimes, emphasizes the ability of associational life to create a counterweight to the state. It is the latter that "lays special emphasis on civil society as a sphere of action that is independent of the state and that is capable—precisely for this reason—of energizing resistance to a tyrannical regime" (Fowley and Edwards 1996: 39). Articulated forcefully by activists and thinkers such as Vaclav Havel, Jacek Kuroń or Adam Michnik in the context of opposition to communist regimes in the 1980s, the vision of a "civil society against the state" lost its significance after 1989. In the post-state socialist societies, sponsorship of civil society has become an important part of the process of democracy promotion and "one of the major themes of the discourse on the transformation of the former European state socialist societies to capitalism" (Lane 2010: 294). In the freshly reclaimed democracy, the civic society was primarily expected to be a

provider of public services: to organize cultural, educational or sports activities, to facilitate self-help actions, to raise funds for a range of vital actions. The 1989-1990 transformation in Central and Eastern Europe coincided with the process of shrinking the welfare state in the rich Western countries. In the neoliberal global regime, “civil society actors and their resources are called upon to compensate for the retreat of the state and the marketization of social relations”, while state funding for civil society is being cut (Sauer 2008: 287). This process that Sauer describes as “offloading” state responsibilities onto non-state actors, including individuals, families and non-governmental organizations, may open up venues for civil society groups and social movements to intervene, but usually it results in the instrumentalization of civil society actors for the benefit of neoliberal politics.

Such vision of the role of civil society rests on the assumption that there is a clear division between the civil and political society. In Poland, like in other European countries, some non-governmental organizations have been involved in political activities, such as commenting on the proposed laws, lobbying for certain solutions, exposing government abuse, or acting for a widely understood promotion of democracy; still, the discourse of the third sector's apolitical character has dominated. Analyzing the Polish think-tanks' discourse on the civic society more than two decades since 1989, Katarzyna Jezierska notes:

In Central and Eastern Europe, civil society used to be interpreted as the source of hope and the means to obtain regime shift, but after 1989 its radical promise has been severely blunted. When civil society materialized into civil society organizations, it recalibrated its goals – it lost the critical potential of “antipolitical politics” (Havel 2010; Michnik 1985), being the source of alternatives to the current political and socio-economic system, and settled into the role of auxiliary infrastructure legitimizing the existing neoliberal system. (2017: 105).

A civic society perceived as the third sector whose task is to provide public services, has become part of the dominating frame of interpretation, and not only in think-tanks (Jezierska 2017). The civic society was expected to be “beyond” current political conflicts, and to represent a range of values subject to political consensus, such as pluralism, individual rights, and egalitarianism. Meanwhile, and not only in Poland, politics was increasingly perceived as associated with party conflicts, dirty interests, corruption, and government abuse. The process of depoliticization was strengthened by the trend of NGO-ization, or subordinating the organizations to a state-controlled grant system, increasing bureaucratization, and alienation from the society and its problems.

In recent years we can observe discursive shift in the debates on civil society: a come-back of civil society-against the state rhetoric and more positive attitudes towards political engagement of NGOs. Among NGOs' the trend towards engaging in political activities has been growing in Poland since Law and Justice came to power, and it has been accompanied by the emergence of grassroots mobilizations. Today, a growing number of non-governmental organizations is joining strictly political actions, e.g. government's actions monitoring, representing the interests of certain groups, or organizing protests. Simultaneously, we can observe a different type of politicization, characterized by co-optation of civil society organizations by the state which expects or forces NGOs to work towards politically defined policy objectives.

### ***State – CS relations: models, forms and patterns of consultation, key reforms etcetera***

Until recently, the most important piece of legislation was the 2003 Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work (with a 2010 amendment), which regulates many important issues concerning civil society's functioning, focusing mostly on formal types of activism. It sets the rules of engaging in public benefit work by NGOs, regulates their cooperation with public administration, and establishes

the terms for securing public-benefit organization status as well as for state supervision over public-benefit work. In practice, this means that even though informal groups and individuals are not entirely excluded from cooperating with authorities, they are not eligible for certain types of public support. They are also not represented in the Public Benefit Works Council, which is an advisory and supportive body contributing to the formulation of tax provisions, expressing opinions about the government's plans and facilitating cooperation between civil society organizations and the state (Gumkowska et al. 2006: 49).

Financial resources are channeled towards formal organizations, especially those that received the status of Public Benefit Organizations in accordance with the Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work. Only the entities that perform "public benefit work" are eligible for state support, and since the act defines such work as "a work performed to the benefit of the public and society by non-governmental organizations", by definition it excludes any informal groups and networks. Only non-governmental organizations can enter the contest for state subsidies organized by the state funded Civic Initiatives Fund (*Fundusz Inicjatyw Obywatelskich*) and acquire public-benefit organization status, making them eligible for one percent of citizens' taxes. The so-called "percentage law" that enables citizens to support the third sector directly, not via the state, was introduced in 2003 to stimulate engagement, to educate citizens, and to help the organizations become less financially dependent on the state (Goliński 2004; Wygnański 2004).

The 2003 Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work introduced a provision that obliged local authorities to set up social consultation bodies in place at the local level in all communes, both urban and rural, and the other local government units and develop plans for cooperation with local NGOs every year. According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy reports, most local governments prepared such plans. Some studies suggest however that many organizations did not know that such regulations exist and that the cooperation between authorities and non-governmental organizations in Poland were not based on partnership but rather depended on the good will of civil servants (e.g. Fuszara 2008).

While implementing these regulations was not always successful, there were some indications that Poles were becoming more and more interested in such cooperation and more effective in influencing decisions on the local level (e.g. Garpiel 2014). The situation changed in September 2017 when Law and Justice party introduced new legislation changing the structure of the state-civil society cooperation. The Act on the National Freedom Institute – Centre for the Development of Civil Society established a new administrative body (the abovementioned Institute), with the task to distribute public funds among non-governmental organizations. Importantly, the people in charge of this process will be appointed by politicians, with no input from the civil - the Institute's Director and the majority of Director's Council are appointed by another new institution: the Committee for Public Benefit Activity, chaired by a member of the Polish Cabinet (the Council of Ministers). "This means that the Council of Ministers will have broad powers to influence and control the work of the National Institute" and the money this institutions distributes (Civic Initiatives Fund amounted to 60.000.000 PLN in 2018) (<http://www.hfhr.pl/en/national-freedom-institute-act-helsinki-committee-in-poland-issues-statement/>). The Institute was created despite negative comments from civil society organizations, experts and scholars. "According to the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, the adoption of this Act is a clear shift away from the concept of the state supporting the growth of civil society and a systemic threat to the independent operation and development of NGOs in Poland." (ibid).

More details can be found here: <https://siecobywatelska.pl/is-the-national-institute-of-freedom-a-deserved-name/?lang=en>

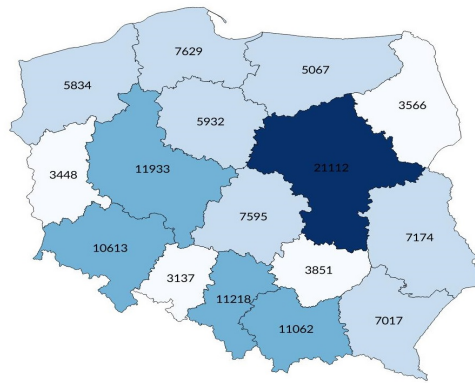
Another institutional change took place in January 2016, when the office of the Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment (a key institution for implementing gender equality in Poland) was transformed into the office of the Plenipotentiary for Civil Society and Equal Treatment. New Plenipotentiary appointed in 2016 was focusing mostly on establishing cooperation with civil society actors (mostly because he was neither competent nor willing to engage in any activities regarding gender and sexual equality). Both him and the next Plenipotentiary appointed in the end of 2016 engaged in cooperation only with socially conservative groups, rural and Catholic organizations, avoiding any contacts with existing umbrella bodies or organizations working on behalf of the development of civil society in Poland.

***Organized civil society structure in Poland (facts and figures no. organizations, volunteers, employees, revenue).***

In 2015 there were approximately 120.000 non-governmental organizations in Poland, including foundations (20.000) and associations (100.000). The data did not include informal networks, parties, labor unions and organizations such as the Polish Voluntary Fire Brigades (*Ochotnicza Straż Pożarna*), which are routinely excluded in the statistics of civil society organizations and civil society literature, even though they are often the most influential organizations in rural areas.



**100,000**  
associatio



**20,000**  
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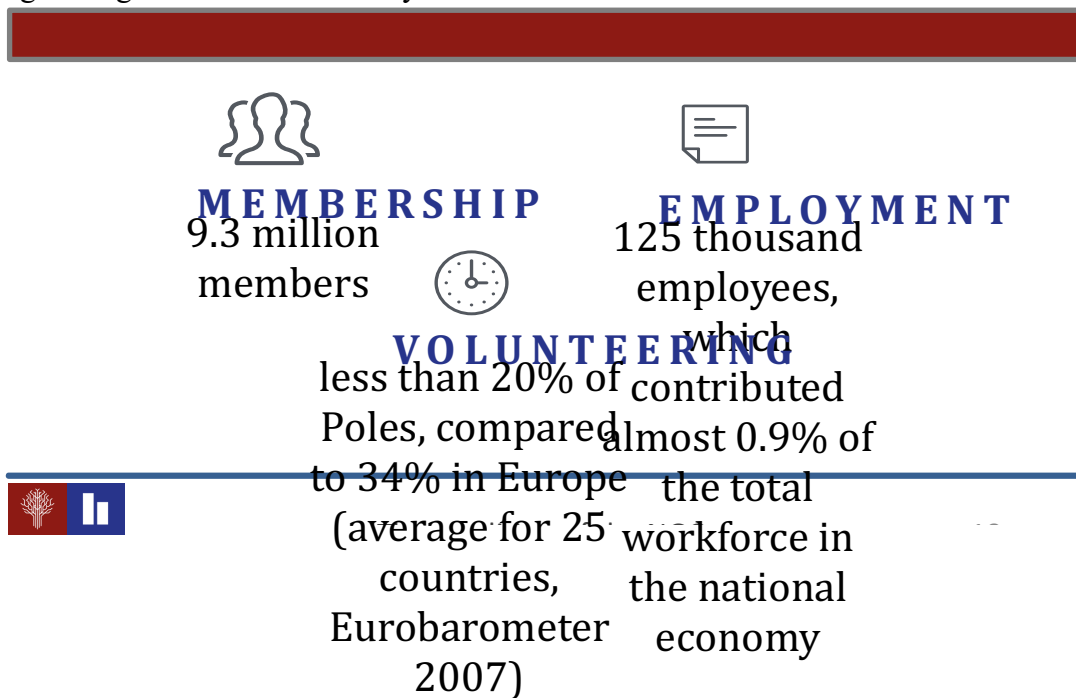
**70%** are  
active

Source: Report of the Klon/Jawor Association, 2015.

Most organizations did not employ any personnel: only 35% of Polish NGOs employed anyone (56% of those that operate in Warsaw), and out of that only 10% employed 20 people or more, whereas 65% of organizations engaged volunteers (the average was ca 10 volunteers per year/per organization). Only associations have members, on average 30 members in 2015 and this number has dropped in recent years. There are also big differences between organizations: in 2011 one in four associations had 100 or more members, whereas about 5% of them had over 750 members.

Most recent report (to be published in 2019) suggests that whereas we witnessed mass mobilizations and protests taking place in 2016 and 2017, today people are less likely to engage in organized civil society: between 2010 and 2018 the number of members that average association had dropped from 35 to 30, and even though the percentage of organizations engaging volunteers rose from 50 to 65% the average number of volunteers they work with dropped from 10 to 6. Among the representatives of NGOs reporting that they work with a smaller number of volunteers than before and have trouble with recruiting new, the majority represent big organizations located in larger cities and operation on a national scale, whereas local, smaller organizations are more likely to succeed in

attracting new volunteers. This data may suggest that people engage either in contentious actions (protests, marches and demonstrations) or in voluntary work for non-governmental organizations (that rarely organize disruptive events), so the mass mobilization may not necessarily translate into the strengthening of Polish civil society understood as the third sector.

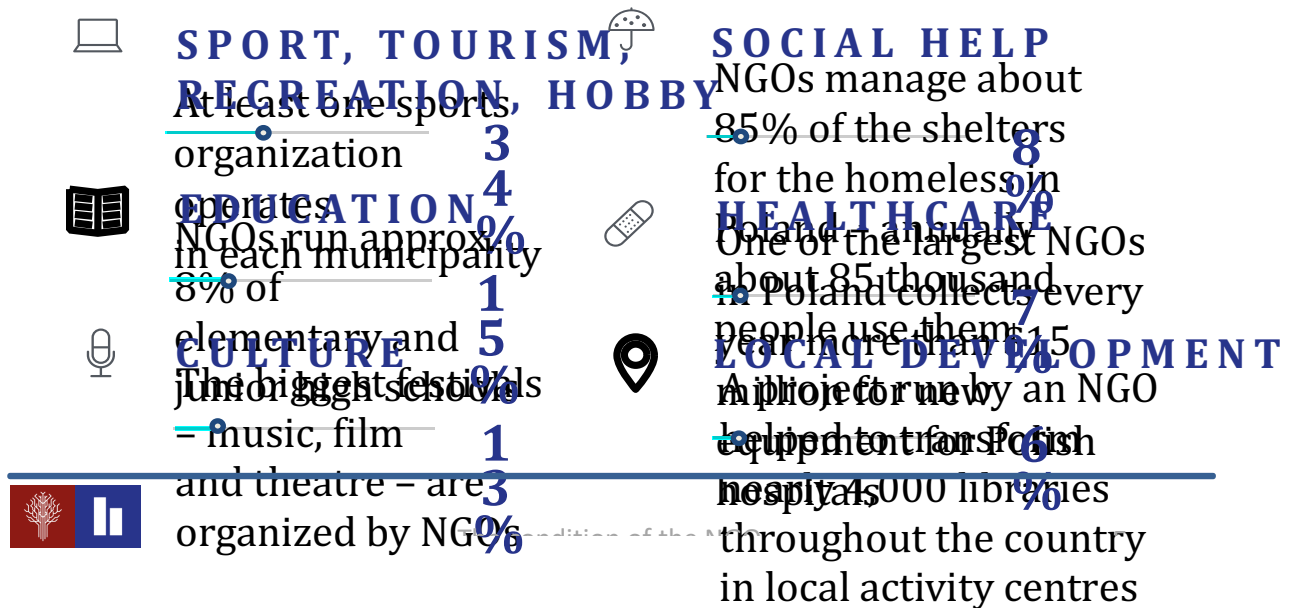


Source: Report of the Klon/Jawor Association, 2016.

When asked more generally whether they engaged in any “voluntary and non-profit pro-social activity” during the last year, as many as 78% of Poles answered “yes” (CBOS 2014). Most respondents however declared that they devoted their time to help friends, family members (living separately) and neighbors, which indicates a preference for non-institutional types of activism.

The strength or weakness of civil society in a given country often depends on money: in 2015 only 6% of NGOs had income amounting to 1000.000 PLN or more (230.000 EURO). Over the last two decades the budgets of organizations were growing: in 2014 the average NGO had income amounting to about 27,000 PLN (\$7,400) - 50% higher than in 2001 (19.000 PLN). As demonstrated in the reports of the Klon/Jawor Association monitoring the development of civic society, Polish NGOs were driven mainly by funding from local and central government programs. Even though fundraising was reported as the main problem for organizations, few of them managed to diversify sources of income: in 2015, only under a third of organizations surveyed by Klon/Jawor used three or more sources of finance (Adamiak et al 2016). Also, few organizations obtained support from individual persons. It is also worth noting that over 2003-2014, while NGOs noted a slight increase in donations from individuals (from 3% to 9% of the budget), along with higher donations of 1 percent of personal income tax (up to 5% in 2014), income from membership fees dropped from 8% to 3%. For more than two decades, the Polish third sector had increasingly relied on public funding, Polish or foreign: in 2014, it constituted 55% of overall income of NGOs (Adamiak et al 2015). Even though they have limited resources, Polish NGOs “reportedly manage roughly eight percent of the country’s education system, most of its homeless shelters, and virtually all of its athletic associations. Many also serve communities the government is unable or unwilling to serve, protecting the rights of individuals and of minority groups, and demanding transparency from authorities.” (Human Rights Report 2017).

# ACTIVITY DATA



Source: Report of the Klon/Jawor Association, 2016.

## Central coordinating bodies within CS (federation, umbrellas, capacity-building centers)

According to Klon/Jawor data 34% of NGOs belong to Polish networks and umbrella orgs, most often sport/hobby organizations, and only 17% of those in arts and culture sector. Only 4% of organizations declare that they regularly cooperate with foreign NGOs and 8% belongs to international umbrella orgs or networks.

Most important umbrella org is **National Federation of Polish NGOs (Ogólnopolska Federacja Organizacji Pozarządowych, OFOP)** which has 146 members, and cooperates transnationally with the World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Affinity Group of National Associations, European Network of National Associations. It “was established in 2003 by the initiative group of Polish organizations – as a result of a participatory process aimed at establishing a representation body for the NGO sector in Poland. Currently OFOP brings together more than 100 organizations from all over Poland. As among them are federations and other large organizations – more than 400 NGOs belong to OFOP. The Organisation’s mission is to act on behalf and through its members for strong non-governmental sector in Poland. Main goals of OFOP are:

- Developing cooperation, performance standards and building a sense of identity within the NGO sector in Poland.
- Advocacy on behalf of non-governmental organizations for their common interests.
- Shaping favourable social attitudes towards the NGO sector and maintaining its fair image”

Polish Non-Governmental Organizations Forum (Ogólnopolskie Forum Inicjatyw Pozarządowych – OFIP) is a periodic event that takes place every three years in Warsaw. OFIP is attended by representatives of non-governmental organizations, local governments, public administration and business. The main event of every forum is a conference dedicated to cooperation within the sector

of NGOs and relations with external partners. It is accompanied by various presentations of the activities from non-governmental organisations, which are available to all interested persons.”

Contact

<http://ofip.eu/en/>

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The I OFIP took place in 1996 at the Warsaw University. During this forum two essential documents were adopted:

- 1) The Charter of Principles of NGO activities.
- 2) Charter of Sponsors' rights.

During the III OFIP the Initiative Group (60 organizations from all over Poland) was established to build a federation of non-governmental organizations; later named the National Federation of Polish Non-Governmental Organizations. Participants of the IV OFIP, which was held in 2005, took part in an open meeting of the group for the amendment of the Law on Public Benefit Activities operating at the Council of Public Benefit Activities. During VII OFIP in 2014 we focused on the internal strategy of the civic sector development. In connection with the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the 1st free elections in Poland, we looked at the legacy of the achievements and NGOs sector from the perspective of the whole period of transformation and assessed future challenges for the NGOs w Poland. Starting from 2014 OFIP is organized by the National Federation of Polish NGOs (Ogólnopolska Federacja Organizacji Pozarządowych, OFOP). Every year there is also a mini-conference held in Warsaw to uphold contacts and to enable people discussing urgent matters.

### **Capacity-building centers/programs**

Szkola liderów (The School for Leaders) founded in 1994 by the initiative of Dr Zbigniew A. Pełczyński, professor at the Oxford University. “In 1997 the project transformed into the School for Leaders Association, which in 2014 became School for Leaders Foundation. Our mission is to support the development of civil society through training and support of leaders who perform their activities within the public sphere in NGOs, local government institutions and political parties. The participants of our programs are the people of different political and social backgrounds. After over 20 years of activity, our Alumni are members of the European and Polish Parliament, of the government and of many local governments. They also run hundreds of organizations and social initiatives in over 40 countries all across the world.” They take in grassroots organizers, journalists, emerging politicians, academics and more, and have 950 graduates. There are several programs, including:

- School for Political Leaders,
- PAFF Leaders Program
- School for Leaders of the Polish Community Abroad,
- National Consultation Network of Leaders.

<http://www.szkola-liderow.pl/?lang=en>

### ***Key challenges and transformation processes at play in Poland***

Over the three years since Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) party took power in 2015, Polish civil society has changed considerably. Mass protests involving tens of thousands people have been staged, and new nationwide civic networks and local organizations have emerged in the country, including of the Committee for the Defence of Democracy (KOD), Polish Women's Strike (Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet) and the network initiating and coordinating the protests against judicial reforms dubbed the Chain of Light (Łańcuch Światła). All of this have happened in a country where civic society was until recently described as fledgling and underdeveloped. Moreover, analyses suggest that these were not one-time outbreaks or single-cause movements. The mobilization against the planned tightening of abortion law may serve as an example: on the basis of local protests in the spring of 2016, a nationwide grassroots movement has grown, which managed to organized mass demonstrations involving over 100.000 people in October 2016, which in turn led to the rejection of the abortion ban proposal. The movement emphasizes its autonomy and yet remains well networked with the existing women's organizations and groups. It works not only for reproductive rights but also fights for social issues and defends the rule of law (Korolczuk 2017). Moreover, many activists mobilized around the Polish Women's Strike emphasized in their speeches and interviews the need for renewal of democracy and empowering citizens in the political process, and declared that their engagement is an attempt at repairing the institutions of state and increasing citizens' influence in governance.

These mass mobilizations have emerged in the context of a shrinking civic society space (Szuleka 2018, Human Rights Report 2017), characteristic also to other countries, such as Hungary, where right-wing populist parties rule. This trend includes tightening state control over financial resources, closing communication channels between power holders and society, as well as privileging civil society actors that cooperate closely with right-wing parties. Clearly, the current right-wing populist government in Poland is not only attempting to co-opt civil society actors by channelling the funding to civic activities that meet its policy objectives; it also withholds support for any organizations it considers liberal, critical of its reform projects, or opposing government agenda. Also, the ruling party introduces institutional changes that favour some organizations and hamper the operations of others and keeps establishing quasi-NGOs fully controlled and generously financed by the state (Szuleka 2017). Thus, the question is whether the current wave of mobilization is just a temporary outburst of citizen's engagement, resulting from the growing polarization and the lack of communication between those in power and the people, or a more complex process of re-awakening of the Polish civil society.

In the context of the heightened political climate after the 2015 parliamentary elections, the process of politicization becomes much more visible and appears on a much larger scale: on the one hand, there is a clear transformation of the civic society which breaks away from the paradigm of apolitical attitude; on the other hand, state intervention is much deeper. Within this trend, four parallel phenomena need to be identified that are related to some extent, yet not identical. These include: 1. a shift in the orientation of part of the third sector – some of the existing non-governmental organizations are engaging in current politics more openly and to a larger extent; 2. the growing political engagement of citizens, including persons who had not participated in such activity before; 3. attempts to enter institutional politics undertaken by activists, particularly those from urban movements; 4. government actions aimed at subordinating grassroots social movements and organizations to political goals, by means of limiting the possibility of grassroots mobilization, and by building organizations that represent government interests, so-called GONGOs (government-organized non-governmental organizations). The emergence of grassroots initiatives and a bigger

engagement of existing organizations in political processes result mainly from citizens' disappointment with institutional politics and from a search for new solutions; despite certain pitfalls along the way, this offers hope for a revival of civic society. Simultaneously, a shrinking of civil society space can be observed, (Szuleka 2017), including cuts in funding, lack of social consultations, and smear campaigns against activists in public media. Between 2016 and 2018, the state withheld grants for some organizations that provide assistance to victims of violence, despite their meeting formal requirements; some grant competitions remained unresolved; and results of some of them were unexpectedly revised for no obvious reason. For example, a competition for organizing social consultations regarding the education system reform was rerun, and the grant was awarded to a new winner, the Ombudsman for Parents' Rights Association (Stowarzyszenie Rzecznik Praw Rodziców), a conservative organization that had supported Law and Justice election campaign (Szuleka 2017).

### ***Concluding remarks – new trends and challenges***

A critical reflection is needed over the tension between the vision of the civic society as an institution burdened with the task of supplementing state functions, and the vision of civic society as a control on power. As Stanisław Mocek writes, “the need for the existence of the civic society in a democratic state to a large extent results from the imperfection and incapacity of the state and the market, while the idea itself refers to the process of social self-organization as a factor constituting the democracy and influencing its quality” (2014: 10). In a well-functioning democracy these two functions – providing social services and controlling power – may not be necessarily in open conflict, but in a state ruled by a party determined to win absolute power, independent non-governmental institutions and the government will soon find themselves on a collision course.

There is no doubt that given the ruling party's conservative viewpoint, some organizations will be denied support. The cuts in funding for victims of violence, or refusal to adjust the income limits for Alimony Fund benefits, clearly demonstrate that the ruling party is guided not only by the interests of select social groups, but also by a conservative ideology that denies support for what conservatives consider “untypical” families or for activities related to women's rights. At the same time, one can hardly imagine a better moment for significant change on the level of discourse and political imagination. In a situation where the state fights independent organizations and creates its own “civic society” structures embodied by institutions with names featuring “freedom” and “nation”, and showers them with grants, monitoring and controlling government actions becomes a priority. There is an urgent need to restructure collective imagination and language, in order to empower the citizens who in turn need knowledge and tools for holding the politicians who represent them accountable for their actions.

Second, for a substantial part of the third sector, financing is becoming an urgent issue. The negative effect of financial dependence on the state is now even more visible than a few years ago, with a number of organizations already struggling with a crisis caused by state funding cuts. The government keeps redirecting financial support to GONGOs, that is, government-created and controlled organizations posing as grassroots initiatives. However, this crisis situation may offer an incentive for the NGOs, providing motivation for a much-delayed shift in the mindset, primarily, for seeking finance sources that are independent from the state. When one can no longer count on the state, obtaining support from the society becomes necessary. Some organizations attempted to launch one-time actions in the last two years, such as online crowdfunding, which provide temporary support. However, a shift in the finance model requires changing the way of communicating and collaborating with potential supporters. The model of reaching out for support directly to the society offers good

prospects in Poland, as demonstrated by the example of Action Democracy (Akcja Demokracja), a progressive foundation established in 2015 with the goal to mobilize people for petition drives and offline actions, which was instrumental in organizing the Chain of Light demonstrations in 2017. Just one year after it was established, the organization was already 60% financed by direct donations from individuals supporting its campaigns. Moreover, with a budget of nearly 1 million PLN, it became one of the most affluent non-governmental organizations in the country. The key to AD's success is to effectively use communication tools and to treat people like activists, not just a source of financial support. Offering the activists influence on the organization's direction of actions, including the choice of campaigns' goals, is another important element of Action Democracy philosophy. To ensure that, the organization conducts numerous polls asking the activists for an opinion on campaign topics and most effective tactics. It also offers its supporters an option to fund concrete actions (for example, billboards), and invites them to directly participate in online and offline actions. The organization also runs a separate website Our Democracy (NaszaDemokracja) which enables individuals and groups to initiate social change campaigns, with Action Democracy support. Owing to such a mode of operation, and working in close cooperation with the Polish Judges Association "Iustitia", Action Democracy managed to co-organize a series of mass street protests against the government-induced reform of the Polish judiciary in July 2017. Arranged in close cooperation with other organizations and local groups, the events involved tens of thousands of people marching and demonstrating in front of court houses in Warsaw and many other cities. The protests were dubbed Chain of Light (#ŁańcuchŚwiatła) since participants were holding candles symbolizing light in the darkness and mourning over lost freedoms. This civic mobilization motivated Polish president to veto two of the three controversial government bills, and was a powerful signal of the society's resistance to the actions of the ruling party.

Obviously, not all organizations are able to copy the model of Action Democracy, which is a campaign organization of OPEN type. Still, examples from other countries demonstrate that government attacks on NGOs may trigger greater support from the society (Szuleka 2017). That happened in case of the Hungarian watchdog Átlátszó which works for transparency, and for increasing government responsibility and access to information in the country. According to the organization's website, in 2017 the number of individuals supporting Átlátszó via donations of 1% of tax increased by 23%, from 2,587 to 3,345. "This is the third year when the majority of Átlátszó budget is financed by our readers: by micro-donations, subscription, and 1% tax.". This not only helps the organization survive when other sources of finance are cut off, but also strengthens its legitimacy to act on behalf of the society.

In order to win regular support from citizens, the third sector requires a fundamental shift in thinking and in mode of operation. After 1989, many freshly created non-governmental organizations in Poland followed the principles "fewer people means fewer problems" and "the fewer members, the better" (Jacobsson 2017: 88). Studies revealed that NGOs were unwilling to involve citizens in their work, except for volunteers fulfilling simple tasks (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017). Another visible trend was a preference for the formula of memberless foundation over association and in associations, membership figures have dropped systematically, from an average of 42 members in 2004 to 30 in 2015; of these, only about a half were engaged in association operations (Adamiak et al 2016: 48). This data demonstrates the scale of third sector's alienation, and a lack of strong ties with the society on whose behalf the NGOs are expected to operate. Insufficient resources are an obvious setback, but the third sector needs also to address the issue of absence of democratic mechanisms for involving people in decision-making process, consulting the ideas, or effectively informing about activities.

Strengthening collaboration within the civic society is yet another challenge. As Klon/Jawor reports point out, mostly due to the formal requirements in case of the projects sponsored by the EU, the contacts between organizations have intensified over recent years, and studies indicate that apart from local government, other foundations and associations are the preferred partners in operations. At the same time, the authors of Klon/Jawor study express an opinion that this collaboration has a rather formal character, and “in Poland, the non-governmental sector can hardly be called a community of organizations; there are only individual organizations pursuing their goals” (Adamiak et al 2016: 22). After the Law and Justice party came to power, collaboration efforts have intensified, including numerous public debates, informal meetings, and stronger collaboration with international organizations, but the effects of this trend are yet to be seen.

To strengthen the power of civil society vis-a-vis the state, it is important to operate not only within the third sector, but also to reinforce the ties between the existing organizations and new social movements. In a post-NGO era, traditional forms of institutionalization of civic energy have lost momentum, while new tools and collaboration practices have emerged. This implies a need to face the third sector's inclination for internal rivalry. Until recently, that rivalry resulted mostly from enforced competition for limited resources, and from the fact that in the Polish context, the logic of operation typical for private and market spheres infiltrates the sphere of civic activity. However, in a situation where the state attempts to limit the operations of some organizations and groups, individualistic strategies rarely work, and survival requires maximum collaboration, such as building coalitions, sharing know-how, using international contacts, and sharing resources. And the civil society actors seem to be increasingly aware of this.

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## Appendix 1.

### Key academic resources for empirical work

- **Research centers/university departments**

1) The Centre for Civil Society Development is a research unit within the Institute **for Social Policy** at the **University of Warsaw**, one of Poland's oldest academic centres offering teaching programmes and research. Its teaching and research activities concentrate on the reforms of European social policies, the challenges of the welfare mix and the functions of the third sector and social economy in social welfare delivery and the process of public governance.

<http://www.ips.uw.edu.pl/the-institute-of-social-policy-of-the-university-of-warsaw.html>

Prof. dr hab. Ewa Leś, director

dr Małgorzata Ołdak

dr Bartosz Pieliński

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ul. Nowy Świat 67,

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Telefon: +48 22 55 20 286

Faks: +48 22 826 66 52

2) Civil Society Research Team at The Graduate School for Social Research (GSSR) of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw

<http://www.ifispan.pl/socjologia/zaklad-spoleczenstwa-obywatelskiego/>

Dr hab. Dariusz Gawin, director

Dr hab. Galia Chimiak,

Adres: Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii PAN,

00-330 Warszawa, ul. Nowy Świat 72, pokój 238,

tel. 657 28 52, fax.: 826 78 23

3) Centrum Badań Społeczności i Polityk Lokalnych (Center for Research on Local Societies and Politics) established in 2010 as a joined initiative of Collegium Civitas Stowarzyszenia Centrum Wspierania Aktywności Lokalnej (CAL – Center for Supporting Local Activities Association).

dr Bohdan Skrzypczak, dyrektor

Collegium Civitas

plac Defilad 1, XII piętro

00-901 Warszawa

tel.: 22 656 71 87

e-mail: [info@civitas.edu.pl](mailto:info@civitas.edu.pl)

<https://www.civitas.edu.pl/en/>

4) Center for the Study of Democracy, SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw. Center focuses on theory and models of democracy. It researches citizen participation in democratic and political processes, assesses the quality of democracy in Poland, observes social and

political movements, and studies political views and attitudes. The Center cooperations with other Polish and international research centers. The research findings collected by the Center do not merely enrich the body of knowledge, but they also identify good practices, which have positive impact on the public sphere.

<https://english.swps.pl/research/research-units>

Ul Chodakowska 19/31,

03-815 Warsaw, Poland,

prof. Radosław Markowski, dyrektor

Dr Benjamin Stanley, researcher

Prof. Mikołaj Cześnik, researcher

- **Data bases available with info on CS in each country**

[ngo.pl](http://ngo.pl) - portal of NonProfit Organizations: NGO in Poland

[KLON/JAWOR Association](http://klonjawor.org) - an independent, non-political, non-profit organization the main objective of which is to provide all who are interested with free access to information required for the development of civil society (in Poland)

**Social Diagnosis**, bi-annual analysis of the quality of life in Poland, includes also data on civic activism

<http://analizy.mpips.gov.pl/index.php/raporty-i-publikacje-topmenu-58/39-diagnoza-spoeczna.html>

**Main Statistical Office (GUS)**, does research on volunteering and forms of civic engagement

<https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/social-economy/volunteering-and-other-types-of-unpaid-work-outside-own-household/volunteering-in-2016,1,2.html>

- **Key events (annual conferences or similar)**

Polish Non-Governmental Organizations Forum (Ogólnopolskie Forum Inicjatyw Pozarządowych – OFIP) a periodic event that takes place every three years in Warsaw – every year there is mini-OFIP in Warsaw. OFIP is attended by representatives of non-governmental organizations, local governments, public administration and business. The main event of every forum is a conference dedicated to cooperation within the sector of NGOs and relations with external partners. It is accompanied by various presentations of the activities from non-governmental organisations, which are available to all interested persons.”

Contact

<http://ofip.eu/en/>

Ogólnopolskie Forum Inicjatyw Pozarządowych

ul. Strzelecka 3/12. 03-433 Warszawa

tel. 48 22 253 28 56

e-mail: [ofip@ofop.eu](mailto:ofip@ofop.eu)

- **Research books necessary to read**

K. Jacobsson and E. Korolczuk (Eds) *Civil Society Revisited. Lessons from Poland*. New York, NY: Berghahn Books.

Chimiak, G. 2006. *How Individualists Make Solidarity Work*. Warsaw: Ministerstwo Pracy i Polityki Społecznej.

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- **Appendix 2. Person gallery**

There are many people engaged in Polish civil society, both as activists, directors of NGOs, academics and public intellectuals. This is a short list representing the speakers at 2017 Polish Non-Governmental Organizations Forum (OFIP), a key event for organized civil society in Poland.

prof. Piotr Gliński – deputy Prime Minister, minister of culture and national heritage. Since the 80s, he has taken an active part in the work of non-governmental organizations. Co-finder and long chairman of the Social Ecological Institute, co-organized the National Ecological Movement. President of Polish Sociological Association (2005-2011). He was also a co-founder and long-time member of the Board of Directors of the Klon/Jawor Association and co-founder and long-time member of of the Academy of Philanthropy in Poland.

Katarzyna Batko-Tołuć – The co-author and first coordinator of the “Watchdog” program. Author of the “Szkoła Inicjatyw Strażniczych” [The School of Watchdog Initiatives] project concept. She supports other watchdogs with substantive content. She aids planning watchdog activities and watchdog-related education. She is actively involved in working for transparency and clarity of public life in Poland.

Ewa Kulik-Bielińska – director of the Stefan Batory Foundation since 2010. During the PRL opposition activist, editor of independent magazines, translator.

Przemysław Jaśkiewicz – Konfederacja Inicjatyw Pozarządowych Rzeczypospolitej. Journalist and photojournalist, co-creator of the ‘Puls’ Radio in Lublin and its vice-director. Since 2011 deputy President of the Independence Foundation.

Dr Krzysztof Mazur – President of the Jagiellonian Club. Pundit of the Jagiellonian Club in the fields of politics, society and public management. He works at the Jagiellonian University. Co-author of the report on the Responsible Development Strategy. Member of the Board of the National Center for Research and Development.

Piotr Frączak, Stowarzyszenie Dialog Społeczny

Łukasz Waszak, Sieć SPLOT

Łukasz Domagała, Ogólnopolska Federacja Organizacji Pozarządowych

Paweł Jordan, Stowarzyszenie BORIS

Bohdan Skrzypczak, Centrum Aktywności Lokalnej

Justyna Duriasz-Bułhak, Fundacja Wspomagania Wsi

Tomasz Schimanek, Akademia Rozwoju Filantropii w Polsce

**Other important academics:**

Radosław Markowski, Director of the Center for the Study of Democracy, Principal Investigator of the Polish National Election Study [PGSW] (1995 till now), Principal Investigator of the Polish part Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) initiated and coordinated by ICORE and ISR/CPS, University of Michigan and co-Chair of Advisory Committee of the Media and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe Project, launched and coordinated by University of Oxford, Department of Politics and IR (2009-2013)

Galia Chimiak an associate professor at the Civil Society Department at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Polish Academy of Sciences. Research interests are in civil society, development cooperation and global education.

Ewa Leś is Professor of Political Science at Warsaw University and Director of the Centre for Civil Society Development at the Institute of Social Policy.

Sławomir Nałęcz graduated in sociology from University of Warsaw. Since 1997 he has taken part in the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project as data expert for Poland (co-author of *Defining the Nonprofit Sector: Poland* (2000) and the chapters on Poland in *Global Civil Society*, volume 1 (1999) and volume 2 (2004).

Bartosz Pieliński is an Associate Professor at the University of Warsaw's Institute of Social Policy. Here he has taken part in several research projects dedicated to the role of civil society in the Polish social policy. He also works at the Korczakowska Foundation, an organization dedicated to the promotion of Janusz Korczak's legacy.

### **Appendix 3 Central coordinating bodies within CS (federation, umbrellas, capacity-building centers)**

Most important umbrella org is **National Federation of Polish NGOs (Ogólnopolska Federacja Organizacji Pozarządowych, OFOP)** which has 146 members, and cooperates transnationally with the World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Affinity Group of National Associations, European Network of National Associations. It “was established in 2003 by the initiative group of Polish organizations – as a result of a participatory process aimed at establishing a representation body for the NGO sector in Poland. Currently OFOP brings together more than 100 organizations from all over Poland. As among them are federations and other large organizations – more than 400 NGOs belong to OFOP. The Organisation’s mission is to act on behalf and through its members for strong non-governmental sector in Poland. Main goals of OFOP are:

- Developing cooperation, performance standards and building a sense of identity within the NGO sector in Poland.
- Advocacy on behalf of non-governmental organizations for their common interests.
- Shaping favourable social attitudes towards the NGO sector and maintaining its fair image”

Polish Non-Governmental Organizations Forum (Ogólnopolskie Forum Inicjatyw Pozarządowych – OFIP) is a periodic event that takes place every three years in Warsaw. OFIP is attended by representatives of non-governmental organizations, local governments, public administration and business. The main event of every forum is a conference dedicated to cooperation within the sector of NGOs and relations with external partners. It is accompanied by various presentations of the activities from non-governmental organisations, which are available to all interested persons.”

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### **The Network of Information and Support for Non-Governmental Organisations (Sieć Wspierania Organizacji Pozarządowych SPLOT)**

Since 2003 it’s a coalition of associations. The purpose of the organisation is to increase non-governmental organisations' management abilities and long-term activities, development of the cooperation between state and municipal institutions and non-governmental organisations and promotion of the NGOs. It focuses on education, the collection and distribution of information, counselling, consulting and training.

They have 10 local branches: Słupsk, Gdańsk, Elbląg, Olsztyn, Ełk, Poznan, Leszno, Białymstok, Wrocław, Wałbrzych, Jelenia Góra, Łódź, Skierniewice, Łęczyca, Piotrków Trybunalski, Sieradz, Kutno, Warszawa, Kraków.

Al. Niepodległości 245/74  
02-009 Warszawa  
**telefon:** 22 827 52 11  
<http://siecsplot.pl>  
**email:** [biuro@siecsplot.pl](mailto:biuro@siecsplot.pl)

### **CAL Association**

It is a national, non-governmental organization, initiating and implementing educational programs to support the activation and development of local communities. Our work is based on animating development – supporting (always in an educational way) local leaders and animators to mobilize, educate citizens for being active. The association was brought to life to strengthen the basis of civic society in Poland, support sustainable development and promote participatory approach. CAL Association is a highly respected and well established organization, which, thanks to professionalism and high quality of the educational and training offer, enjoys the confidence of both public authorities, and the specialists environment.

Started in 2000 and thanks to great effort of hundreds animators in Poland, CAL is a strategic partner for NGOs, institutions on local, regional, national (also for government – CAL is a part of system projects run by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy or Ministry of Regional Development). The CAL Association is a member of the National Federation of Non-governmental Organisations, Combined Bureau for Social Development (CEBSD) and the International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres (IFS)

Contact:

Centrum Wspierania Aktywności Lokalnej CAL (CAL Association)  
ul. PACA 40, 04 – 386 Warszawa  
Contact person:  
Lena Chotkiewicz  
mail: [lenach@cal.org.pl](mailto:lenach@cal.org.pl)  
tel. +48504220189

### **There are also local federations, e.g.:**

Little Poland Non-Governmental Federation (FEDERACJA MAŁOPOLSKA POZARZĄDOWA)  
ul. Stolarska 6/9  
31-043 Kraków  
tel.: 505343132 (Olga Glińska)

Silesian Non-Governmental Federation (Dolnośląska Federacja Organizacji Pozarządowych)  
ul. Kołłątaja 31/ 1-2  
50-004 Wrocław  
telefon: 699 858 391  
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