

# INTRODUCTION

## RETHINKING POLISH CIVIL SOCIETY

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This volume provides new perspectives on civil society and social activism in contemporary Poland. It offers a much-needed update of the state of social activism in the country and suggests new ways of conceptualizing civil society that are relevant beyond the postsocialist context.

We argue that a reassessment of the postsocialist civil societies in general, and of Polish civil society in particular, is called for on both empirical and theoretical grounds. For the purpose of such rethinking, this volume critically addresses the way in which postsocialist civil society has been conceptualized, with special focus on Poland. Second, it discusses the limitations of the common indicators used to assess the strength and character of the civil societies in the region. It is argued that there are forms of collective action that have tended to escape observers' lenses for theoretical, methodological, normative, and ideological reasons. Consequently, the volume calls attention to the exclusionary practices entailed in the "making up" of civil society in the region, revealing how the concept of civil society, as commonly applied in political discourse as well as empirical research, excludes many forms of social activism.

As argued by Kubik (2005), there are two dominant strategies for applying the concept of civil society. Some scholars propose a fixed definition of this phenomenon and then look for the social arrangements that can be subsumed under the concept, while others attempt to reconstruct its content and scrutinize "the ever-changing and often tension-ridden interaction between the concept and the realities within which it emerged (the modern West) and to which it is sometimes employed (non-Western contexts)" (Kubik 2005: 1; see also Hann and Dunn 1996). While much of the existing

scholarship on Polish civil society follows the former strategy, in this volume we position ourselves firmly in the latter tradition, as we are interested not only in the actual practices by which civil societies are “made” from above, but also in the political and ideological consequences of the usage and promulgation of specific notions of civil society. On the basis of up-to-date empirical studies of a range of mobilizations and cases of collective action that exist in contemporary Poland, we scrutinize how certain forms of activism and types of claims are legitimized in public discourses as representing “genuine” civil society, while others are delegitimized. In doing so, the volume critically approaches the ways in which civil society is “made from above” by the elites, by the media, by public institutions, and in academia, thus complementing and contrasting this vision with the views “from below.”

Based on the case studies included in the volume, we propose a conceptualization of civil society that is less normative and more process- and practice-oriented and that includes a variety of activities ranging from low-key local informal initiatives to organized forms of action and mass social movements. These collective activities take place in what Alexander termed a “solidaristic sphere” (2006: 31), a sphere where people associate and cooperate to advance common interests and concerns; however, we argue that this sphere is not clearly separated from, but rather interconnected with, the family, state, and market.

The remaining part of this introductory chapter is structured as follows: first, we introduce in more detail our conceptualization of civil society. Next, we position our volume in relation to the wider debate on postsocialist civil societies, developing the theoretical and methodological reasons that underlie our reassessment of these societies. Then we present an overview of existing research on Polish civil society. We start by looking at existing scholarship on civil society engagement, then we point to forms of social activism that have been missed or are only recently gaining attention, explaining how specific conceptual frameworks and methodologies narrowed the view on local civil society. Finally, we provide an introduction to the individual chapters and the various ways in which they contribute to a problematization and/or rethinking of Polish civil society.<sup>1</sup>

## Conceptualizing Civil Society

Approaching civil society as an object of study with fluid boundaries rather than as a fixed point of departure allows us to critically assess the consequences of the use of specific empirical indicators or specific definitions of civil society. Thus, we propose rethinking and challenging a number of dichotomies that form the definitions of civil society dominant in the existing

literature on postsocialist civil society, including in Poland. These dichotomies concern:

- the ideological and normative level, which means that there is a strong focus on the post-1989 “civil society” as an ethical project that entails promoting tolerance, equality, and inclusion by well-established democratic means, while organizations inherited from socialist times and different forms of rebellious, radical, “uncivil,” or illiberal activism tend to be marginalized or excluded;
- organizational forms, which means that most research focuses on civil society organizations (CSOs), whereas less attention has been paid to informal or semiorganized types of civic engagement;
- the functional dimension, as there is an assumption that civil society organizations and groups can act either as apolitical service providers and self-help groups *or* as claim makers, lobbyists, and protesters, but that they rarely combine these functions.

Later, we discuss how such dichotomous perspectives (new-old, civil-uncivil, formal-informal, noncontentious-contentious, apolitical-political) function in practice, preventing us from seeing the richness and diversity of the civil society that actually exists in Poland. The theoretical effort that follows is to move toward a practice-based and locally embedded understanding of what we could call “vernacular” civil societies (cf. Kennedy 2013). One of the consequences of such an approach is to focus on practices rather than predispositions and norms. Whereas civil society is a much broader term than social activism, as it encompasses individual behaviors (e.g., signing petitions) and attitudes (e.g., level of trust or pro-democratic orientation), this volume focuses mostly on social activism, which is based on recognizing oneself as part of the social fabric, oriented toward influencing the way society works, and which includes different types of engagement. Consequently, we include all forms of intentional action undertaken collectively, including low-key, local activism oriented toward practical goals as well as promoting or opposing social change. This endeavor is in line with recent efforts by Polish scholars and activists who stress the importance of local grassroots initiatives and informal activism in local urban and rural communities, and critically approach highly normative and narrow understandings of civil society (e.g., Bilewicz and Potkańska 2013; Bukowiecki et al. 2014; Erbel 2014; Herbst and Żakowska 2013; Jawłowska and Kubik 2007; Mocek 2014; Piotrowski 2009). In focusing on social activism thus conceived, we also call into question established analytical divisions between civil society research on the one hand and social movement studies on the other. Indeed, our practice-based conception of civil society is a way to bridge the two research traditions, in-

cluding in terms of the methodology used. While civil society scholars rarely use conceptual and methodological tools evolving from social movement studies, we intend to overcome this division with the goal of cross-fertilization of these two types of analysis. Thus, we include studies that employ approaches and methodologies typical of social movement analyses (e.g., frame analysis, protest event analysis, qualitative case studies) along with analyses that use quantitative political participation data or analyze secondary sources to discern the extent and relative strength of existing organizations or the financial condition of nongovernmental actors. Such an approach enables us to give analytical coherence to the growing body of literature showing that there is a significant potential for robust social activism in Poland (e.g., Chimiak 2014; Ekiert and Kubik 2014; Herbst and Żakowska 2013; Krześ 2014; Mocek 2014), but representing different kinds of civic engagement than the formal organizations and volunteering that have been the dominant focus in Polish civil society research.

Moreover, we see civil societies as relational and processual phenomena, suggesting that it is fruitful to think of civil society not exclusively in terms of organizational structures but also as processes of overcoming constraints to collective action. This process-oriented approach is useful to conceptualize and analyze the relationships and fluid boundaries between the civil sphere, the family, the state, and the market. We thus conceive of these spheres not as clearly separated from each other but rather as interconnected, with the way they relate to each other changing over time. Even if it is analytically possible to distinguish between the domestic sphere (family and kinship relationships), the market sphere, the civil sphere, and political society (political parties), in reality these spheres are interpenetrated, interdependent, and in constant flux, as argued not least by feminist scholars (Hagemann et al. 2008; Okin 1998; Mulinari 2015; Scott and Keates 2004; see also Alexander 2006 and Ginsborg 2013). For instance, private resources can be used in civil society activity, identities embedded in the domestic sphere can be politicized and drawn on in collective action formation, civil society organizations can be formed by groups of friends or family members, and so on. Especially in a postsocialist context, it has been found that organizations and mobilizations tend to be based on extended private networks (Chimiak 2006; Howard 2003; Fabián and Korolczuk 2017; Jacobsson 2012, 2013; see also Jacobsson's and Korolczuk's chapters in this volume). This is, in part, a legacy of state socialism, when the domestic sphere—networks of families and friends—functioned as a locus of opposition in the absence of an autonomous public sphere. As put by Kubik, during state socialism “mobilizing for action within dissident groups is unthinkable without the support of familial, kinship, and friendship networks ... In fact, civil society cannot exist without a base in domestic society” (Kubik 2000: 198). These networks were also

critical for the struggles to meet day-to-day needs, and they still are for many people in capitalist Poland (Mazurek 2012). Consequently, we argue that in order to understand civil society making in postsocialist and “transitional” societies in particular, it is necessary to call into question dichotomous views of private versus public and personal versus political, and to investigate the relatedness of different societal spheres as they change over time.

Thus, our analysis of civil society making begins with what people do, from actual real-life experiences, practices, and processes of overcoming constraints to collective action and building social relationships, which are sometimes unsuccessful in the short run, but which can be fruitful in a longer perspective. Rather than measuring only the present level of engagement, a process perspective allows one to see how individual grievances may be generalized and contribute to trust building in a long-term perspective, helping citizens to overcome the fragmentation of collective action space, not uncommon in postsocialist countries (Clément 2015; Jacobsson 2015a). In addition, we advocate that more attention be paid to the development of both deliberative and collaborative processes and structures (which we see as quintessential components of civil society), instead of focusing merely on organizational development or individual acts of participation. We also aim to challenge the dichotomous tendencies (described above) by including the infralevel of resistance and activism (Scott 1990).<sup>2</sup> This means studying everyday practices, informal activism, participation in more fluid deliberative processes, and local grassroots initiatives around issues that transgress the public-private divide (Mocek 2014; Chimiak 2014; see also Hryciuk in this volume). It also means interpreting nonparticipation as a form of response to specific conditions (as Kiersztyn shows in her chapter; see also Greene 2014), rather than just an expression of a lack of civic spirit (cf. Charkiewicz 2012; Garapich 2014).

Finally, our aim is to theorize social activism in the Polish context by taking into consideration not only the recent historical past, but also current global trends as well as transnational and national structural, political, and social tensions. This positions the volume within a broader discussion concerning the challenges of collective action in the contemporary world (e.g., Bennett et al. 2013, Kubik and Linch 2013). Our argument is that this challenge, especially in the postsocialist region, has too often been defined in terms of individual motivations, specific types of mentality, and historical contingencies. Instead, it should also be analyzed in relation to specific local ideals and practices of activism in conjunction with discursive, political, and economic opportunity structures in a given context and transnational as well as global processes. We thus believe that while the legacy of state socialism is clearly an important factor influencing social activism in the country, we also need to account for more recent global trends. Thus, the volume attempts

to analyze social activism in the Polish context, taking into account the precarization of work conditions, the retrenchment of welfare provisions, (re)privatization and rising economic inequalities, migration, and the renewal of nationalist ideologies and discourses, which clash with the liberal ideals of citizenship promulgated and promoted in the rebuilding of civil societies after 1989.

## Rethinking Postsocialist Civil Societies

In this volume, we side with recent scholarship calling for a reassessment of the postsocialist civil societies on both empirical and theoretical grounds. The first and most obvious reason is that several decades have passed since the regime change and the most intense years of political and economic transformation are behind. Some recent studies have argued that we now have entered a new phase of postsocialist civil societies with a revival of grassroots activism across the region in a number of fields, maybe most notably in the field of urban activism (e.g., Ishkanian 2015; Jacobsson 2015a). This gives us reason to speak of a civil society development “beyond” NGO-ization, which was more characteristic of the first period of political and economical transformation (Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013a; Sava 2015). Moreover, as Ekiert and Kubik argue in their chapter in this volume, the differences among the former state-socialist countries are huge and in fact growing, whereas the civil societies in Central European countries that belong to the EU are not significantly different from civil societies in some established European democracies, at least in organizational terms.

Second, as several chapters in this volume illustrate, rather than being built “from scratch,” postsocialist civil societies can be better understood as “recombined” (Ekiert and Kubik 2014, and in this volume), 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. Related to this debate is the call for a reassessment of the type of civil society that existed *during* state socialism and its relevance for civil society development after 1989. 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.) 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; see also Ekiert and Kubik in this volume). The character of this “imperfect” civil society is relevant to later developments. Thus, a fair picture of postsocialist civil societies needs to pay careful attention to how older and newer forms of activism combine.

Third, it has become increasingly clear that conventional ways of measuring civic engagement fail to do justice to, or reflect in a fair way, the existing postsocialist civil societies—due to the indicators used, such as numerical strength or organizational density of NGOs, or the number and size of protest events reported by the media (Ekiert and Foa 2012; Ekiert and Kubik 2014; Herbst and Żakowska 2013; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013a; Jacobsson 2015a; Mocek 2014; White 2006). As developed by Ekiert and Kubik and Giza-Poleszczuk in their chapters in this volume, discrepancies exist between the findings of international surveys, such as the World Value Study and European Social Survey, and national studies. One problem with commonly used survey methods concerns translation, especially of the wording of questions. As Giza-Poleszczuk argues in her chapter, local citizens who might be helping in local schools, for instance, might not identify this with “volunteering,” which for some remains a new and alien term (see also Przewlocka et al. 2013: 18). The resonance of different concepts also reflects the experiences of different generations, as younger people, on the other hand, may not identify with older concepts, such as *przodownik* (leader) or *społecznik* (social activist, person engaged in social work) in the Polish context (e.g., Bojar 2004).

Another problem in adequately capturing of the strength of civil society concerns quantitative indicators, such as organizational density. The frequent research focus on NGOs does not necessarily reflect that they are the most important civic actors in the postsocialist context, but rather that they are recorded in official registers and thus easier to count than informal forms of activism (Mocek 2014; Szustek 2008). Protest event analysis carried out in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Bulgaria suggests that local “self-organized” civic activism, that is, collective action mobilized without the involvement of an organization, is the most frequent kind of activism in this context (e.g., Císař 2013a; 2013b; 2013c). This form of activism is based on “many events, no organizations, and few participants” (Císař 2013c: 143). However, such very local and low-key activism easily escapes the researchers’ lens when the focus is on advocacy organizations capable of lobbying policy

makers or catching media attention or on traditional protest events, such as mass demonstrations.

To attend to informal activism is particularly important in a postsocialist context, where formal membership in organizations may not be the preferred form of engagement given memories of encouraged or forced membership in state-controlled organizations (e.g., Howard 2011; White 2006). Instead, informal initiatives or loose affiliations may be more attractive for citizens. This is the case in contemporary Armenia or Bulgaria, for instance, where the activists involved in recent waves of social activism often distance themselves from NGOs and subscribe to a more political understanding of civil society than was introduced in the 1990s (Ishkanian 2015; Sava 2015). The prevalence and importance of informal activism in Poland has already been confirmed in recent studies of local grassroots activism (Chimiak 2014; see also Bilewicz and Potkańska 2013; CBOS 2014; Erbel 2014; Herbst and Żakowska 2013; Mocek 2014; Polanska and Chimiak 2016).

Individual-based ways of measuring civil society strength, such as surveys of voluntary engagement, also fail to consider the more relational dimensions of civil society building and development as well as deliberative processes, which may also be important for civil society functioning. Examples of such deliberative structures developed *within* civil society in the Polish context range from the Congress of urban movements and tenants' coalitions (Polanska in this volume) to the local mobilizations around participatory budgeting and the National Council of Rural Women's Organizations (Matysiak in this volume), to be described in more detail later in this Introduction. An important reason for this civil society development is that NGO-based models have been criticized not only by scholars but also by practitioners. Moreover, short-term ad hoc mobilizations or informal, low-key types of engagement do not require as many resources as the establishment of formal organizations, and mobilization around pressing local issues tends to mobilize more people than do more abstract issues such as national reforms. Informal activism is usually based on preexisting social relationships between neighbors, parents whose children go to the same school, or people who live on the same street, making it considerably easier to overcome lack of trust. Consequently, these emerging forms of social activism can be interpreted as a response to the main challenges to collective action in the postsocialist context identified in the literature, such as general apathy, low level of trust, and lack of resources (Gawin and Gliński 2006; Gumkowska et al. 2006; cf. Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013b), and as a step toward overcoming them.

A fourth reason for re-evaluating the nature of postsocialist civil societies is conceptual, as models developed in one part of the world (mostly the "West") might not be fit for, or do full justice to, civil society in other parts of the world. Social anthropologists researching the region were already of-



fering this critique in the 1990s, arguing that “real” civil societies may diverge from ideal-type models provided by, for instance, political theory; the nature of civil society is seen here as reflecting diverse realities in different social contexts (Buchowski 1996; Hann and Dunn 1996; cf. Trutkowski and Mandes 2005; Gagyí 2015). Likewise, social movement scholars have argued that in expecting collective action in the postsocialist context to follow the same repertoire of action and contention as in Western Europe or North America, researchers risk missing out on important forms of engagement and collective action (e.g., Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013a; Jacobsson 2015a). For instance, it has been argued that social movement organizations in postsocialist Europe may be less able to mobilize people into traditional forms of participatory activism; however, they have been quite effective in so-called transactional activism. This type of activism entails building productive relationships with public authorities as well as other civil society actors (e.g., Císař 2013a, 2013c; Petrova and Tarrow 2007). Thus, movements here simply display a partly different repertoire of contention (see also Flam 2001).

Moreover, dichotomous views of social actors—either as engaged in contentious action or as becoming service organizations or self-help groups—are not particularly helpful for understanding collective action in the postsocialist context. In many cases groups are in fact engaged in both types of activism in parallel, as illustrated in the analyses of tenants’ organizations and mothers’ and fathers’ initiatives (Hryciuk; Polanska; Korolczuk, all in this volume), and even those groups that currently have a quite narrow focus, such as networks of rural women, carry a potential to undertake other types of activism (Matysiak in this volume).

A final argument calling for a reassessment of postsocialist civil societies is that there are ideological and normative reasons as to why some forms of social engagement have been privileged and others disqualified, in research as well as in public policies. Building civil society has been part and parcel of the political project of developing capitalism and democracy, and has thus functioned as a reform ideology in the transition process of state-socialist countries (e.g., Buchowski 2006; Górníak 2014; Lane 2010; Załęski 2012).<sup>3</sup> As such, it can be seen as a form of political coordination under capitalism; the promotion of civil society has thus become “a social component of the move to markets and polyarchy” (Lane 2010: 311). The (neo)liberal organizational models (with NGOs as the prototype) were introduced and sponsored from abroad, especially during the first two decades of political and economic transformation, but (in most countries) they were also embraced by domestic policy makers and elites. Through this process of de facto channeling of engagement, civil society in Central and Eastern European countries developed into a “third sector” that would provide auxiliary services

and expert knowledge to the state (Żuk 2001: 114). Detrimental effects of this trend include the bureaucratization and depoliticization of civil society actors, which shows that promoting civic engagement from the outside often serves the political and economic interests of the promoters rather than local society. As mentioned above, the recent resurgence of grassroots activism and the search for new models of organizing across Central and Eastern Europe are in part a reaction to such “transplanting” of models and practices from abroad (Fabián and Korolczuk 2017; Jacobsson 2015b).

So far, some types of activism have been too easily interpreted as the expression of “genuine” civil society, while other groups and organizations are delegitimized. The process of delegitimization is manifest, for instance, in a highly normative language used when some organizations and groups are discussed. They are often referred to as “old,” self-serving or corrupt, disruptive, “backward,” as “the remnants of the state-socialist era” (see, e.g., Hryciuk and Korolczuk 2013). For example, in a widely referenced analysis of the organizational patterns of Polish NGOs, the organizational styles of most postsocialist organizations studied come under such labels as “resistant to transformation” (*odporni na transformację*), “nostalgic clientelism and nepotism” (*nostalgiczny klientelizm i kolesiostwo*), or “real enemies of democracy” (*prawdziwi wrogowie demokracji*), (Gliński 2006a: 66–73). This is not to deny that clientelism or anti-democratic attitudes exist among representatives of organizations but rather to highlight the exclusionary discourses that may prevent us from seeing the heterogeneity of existing organizations. Another example of how this exclusionary logic works is presented by the Polish Voluntary Fire Brigades (*Ochotnicza Straż Pożarna*), which were 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.<sup>4</sup> Even when they are included, as in Gliński’s study analyzing the activities of one local brigade, they appear as an exemplary case of organizations “resistant to transformation” that do not engage in any meaningful type of action but “remain in a nostalgic slumber” (2006a: 86–88). Until recently the voluntary fire brigades were typically seen as an example of “old” civil society, which works to integrate the local community mainly in rural areas by organizing local festivities and celebrations, but is not oriented toward social change (Gawin 2004). Research shows, however, that the fire brigades also fulfill other roles. For example, they are important for local political life, because their members can recommend candidates in local elections and sometimes “the number of activists recommended by fire brigades is bigger than the candidates recommended by political parties” (Bartkowski 2004: 290). They generate social capital and can be interpreted as examples of bottom-up, self-organizing civil society (Adamiak 2013). This shows that organizations can combine different functions such as service provision with

exerting political influence, and therefore that dichotomous understandings of civil society organizations are not helpful if we are to understand local civil societies.

The logic of exclusion pertains also to the activism of economically disadvantaged groups or social movements making claims about welfare and socioeconomic problems (Charkiewicz 2009; Hryciuk and Korolczuk 2013; Hryciuk and Polanska in this volume). People who belong to these groups easily fall victim to the process of what Buchowski termed “internal societal orientalization” (2006: 466). They are seen not as a vital part of the process of democratization and modernization of the country (understood as “successful transition”), but rather as interest groups that are “tainted” by their postsocialist origins or type of mentality. Consequently, they become discursively and practically disqualified from being “legitimate” civil society actors that, in turn, affects the way civil society is defined and theorized in Poland (Górniak 2014).

This exclusionary process takes place not only with regard to class position but also with regard to the gender or ideological and religious orientations of the citizen groups. It affects specific social groups or organizations, such as poor mothers fighting for the restoration of the Alimony Fund (Hryciuk and Korolczuk 2013; see also Hryciuk and Polanska in this volume), labor unions protesting pension reform and precarious working conditions (Kubisa 2014), people living in communal buildings mobilizing against reprivatization plans (see Polanska in this volume), or rural women’s organizations (*Koła Gospodyń Wiejskich*) (see Matysiak in this volume). Also, the activism of conservative religious organizations and groups, such as the Family of Radio Maryja, is rarely seen as an expression of civil society (see, however, Kamiński 2008; Krzemiński 2009; Rogaczewska 2008). The same is true of right-wing or nationalist mobilizations and radical groups practicing violence or other forms of illegality that stand in contrast to the “civilized” repertoire of contention exhibited by most other movements in the region (see, however, Pankowski 2010; Platek and Płucienniczak in this volume; cf. Piotrowski 2009; Polanska and Piotrowski 2015; Wrzosek 2008). The grassroots movements arising and developing in Central and Eastern Europe encompass a wide spectrum of claims ranging from notably progressive to notably reactionary ones (from the perspective of liberal democracy) (e.g., Graff and Korolczuk 2017; Fábíán and Korolczuk 2017; Kováts and Pöim 2015). Thus, to better understand the dynamics of existing “vernacular” civil societies, we need to identify less normative and more inclusive conceptions of civil society and social movements, allowing an analytical openness to the variety of ways in which social engagement occurs (Kopecký and Mudde 2003b).

In this volume, we propose approaching these exclusionary practices as an object of study, thus analyzing the process of legitimization and (de)legitimi-

zation of specific groups, repertoires, and claims by the elites, the media, and academia due to class, gender, ideological standpoint, etc. We see this logic of exclusion as connected to the local trends (postsocialist transition) as well as to transnational or global processes, such as neoliberalization, globalization, and migration. Consequently, a practice-based and processual approach to civil society enables us to see how local and transnational trends, discourses, and practices interact with and contradict each other, resulting in a rich, heterogeneous, and evolving array of different types of social activism.

### Making Sense of Contemporary Polish 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 (Bartkowski 2003 and 2004; Szustek 2008; Zagala 2014), and its fairly well-developed and diverse associational sphere during the years of state socialism (Ekiert and Kubik 2014). Some scholars propose to go even further back and study the influence of the long-term historical processes dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when Poland lost its independence and was divided among the three neighboring countries (Bartkowski 2003; Leś 2001). They argue that until today there have been significant differences pertaining to social capital, level of socioeconomic development, and vitality of institutions of local democracy and self-government that 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., the availability of spaces where people can gather. According to Bartkowski, today 85 percent 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 eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the period of the Galician autonomy introduced by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, are the strongest (2004: 291).

Most international readers, however, would associate the country 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 nearly decade-long period of abeyance 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 2015: 164). 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 the 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.

There is also evidence that by the wake of the transformation Polish 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; Penn 2003; Załęski 2012). A well-known example of such a dynamic is the case of local citizens' committees, which emerged at the end of 1988 as semilegal 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, translated by the editors).

These findings suggest that the apathy and lack of social engagement among Poles observed in the 1990s did not stem only from the economic hardships or postsocialist mentality, but resulted from the democratic state's efforts to discourage mass mobilization and channel social activism into NGOs. Gliński (2008) claims that distrust toward mass mobilization and the elitist vision of civic organizing were also common among scholars, 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 twenty-first 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).

Until recently, the conventional view of contemporary Polish civil society depicted it as weak, passive, and nonparticipatory 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 2006; Kościański and Misztal 2008; Przewlocka et al. 2013; Sulek 2009). Indeed, most quantitative indicators show that the number of Poles engaging in any type of social activism is low. According to recent studies, the percentage of Poles who participate in voting and volunteering, who are members of nongovernmental organizations, or who take part in demonstrations is the lowest among EU countries (BBVA International Study 2013). The Social Diagnosis Report shows that 86 percent of Poles do not belong to any organizations (Czapiński and Panek 2013: 289; cf. GUS 2013). Only 13.7 percent declared that they belong to “organizations, associations, parties, committees, councils, religious groups, or clubs,” of which the most commonly mentioned are religious organizations (23 percent), sports clubs (15 percent), and hobby clubs (13 percent). Only 2.5 percent 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 percent of respondents took part during the last year (2013: 291). Slightly more popular was taking part in unpaid work or providing services for persons outside the family or for a social organization (19 percent) and participation in public meetings outside of the workplace (17 percent). In general, participation is said to be more popular among well-educated persons living in big cities than among other parts of the population (Czapiński and Panek 2013: 290).

To explain the lack of citizens’ engagement, researchers often point to lack of social capital, especially low level of social trust (Lewenstein and Theiss 2008; Szymczak 2008), the weaknesses of civic education (Napiontek 2008; Torney-Purta et al. 2001), and a generally low level of interest in the democratic culture of participation (Sulek 2009). Apathy and notorious Polish “learned helplessness” (e.g., Gliński 2006b: 279) are highlighted in scholarship as the main obstacles to social activism and engagement in the civil sphere; instead people are resourceful in the sphere of work, informal economy, professional career, or when coping with poverty; thus civic engagement is allegedly limited to “enclaves” of engaged citizens surrounded by general passivity (e.g. Gliński 2004 and 2006b; Czapiński 2008). These anti-civil attitudes are often attributed to the specific type of mentality molded by a state socialist past that combines a sense of entitlement with lack of

responsibility for the common good, impeding civic spirit and social engagement (Sztompka 1991; 1998; cf. Maslyk 2013). Some researchers also point to the persistence of “sociological void,” a term coined by Nowak (1979) to describe Poles’ lack of identification with intermediary-level institutions and strong identification with family and the nation in the 1970s. Pawlak (2015) shows that this concept is still evoked by Polish sociologists as an obstacle to the development of civil society and democratic culture in the country today, even though most scholars have ceased to examine the extent to which Nowak’s idea fits current trends.

Scholars have also stressed economic and sociopolitical factors that hamper the development of civil society understood as not-for-profit activism on behalf of the common good. The lack of financial resources and know-how are often pointed out in literature as an obvious obstacle to the development of the third sector (Gliński 2006b; Przewlocka et al. 2013), especially in the case of smaller organizations based outside of Warsaw (Korolczuk 2013).

International studies show that individuals’ levels of education and income have a profound impact on participation and political activism on an individual level (Schlozman et al. 2010; see also Kiersztyn in this volume). The rapid and thorough economic transformation initiated in 1989 resulted in relatively high levels of economic inequalities in contemporary Poland.<sup>5</sup> 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 Poles’ lack of social engagement, is partly confirmed by surveys showing that people who earn above the average income 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 (Adamiak 2014). Nevertheless, Kiersztyn (in this volume) 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 (alleged) enclave-like character of Polish civil society is also interpreted as resulting from existing regulations that channel social activism into nongovernmental organizations, marginalizing other types of engagement (Jacobsson 2013; Mocek 2014; Szustek 2008). The 2003 Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work (with a 2010 amendment), which regulates many important issues concerning civil society’s functioning, focuses 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 (as we develop later), 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 toward 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 nongovernmental organizations," by definition it excludes any informal groups and networks. Only nongovernmental 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 1 percent of tax revenue. The so-called percentage law enabling 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 process of introducing regulations concerning the relationship between civil society actors and the state is ongoing. Adjustment to new regulations takes time, thus, there is a need for constant re-evaluation of how specific tools work. One example concerns the development of structures for relationships with public authorities, such as the social consultation bodies in place at the local level in all communes, both urban and rural, and the other local government units. The 2003 Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work introduced a provision that obliges local authorities to set up plans for cooperation with local NGOs every year and, according to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy reports, most local governments prepare such plans. While implementing such regulations is not always successful, there are some indications that Poles are becoming more and more interested in such cooperation and more effective in influencing decisions on the local level (e.g., Garpel 2014).<sup>6</sup>

To sum up, existing literatures on civil society in Poland show that the level of citizens' engagement reflects local institutional mechanisms, such as financial incentives and regulations aimed at stimulating social activism, but also larger processes of social, economic, and political change. In pointing to a number of important cultural, institutional, and financial factors that im-



pede citizens' engagement, existing scholarship gives us a valuable picture of civil society activity in the post–state socialist context. However, such a view appears increasingly one-sided as new, often informal, more or less spontaneous grassroots mobilizations and types of engagement emerge in the country. Thus, there is a need to rethink the ways in which civil society is defined and analyzed. We believe that this task requires rethinking the conceptual and methodological approach to capture the various types of activism as well as bridging civil society and social movement studies.

## Rethinking Polish Civil Society

Whereas most existing literature on civil society in Poland laments the weakness of civil society in the country, and most quantitative measures confirm a generally low level of social engagement, people observing the events in Warsaw in the early autumn of 2015 might have had a different impression. To give one illustrative example: in just three days between 10 and 12 September 2015, the Polish capital saw a protest against the influx of refugees, gathering five thousand participants, as well as a demonstration of two thousand people under the banner “Refugees Welcome,” organized by left and liberal groups. There were also several thousand nurses mobilized by the All-Poland Trade Union of Nurses and Midwives, who took to the streets to demand better pay and working conditions, and a demonstration of a couple hundred people, mostly elderly, who marched under the banner “Jesus Christ the King of Poland.” Additionally, Warsaw hosted the VII Congress of Women, organized by the Congress of Women Association, which gathered approximately four thousand women from across Poland demanding more gender equality in all areas of social and political life.

Such a scale of social mobilization is not atypical for contemporary Poland, as in recent years many groups took to the streets on a mass scale, including right-wing nationalist groups, trade unions, as well as feminists (Kubisa 2014; Regulska and Grabowska 2013) or people protesting against the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) (Jurczyszyn et al. 2014). These initiatives were not limited to Warsaw, as smaller demonstrations in support of helping refugees took place in other Polish cities such as Kraków and Białystok, and in 2014 alone twenty-one local Congresses of Women took place in different regions. In some cases, citizens were mobilized by existing organizations such as trade unions, football fan clubs, or associations; in other cases, there were more spontaneous grassroots initiatives, e.g., the demonstration welcoming refugees in Poland or protests of ACTA. The sheer scale of these mobilizations calls into question the validity of the view of Polish civil society as currently weak and underdeveloped.

Our claim is that some types of social activism have escaped researchers' attention, not only due to their relative novelty or the sometimes low-key nature of their action, but also because of the specific definitions of civil society that circulate in both academia and public discourse in Poland (cf. Jawłowska and Kubik 2007). As shown by Jezierska in this volume, most representatives of Polish think tanks conceptualize civil society as a provider of public services, moral blueprint, or control on power. However, such narrow understandings of civil society do not only appear characteristic of the elite group of people working for influential NGOs. As noted by Trutkowski and Mandes, studies on civil society often come down to debating which institutions fit the normative definitions of civil society and thus should be included in the analysis, and which should be excluded (Trutkowski and Mandes 2005: 30; cf. Górniak 2014; Jawłowska and Kubik 2007). Thus, the types of social activism that do not fit such a narrow understanding of ideological, organizational, and functional characteristics of civil society tend to be marginalized and/or excluded.

The example of extreme right-wing movements shows that the ideological and normative orientation of the activists is an important factor in determining whether they are seen as part of civil society. People protesting immigration with slogans such as "All Poland says 'No!' to these Islamic barbarians"<sup>7</sup> appear to be in direct and unequivocal opposition to the values that civil society is expected to epitomize, such as openness, responsibility, and solidarity (e.g., Gawin and Gliński 2006; Kocka 2006; Wrzosek 2008). Thus, many researchers would rather consider such movements as a reflection of uncivil society (cf. Kopecký and Mudde 2003a), which employs highly disruptive tactics to achieve its goals and/or reflects the "populism and illiberalism [that] are tearing the region apart" (Krastev 2007: 56). However, our view is that such groups are rarely as homogenous as they appear, and in any case their attitudes and activities need to be studied and interpreted rather than evaluated and disqualified.

Moreover, researchers often also exclude other groups, such as trade unions, as part of contemporary Polish civil society, interpreting their activism as a fight for the interests of a narrow group rather than for the common good (cf. Uzzell and Rätzl 2013). Even though scholars recognize the historic role of Solidarity, "which originated in 1980 as a trade union and also a citizens' movement ... a 'moral avant-garde' which was struggling to free and modernize the country" (Krzywdzinski 2011: 68; Ost 2005), trade unions are seldom included in civil society studies and in statistics (see, however, GUS 2013). These exclusions influence the general picture of social activism in Poland. A few existing studies of traditional forms of organizing, such as trade unions and farmers' activism, show that these groups are able to mobilize on a mass scale and have an important impact on the political

sphere and the broader society. Kubisa's (2014) study of the mobilization of nurses in Poland, for instance, shows that over the last decade the All-Poland Trade Union of Nurses and Midwives not only managed to significantly increase its membership, actively recruiting new members during protests and strikes, but also succeeded in changing public discourse on health-care reforms. Similarly, the analysis of farmers' activism over the last twenty-five years shows that there were two major waves of protests (in 1989–1993 and 1997–2001) during which the farmers mobilized on a mass scale to defend their rights, which influenced the development of agricultural policy (Foryś 2015).

A similar tendency toward “invisibilization” can be observed in the case of conservative religious activism. According to several studies, members of religious organizations and communities make up as much as 75 percent of all people who belong to Polish civil society organizations (Szymczak 2011: 64; cf. Herbst 2005), but in the public discourse they are often depicted as “backward” and representing values that are antithetical to the norms that civil society actors should promote. Also, there is still little research examining different forms of religious activism and their social consequences (see, however, Byłok and Pędziwiatr 2010; Krzemiński 2009). In our view, these as well as other types of activism included in this volume are worth scholarly attention as they attest to the ability of Polish citizens to overcome major challenges to collective action, frequently pointed out by scholars, in the Polish context, such as widespread apathy, lack of interpersonal trust, disdain for political actions, and resource constraints.

Moreover, whereas previous research often focused on organized forms of activism, mostly through NGOs, currently there is a growing recognition of the many informal initiatives that successfully mobilize Polish citizens. Recent studies indicate that these mostly grassroots, often informal mobilizations constitute an important part of Polish civil society (e.g., Mocek 2014; CBOS 2014; Domaradzka 2015; GUS 2013; Herbst and Żakowska 2013). An example of traditional deliberative structures at the local level that have been little studied so far is the village assemblies (*zebrania wiejskie*) (Matysiak 2011). In recent years, we witnessed increased collaboration and the development of new deliberative structures within civil society that take the form of the organization of forums such as the informal Congress of Urban Movements in Poland (Polanska in this volume; Kowalewski 2013; Pobłocki 2014) or the national Congress of Women (Korolczuk 2014). Other examples of organized or semiorganized forms of participatory practices include participatory budgeting, parents' activism focusing on child care or educational reforms, conservative mobilization against “gender ideology,” grassroots urban movements, mobilizations around civic law proposals,<sup>8</sup> tenants' networks, the cooperative movement (e.g., food cooperatives), and groups

promoting the sharing economy (e.g., time banks), as well as various types of online organizing, such as groups on Facebook, mailing lists, or groups gathering on specific thematic sites and blogs (Bukowiecki et al. 2014; Erbel 2014; Grzebalska 2016; Herbst and Żakowska 2013; Korolczuk 2014; Krześ 2014; Polanska 2014).

Sometimes informal organizing is just a phase in organizational development. For example, the Congress of Women that emerged in 2009 as a loose group of individuals and representatives of various organizations became an association in 2013. In many other cases, however, avoiding registration and maintaining nonhierarchical, informal relationships among participants is a preferred strategy, as in the case of Women's 8 of March Alliance, a feminist group that has existed since 2001, organizing yearly mass demonstrations in Warsaw (Regulska and Grabowska 2013). This type of activism can be termed semiformal because there is a set of rules that regulates the functioning of the group and the Alliance's members engage not only in ad hoc actions but also long-term cooperation with other groups and trade unions (Korolczuk 2014). We interpret them as functional equivalents of formal democratic structures, which can become rather effective in forging dialogue and cooperation as well as introducing specific changes in society.<sup>9</sup>

Some recent studies indicate that informal local activism can be an effective tool to bring about social change. More and more Poles believe that they can influence the way things work at the local level, which can be interpreted as a sign of a growing sense of agency, and as a signal of trust in the positive outcomes of collective actions. During the last decade, the percentage of people convinced that they can effect change in their local communities when acting together has grown steadily. While in 2002 only 50 percent of respondents were convinced that "people such as myself, in cooperating with others, can help the needy or solve some of the problems of the local community, my village or my city," 77 percent of respondents agreed with this statement in 2014 (CBOS 2014). There are some recent examples of how cooperation on the local level can bring social change, and how loose groups of citizens can effectively use certain tools, e.g., the possibility of entering into social consultation with authorities to change important decisions regarding urban planning or the decision-making process regarding hosting the Olympics, as was the case in Kraków (Erbel 2014; Garpiel 2014; Krześ 2014).

Informal types of organizing and social engagement are recognized by Polish law and international agreements such as the Lisbon Treaty. Even though the legal provisions tend to channel social activism into nongovernmental organizations, they also allow individuals and informal groups acting on behalf of all people to engage in the process of democratic deliberation and to cooperate with local authorities (Makowski 2014). Makowski points to

the fact that such cooperation is often difficult in practice due to the lack of clear legal provisions, characteristics of Polish legal culture, and a general tendency toward engaging formal organizations in social consultations and cooperation with authorities. However, interest in such practices appears to be increasing, as the growing popularity of participatory budgeting shows. As of today, participatory budgeting has been introduced in over seventy cities in Poland (Kraszewski and Mojkowski 2014; Prykowski 2011). The participatory budgeting mechanism also exists in rural areas. It was introduced already in 2009 in the form of the village fund (*fundusz sołecki*). The Act on the Village Fund allows the communal councils to allocate funds from their budgets to finance projects, which are collectively chosen by the residents of rural subcommunes (*sołectwa*) located within their administrative areas. Even if participatory budgeting usually concerns a small share of the budget, and sometimes only a limited number of local citizens take part in the decision making,<sup>10</sup> the growing popularity of this and other forms of participation outside of formal organizations suggests that many Poles want to engage in informal, possibly more spontaneous and ad hoc types of social activism (Gerwin and Grabkowska 2012).

Furthermore, the view of Polish society as uniformly weak and apathetic can be contested on methodological grounds, as there are some significant discrepancies in available quantitative data. Whereas studies show low levels of engagement in formal types of activism, this is not the case concerning informal types of activism. When asked more generally whether they engaged in any “voluntary and non-profit pro-social activity” during the last year, as many as 78 percent of Poles answered “yes” (CBOS 2014; cf. GUS 2013). Most respondents declared that they devoted their time to help friends, family members (living separately), and neighbors. While one might debate whether such activities can be interpreted as activities strengthening civil society, these findings signal the existence of a sphere of social engagement that may have escaped surveys focusing exclusively on formal activism. They indicate a preference for noninstitutional types of activism and suggest that quantitative measures focusing on volunteering may show a distorted picture of actual engagement.

Such an interpretation is in line with international scholarship, which shows that traditionally applied indicators of institutionalized political and civic participation do not include the more informal activities that have emerged in many industrialized countries in recent decades (e.g., Baiocchi et al. 2014; Stolle and Hooghe 2005). Such low-key, grassroots forms of engagement can be interpreted as a response to skepticism about and distrust in politics, which has been growing in most democratic countries (e.g., Bennett et al. 2013). Analyzing these phenomena allows us to see that everyday life and political protest in many cases are mutually constitutive, and that daily

practices, including service provision, “are politicized and politicizing as they unfold and develop over time and through diverse networks” (Yates 2015).

All in all, this research overview indicates that there are good reasons to update and revise our knowledge of Polish civil society, a project with implications for the debate on postsocialist civil societies more generally.

## Introduction to the Volume

Our volume takes a broad view of civil society in Poland, as it covers both formal and informal forms of activism, including NGOs as well as loose networks, social movements, and other informal types of social engagement. The contributions focus in particular on initiatives and types of collective action that have not been much reflected in the international research literature thus far, such as the cases of animal welfare activism, rural women’s activism, tenants’ mobilizations, and mothers’ groups as well as right-wing and migrant communities. In particular, our case selection reflects the ambition to call attention to forms of activism that have tended to be delegitimized as “backward,” uncivil, or nonconsequential. As with all selections, this means that some very interesting types of social activism, including LGBTQ and feminist activism, religious mobilizations, and online networks, are not included.

The first section of this book challenges the common picture of, and narrative about, Polish civil society. In chapter 1, Ekiert and Kubik effectively counter three prevailing myths about postsocialist civil societies. First, they confront the myth that civil societies had to be built from scratch after 1989. They point to the associational sphere that existed, to various extents in various countries, during state socialism and argue that “recombined civil societies” is a more truthful description of the existing civil societies in the region. Second, they challenge the myth that a distinct type of postsocialist civil society developed in the region after 1989, showing the growing divergence of civil societies in the region. Third, they challenge the characterization of these civil societies as systematically weak, arguing that (irrespective of the internal diversity) the civil society sector in postsocialist Europe may function somewhat differently than in the West but that it is not necessarily weaker or less politically consequential.

In chapter 2, Giza-Poleszczuk sheds light on how to explain the contradictory findings in national and international surveys of civic engagement and how the narrative of a “weak civil society” in Poland could remain so pervasive. She shows, inter alia, that in the elite discourse on civil society in Poland, traditional notions of social activism (e.g., *czyn społeczny*, *ochotnik*) were replaced by “foreign” notions (e.g., volunteering—*wolontariat*), one

consequence of which is that much local grassroots engagement may escape the lens of civil society surveyors as respondents often do not associate what they actually do in their local communities with these given labels. Taking into account what actually happens on the ground and in a diverse range of organizations (old *and* new), she concludes that Polish civil society has much more vitality than is commonly acknowledged.

In chapter 3, Jacobsson, too, takes issue with the characterization of Polish civil society as weak; in contrast, she finds it dynamic and entrepreneurial. Based on a case study of animal rights activism in Poland, she explores some distinct qualities of the civil society organizations developed after 1989. She argues that in civil society organizing, there tends to be a spillover of action logics from the domestic sphere, such as a tendency to personalize civic and organizational relationships, as well as spillover from the market sphere, such as a preference for individualist forms of action and thinking. She conceptualizes this as a form of “civic privatism,” referring not to passivity but to civic engagement colored by logics from the private sphere, resulting in a highly dynamic but also fragmented civil society sector.

In chapter 4, Jezierska analyzes the existing discourses on civil society within Polish elite NGOs, concluding that one specific understanding of civil society—civil society as service-providing NGOs—has gained a hegemonic position. Examining how the leaders of the main Polish think tanks conceptualize civil society is of utmost importance because they have significant impacts on the shape of Polish civil society through policy influence, grant giving, and training of local civil society organizations. Consequently, the way they frame civil society plays an important role in delimiting the space of possible actions not only for think tanks themselves but also for other civil society organizations.

The second section of the book examines how specific groups struggle with the tendency toward delegitimization of their fight and their claims in the public sphere. In Chapter 5, Korolczuk examines social activism of Polish parents in contemporary Poland. She demonstrates that parental activism challenges the “field approach,” which presupposes a clear separation between private/domestic and public/political spheres, as well as the “normative approach” to civil society. Parents’ rights activism transgresses the public/private divide by showing that parenting does not take place only within the realm of the home, but also in the public sphere, and that people may politicize their experiences and identities related to the “domestic” sphere. Social mobilizations of mothers and fathers also attest to the difficulty in differentiating between common good and particularistic interests of individuals and families. Finally, parents’ rights activism shows that civic participation is a gendered process, as are the definition of the political and the shape of the public/private divide.

In chapter 6, Hryciuk examines the case of the Single Mothers for the Alimony Fund Movement, which has so far been the most spectacular response on the part of civil society to the neoliberal dynamics of social and economic transformation in Poland. The author shows how the mobilization of economically underprivileged women was marginalized in public discourse and how the activists attempted changing the discriminatory law as mother-citizens fighting for social rights, neither using the essentialist notions of womanhood nor calling themselves feminists. Hryciuk observes that while most motherist movements in Latin America legitimize their claims by drawing upon the feminine imagery of Catholicism against the state and by evoking the image of the suffering mother and her sacrifice, the Polish Single Mothers downplayed their cultural role as mothers and called on the civil rights and the constitutional principle of the protection of family instead.

A similar dynamic is examined by Polanska in chapter 7, which focuses on the Polish tenants' movement. Representing a hybrid of transactional types of activism and self-help activism, the tenants' movement is neither donor-dependent nor depoliticized as the conventional view on Polish civil society would have it. Moreover, it mobilizes mostly impoverished people in their fifties and sixties motivated by pragmatic factors like poor housing situations and socioeconomic positions. The author examines how this economically weak group overcomes the challenges of collective action, such as lack of resources and low social capital and fights the neoliberal discourse dominant in the Polish context, which defines the poor as unable to adapt to the new economic system and as remnants from the socialist past.

Finally, in chapter 8, Kiersztyn offers an assessment of the potential impact of precarious employment on civic and political participation among Poles. Contemporary literature consistently points to the existence of a participation gap associated with socioeconomic status, age, and gender, which means that males and wealthier, better educated people have been shown to be more politically active. Kiersztyn's analysis shows that political voice is determined mostly by the educational level of respondents, while economic determinism seems far less important as a factor explaining political and civic involvement in the Polish context. At the same time, Kiersztyn concludes that in light of the results of quantitative studies on civic activism and precarious employment, it appears that current changes in the labor market may, in the long term and indirectly, turn out to be much more detrimental to civic participation than the often-debated trends like postsocialist legacy of apathy.

The final section explores civil society making "between the past and the present" and how some civil society actors struggle to preserve or redefine the past and negotiate its relevance for the present.

In chapter 9, Matysiak focuses on the rural women's organizations (*Koła Gospodyń Wiejskich*) and the role they play at local level, representing a type



of civic activism that is frequently disqualified and “invisibilized” in Polish civil society research. She shows that they are often dismissed as an “old type” of civil society that does not fit the model of civil society promoted in contemporary Poland, and their actual numbers are underestimated, as some of them are informal and thus not counted in the organizational statistics. Matysiak calls for an analysis of civic activism that is attentive to the local context and the local-rootedness of civic activism in order to see how it is shaped by both gender and local traditions and needs.

In chapter 10, Elgenius discusses the increasingly active and diversified social activism of Polish migrants in the United Kingdom. The chapter considers three significant waves of Polish migration (post–Second World War, Solidarity, and post-1989, pre–EU enlargement and post–EU expansion), showing how the different national narratives and experiences are reflected in the civil society making of the different generations of migrants, thus contributing to the diversification of contemporary activism of the Polish migrant community.

In Chapter 11, Płatek and Płucienniczak analyze the types of social mobilizations that deviate from a normative vision of civil society as a sphere populated by civic-minded organizations that build social capital and trust and support democracy. They examine extreme-right groups and organizations in Poland, characterized by the use of violence and anti-state, undemocratic ideology. They follow Kopecký and Mudde (2003b) in claiming that such “uncivil movements” should be included in the study of civil society in postsocialist countries, including Poland, because the extreme right claimed its place in the very center of the public sphere and its repertoire of action changed as the movement managed to blend into the broader civil and political society. The authors conceptualize the specific field of mobilization of the Polish extreme right as a combination of political and discursive opportunities, showing that the extreme-right movement is relatively stable in its anti-systemic and anti-minority aims, but the action repertoire and targets change according to the shifts in Polish opportunity structures. As it adapts to current social and political trends, it transcends the boundaries between civil and uncivil society.

Finally, in a brief conclusion, Jacobsson and Korolczuk synthesize some general findings and theoretical lessons emerging from the volume.

## Notes

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2. Infralevel includes everyday acts of resistance that are “quiet, dispersed, disguised or otherwise seemingly invisible” (Vinthagen and Johansson 2013: 4, drawing on Scott 1990), but that have political meaning and may lead to more visible forms of activism.
  3. Apart from the inherent normativity in the concept of civil society as propagated by policy makers and foreign donors in the transition process, dissident thinkers in the region were also promulgating their versions of legitimate civil society by the 1970s and 1980s. Váslav Havel, György Konrád, and Adam Michnik, for instance, saw civil society as a civilized, moral sphere standing apart from and above the sphere of party politics (e.g., Celichowski 2004; Jezierska 2015).
  4. For instance, the Klon/Jawor reports, which count the number of registered foundations and associations in Poland, exclude the voluntary fire brigades (see, e.g., Przewłocka 2012).
  5. The level of economic inequalities in Polish society, measured by Gini’s coefficient, fell recently (from 0.301 in 2009 to 0.299 in 2013), but 5.1 percent of Polish households still live in extreme poverty and 44.7 percent live below “the prosperity level,” meaning that they cannot afford to spend money on education, culture, or leisure (Czapiński and Panek 2013). Moreover, according to the Polish Central Statistical Office, the percentage of Poles living in extreme poverty rose 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 inequality pertains to the labor market; for example, the rate of temporary employment in Poland is around 27 percent, which is almost twice the EU average (EUROSTAT 2013).
  6. Some studies suggest that many organizations do not know that such regulations exist and that the cooperation between authorities and nongovernmental organizations in Poland is not based on partnership but rather depends on the good will of civil servants (e.g., Fuszara et al 2008). This trend is related to the failures of the administrative, political, and fiscal decentralization process that was to limit the role of the central state. The decentralization process was only partially implemented, which further complicates the relationship between civil society and local authorities (Regulska 2009).
  7. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNYp3UftdiYandfeature=youtu.be>. Retrieved 15 September 2015.
  8. The law in Poland allows citizens to demand that parliament discuss a law proposal if they can collect 100,000 signatures supporting the proposal. It is not ensured, however, that the proposal would be accepted.
  9. This is not to deny that this informal way of organizing also has a flip side, including the formation of informal status and power hierarchies and unequal voice opportunities among participants (see Jacobsson 2013, and in this volume), a topic to be explored more deeply in future research.
  10. Participatory budgeting is often perceived as a tool that helps to engage people in local affairs; promotes interpersonal trust, transparency, and communication; allows people to control the authorities; helps to create local communities; and educates people in civic activism (Gerwin and Grabkowska 2012). At the same time, existing research shows that it can be detrimental to the development of civil society as it can legitimize the privileged position of a narrow elite, transfer the duties from the

authorities to people without providing adequate resources, and narrow down public debates to issues that can be financed through such a system (Krześ 2014). The case of Sopot, which was the first Polish city to introduce participatory budgeting in 2011 in the amount of 5 million PLN (1 percent of the total city budget), shows that there are some significant discrepancies between ideals, plans, and reality. Introducing participatory budgeting in Sopot did not engage people on a mass scale: only a handful of people generally took part in informational meetings and only 7 percent of citizens took part in voting. In 2013, only 4.5 percent of local citizens participated in voting, which shows that such forms of enhancing people's participation are not always successful (Krześ 2014).

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