

## CULTURE, ECONOMY AND WORK

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### **The Cultural Impacts of Economic and Public Administration Reforms in Poland: Continuity or Change in the Cultural Potential for Economic Development since 1990**

*Abstract:* This study aims to determine whether, in the wake of recent economic and administrative reforms, Poland's historically shaped cultural potential for economic development has allowed it to reduce the distance between itself and countries at the center of innovative development in Europe. A country's cultural potential for development is created by quality of government, control of corruption, trust, individualism, and management style. Under imitative-elite rule, before 2015, Poland was closing the gap between itself and the center in terms of corruption control and quality of government. After 2015, corruption grew, social capital dwindled, and the quality of government declined. The current state of Poland's cultural potential for development is a lasting relic of long-term historical processes, and thus rapid economic and administrative changes have had very limited impact on the country's cultural potential for development. Patterns of behavior fostering a knowledge-based economy are poorly disseminated.

*Keywords:* Poland, distance, reforms, cultural development potential, European center

#### **Research Aim**

The main aim of reforms to the economy and public administration was to create better conditions for economic growth. However, some elements of the reforms that were implemented originated from a different cultural context. Introducing regulations that are typical of A countries into culturally different B countries naturally prompts the question as to whether the new regulations in B nations can initiate cultural changes that will bring B countries closer to their A counterparts.

The aim of this study is to determine the cultural factors favoring economic development, to set them in the Polish cultural tradition, and to examine whether economic changes have been accompanied by a decrease in the distance—in regard to the cultural potential for development—between Poland and the European countries leading innovative economic development.

### **A Cultural Approach to Issues of Economic Development in Light of Long-Term Processes**

Contemporary researchers equate culture with ideological objects that are important in shaping social behaviors. Thus, for instance, in studies of differences in national organizational cultures, culture is defined as “collective mind programming, which differentiates members of one group or category from the members of another” (Hofstede 2000: 375). It should be added that this programming has a historical character: “culture is passed down from generation to generation” (Malinowski 1958: 30). Meanwhile, according to Stefan Czarnowski, “culture is a collective good and collective achievement, the fruit of the creative and transformative efforts of countless generations” (Czarnowski 2000: 24). The standardization of behavior within a single culture is brought about by patterns of behavior and values (Parsons 1951: 15 and 46; Kłoskowska 1983: 214 and 229; Benedict 1966: 67–116) and by norms dictating how we should proceed (Znaniecki 1971: 468–538). We are familiarized with cultural models and values by attitudes and their offshoots, that is, by conservatism, individualism, collectivism, authoritarianism, and so forth. From the viewpoint of studying economic behavior, institutions—that is, the principles that regulate and stabilize complex processes of exchange (Blau 1964: 273–280)—are a particularly important cultural product. “Institutions are the limits created by people which must be respected in the course of all possible interpersonal interactions” (North 1992: 477).

The comparative analyses of behavior and cultural models presented below operate on the basis of statistical statements. If we subject groups A and B to long-term observation, including observation of behavior *x*, and if we find that behavior *x* in Group A was greater than in Group B, we can state that in comparison to Group B, behavior *x* is a cultural model typical of Group A.

The cultural approach does not negate the influence of the economy on culture. Yet, it draws attention to the fact that the cultural sphere is autonomous with regard to the economy and that the reverse effect is possible. In Italy, medieval capitalism disappeared, while in the Netherlands and England, after the spread of Protestantism, it developed and expanded to the rest of Europe. In both these countries, capitalist behavior was already embedded in the lifestyle and etiquette of the middle classes. As Maria Ossowska (1985) writes, Protestant rules on how to live in order to be redeemed were in line with middle-class moral requirements and afforded the class interests of the bourgeoisie a sacred legitimacy. A pious lifestyle became an argument in the fight for power and prestige. It also acted as a factor that integrated the emerging bourgeoisie and contributed to its sense of identity (Ossowska 1985). New religious ideas such as thrift, competing for redemption, asceticism, hard work, and independent bible study (which promoted the development of education and intellectual open-mindedness), gave pro-market behaviors the status of divine requirements mandatory for all, irrespective of social class (Weber 1984 and 1994).

However, religion is not the only causative agent. England and France in the eighteenth century exhibited a similar level of industrial innovation (Clark 2007: 304). Yet it was England, and not France, that saw dramatic growth in further innovation, leading to the industrial revolution. In this case, key factors included the cultural climate, which valued and created institutions to promote individual achievement (Landes 2000: 217 onwards).

Equally important were institutions protecting individual freedoms (Ferguson 2011: 145 and 246), relatively few privileges, a political monopoly, state boundaries, limits to market entry, and an open elite (Acemoglu, Robinson 2014: 86 onwards). It is clear that there are certain situations in which cultural factors can strengthen or weaken the position of a given country in the international division of labor.

And thus, the knowledge-based economy began to expand in the 1980s, following the rise of personality orientations that favored it. Creativity, as a quantitatively significant personality orientation, emerged in the 1970s, alongside a visible growth in the importance of individualism, autonomy, and freedom; at the same time, there was a decline in the importance of conformist industrial virtues such as obedience and obligation (Hryniewicz 2012: 81–100).

The place of Poland on the cultural map of Europe is a synthesis of two long-term processes. The first of these, beginning in the sixteenth century, was the division of Europe into two cultural realms: Protestant and Catholic (Eastern Orthodoxy had emerged as a distinct culture earlier, in the eleventh century). The second process involved the formation of different economic systems. While capitalist enterprise flourished in Western European Protestant countries, lands to the east of the Elbe saw the expansion of granges or “folwarks” (Polish: *folwarki*). In Poland, cultural codes and institutions regulating folwark activity began to form and expand, merging with the models typical in Catholic cultures (Hryniewicz 2007: 30 onwards). Thus arose the divide between the capitalist, market-based center and the rural, grange-based periphery.

### **Behavioral and Psychoanalytical Explanations for the Long-Term Persistence of Behavioral Patterns**

Ferdynand Braudel’s research into long-term processes (from the Middle Ages to the end of the nineteenth century) has shown the centuries-long persistence of institutions and patterns of behavior in Mediterranean countries (Braudel 1999). However, the question arises as to how to reconcile the theory of persistence with the fact that institutions and behavioral patterns do change nonetheless. In order to answer this question, we will use the methodology that Reinhart Koselleck developed. Historical events are linked together in structures driving human activity, such as customs, ceremonies, laws, and so on. Structures allow the repeatability and predictability of human activity, and can change with time. Structures accumulate in historical layers, which differ in their susceptibility to change. Some are enduring and conceal recurring possibilities (Koselleck 2012: 5–7 and 216). Thus, in the course of analyzing institutions of the Polish People’s Republic, Wojciech Morawski recorded that not only communist political and economic institutions but also behaviors clearly resembled feudal institutions (Morawski 2001: 162). “Although the whole state had moved to the West and the revolution had moved a huge proportion of Poles to the cities, the social relations that the later People’s Republic of Poland created exercised the most traditional features of a ‘grange’ character” (Leder 2014: 193).

Meanwhile, from the study conducted by Adam Leszczyński into the position and behavior of the peasant class in Poland from the fifteenth to nineteenth century, it

can be concluded that mechanisms of power and the behavior of workers were fairly similar in folwarks, pre-war enterprises, socialist collectives, and private enterprises in the III Republic (Leszczyński 2020: 528). In Central Eastern Europe, an example of a persisting layer predetermining the continuation of societies in modern history might be backwardness, which in this region is a long-term process (Sosnowska 2004: 19). Another persisting layer that engenders conflict among the Polish elite is its ambivalent relationship with the European developmental center. Thus, for instance, the trend of Sarmatism constituted the apotheosis of native pride and enmity toward Western dominance. The constitution of 1791 was an attempt to resemble the West more closely but failed to gain a majority backing from the nobility. Later, in the nineteenth century, it was agreed that technical advancement was needed, but Western liberal individualism was rejected (Jedlicki 2002: 411; Kizwalter 1999: 234).

Jan Sowa's findings, which apply Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical model to explain the centuries-long persistence of ideas and patterns of behavior (Sowa 2011), suggest that codes of behavior proper to a national group remain stored in its collective subconscious, even when institutions and the majority of group members have long forgotten about them. It only takes the slightest impulse, the initiative of a handful of intellectuals, and the behavior will blaze again in full brightness.

The appearance of economic dualism (in the sixteenth century) meant that, in the West, initial experiences of economic cooperation outside the family were gained in enterprises, and in the East, in folwarks. A primitive idea of collective work took shape. The earliest events were a pre-introduction to things and the coining of familiar axioms that helped to make sense of, and deal with, new economic phenomena (Jung 1997: 5–14). Such archetypes are subject to historical development and certain modifications, in that new archetypes, which are often the result of previously unknown experiences, are added to the deep-rooted ones built long ago. The role of archetypes in multigenerational socialization processes may cause the effects of former experiences and means of proceeding to erupt in radically different political conditions. Cultural continuity involves a group's having similar collective reactions in similar economic or political circumstances.

An archetype is a metaphor used by people in everyday life. People use an archetype as an unquestioned model and unintentionally replicated formula in order to control reality, that is, to understand it and know how to behave. The usefulness of the archetype concept for analyzing long-term processes is demonstrated in sociological studies of cities: "in human culture there are (...) lasting, universal and deeply rooted models by which space is valorized and made. These models can be called archetypes, that is, prototypes or initial models; they constitute constant and common cultural elements, adopted partly unknowingly, on the level of the subconscious" (Jałowiecki, Szczepański 2002: 331). And so, for instance, the archetype of an organization is "the basic idea of an organization which people share" and which we obtain along with the archetypes of other institutions in the course of socialization (Kostera 1996: 88).

The neo-folwark model of behavior, which involves distanced authority, autocratic tendencies, distrust, worker passivity, collectivism, and aversion to market mechanisms, is still visible in the organizational behaviors and practices of nations like Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries (Hryniewicz 2014: 89). Strong class and status

barriers, which are upheld in collective work, lead to group isolation and a restricted flow of people and ideas, as well as to mutual fear and suspicion. This is accompanied by lack of trust between employees and their superiors, autocratic management practices, low levels of initiative among workers (improvements) and the underexploited potential of qualified employees (Hryniewicz 2007: 186 onwards).

### Cultural Potential for Development and Its Indicators

Institutions are one of the most important cultural factors for economic development. The regulation of behavior in institutions is achieved via stimuli that dictate whether people have a greater or lesser degree of freedom in their personal aspirations (based on Acemoglu, Robinson 2014: 54 onwards). Institutions may be inclusive or exclusive. Inclusive institutions implement the principle of equal opportunities in all forms of collective collaboration. They allow all those willing to participate in an economic or political activity to do so and guarantee access to public services based on the rule of equal opportunities (in regard to the law, courts, police, roads, schools, healthcare, etc.). Exclusive institutions in the economy support monopolies (protectionism, licenses, permission), and privileges and corruption mean that access to public services falls far short of the equal opportunities principle. Long-term research based on observation of countries on different continents shows that economic success is achieved by those countries that have inclusive institutions, while a dominance of exclusive institutions guarantees economic failure in international arenas. The relations between nations and their public administrations and economic institutions are of key importance (Acemoglu, Robinson 2014: 86 onwards).

In the 1990s, researchers connected with the World Bank initiated studies measuring quality of government. Good quality of government can be defined as the possession of impartial government institutions serving to exercise public authority under the rule of law (Rothstein 2013: 54). Nikolas Charron referred to the work of these institutions in his construction of a Quality of Government (QoG) indicator, which he used to evaluate the quality of government in democratic EU countries, including in the following dimensions: voting and responsibility, corruption, rule of law, and government efficiency (Charron 2008). These evaluations were based on the results of studies, as well as on expert opinions (Charron 2008: 28 onwards; Charron, Lapuente, Rothstein 2018). The highest quality of government was recorded in Northern European countries, and the lowest in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in Southern Europe (Charron 2008: 28 onwards). The link between institutions and development is indisputable and diversified depending on the level of innovation and economic development. In leading nations considered “neutral” in this respect, inclusive institutions enable developmental benefits to be gained from competition between enterprises. In nations that are “catching up,” active institutions and reformative economic policy have relatively greater importance (Go-mułka 2016). Improving bureaucratic efficiency creates a more predictable economic environment (Falkowski 2013: 39–53). In post-socialist nations such as Poland, bureaucratic efficiency, execution of the law, trust in public institutions, the rule of law, and an inde-

pendent economic judiciary (Metelska-Szaniawska 2013: 205–220) are of particular importance. In the course of further analyses, we will use the ICRG QoG indicator, which comprises the dimensions of corruption, law and order, and bureaucratic efficiency (PRS Group 2021). The indicator can be found in The Quality of Government Basic Dataset (Teorell et al. 2023). The higher the score, the better the control and the less corruption.

The effectiveness of public administration is the outcome of formal and informal organizational practices. Studies of the history of public administrations in various countries have shown diversified structures and aims in terms of traditions, beliefs, leading ideas, and specific local challenges (Bewir, Rhodes, Weller 2003), including multicultural environments (Alkadry 2015). Research on the quality of government in Europe has demonstrated that the differences can be attributed to historical trends spanning the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, as well as to the promotion of clientelism, which is the main factor lowering the quality of government (Charron, Lapuente 2013). Studies of 28 EU countries have shown the significance of long-term national cultural processes in shaping national models of public administration (Thijs, Hammerschmid, Palaric 2017).

Robert Putnam's studies indicate that the effectiveness of public administration is strongly correlated with wide social mobilization beyond the family (groups created by people from many different families) and that the cultural seeds of social mobility appeared in the Middle Ages (Putnam 1995). To describe these phenomena, the term "social capital" is used (Putnam 1995; Fukuyama 1997). Trust in people outside one's own family, as well as in public institutions, is of key significance for social mobilization. The spread of the so-called culture of trust fosters cooperation, social mobilization, and innovativeness, lowers transaction costs, and increases competitiveness (Sztompka 2016: 309). The link between social capital and economic growth relies on the progression from trust to cooperation to development. A low level of trust results in a tendency to "privatize administrative bodies" by groups of family or friends (Sztompka 2016: 293 onwards). Research to date suggests that regions with a higher quality of government are characterized by higher levels of social trust (Charron, Dijkstra, Lapuente 2014). Extensive evidence of the positive relation between trust and economic development includes the earlier cited work of Francis Fukuyama (1997). The databases of the European Social Survey (ESS 2023) use indicators of trust as variables—trust in other people, as well as a weighted average trust in three institutions (parliament, politicians, and the legal system).

Historical studies have shown that one of the most important cultural models favoring the spread of capitalist market institutions in Europe was individualism. In the sixteenth century, individualism consisted in ordering one's life to achieve success as a means of salvation. In relations with one's group this meant giving priority to one's own existing commitments over later claims from the group (Hryniewicz 2014: 62 onwards). Lewis Davis's research (based on data from 90 countries) shows that individual responsibility has a positive impact on institutional efficiency and economic development, as measured by per capita income (Davis 2016). Countries with a more individualistic culture create more innovations and have higher productivity and higher long-term growth than countries with a more collectivist culture (Gorodnichenko and Roland 2011). More-

over, the studies by Paula Herbig and Steve Dunphy demonstrate that cultures that place emphasis on individualism and freedom are more creative and achieve greater benefits from implementing innovations (Herbig, Dunphy 1998). Individualism fosters the creation of social capital because it correlates with trust in people and institutions (Hryniewicz 2021: 192).

The individualism indicator is the desire to pass on to one's children values such as independence, determination, and perseverance, and rejection of the need to obey or be guided by religious teaching. Christian Welzel's studies (2013) indicate that this variable coincides with self-direction and perseverance in striving toward a goal. Individualists are guided by their own analysis and do not have group expectations in the form of inspiration, approval of their purpose, or shared responsibility for eventual failure. Innovativeness ensues from critical analysis of the existing state of things and efforts to change it. In collectivist groups, this behavior is treated as a threat to group ties and psychological comfort, and therefore it is rare and meets with punishment. The greater the level of individualism in a given group, the greater the likelihood of innovative behavior. The level of individualism is identified by the three-stage variable (the autonomy sub-index—defined in Welzel 2013: 66–69) contained in databases (World Value Survey 2023).

Since the 1980s, the knowledge-based economy has been expanding. According to the OECD, the term “knowledge-based economy” describes the trend in developed countries toward the increasing importance of knowledge, information, and high-level qualifications, as well as a growing need for access to these resources both from the private and public sector (OECD 2005; Godin 2006). The knowledge-based economy is personified by the “learning organization.” This is an organization in any sector or industry that allows and facilitates learning for all its employees and that consciously transforms itself and its surroundings (Pedler, Aspinwall 1999). Learning organizations develop thanks to the increasing knowledge and skills of their workers, and this situation is achieved through the exchange of thoughts, ideas, and attitudes regarding tasks to be performed (Hryniewicz 2007: 246). Learning organizations create a specific organizational culture, in which a key factor is a participatory management style. The reduced distance between management and subordinates encourages the honest exchange of information and creates favorable conditions for open discussion regarding mistakes, irrespective of hierarchy (Rok, Olejniczak 2012: 122–124). Effective teamwork depends on trust between workers and their managers (Świątek 2020: 149). The same study showed that, in Poland, this trust is low and an autocratic management style predominates (Świątek 2020: 185 onwards). The behaviors of managers and workers reflect the patterns and values of the national culture (Bjerke 2001: 83 onwards).

Research conducted in Polish factories shows that the participatory style of management reduces the psychological cost of work and fosters innovation among employees in seeking better solutions, new working methods, and so on. The autocratic management style has the opposite effect (Hryniewicz 2007: 184 onwards). To test these claims, the management style indicator was created using the European Social Survey database (ESS 2023) and by combining the responses to two questions using a 10-point scale: “Do respondents have any influence on organizing the day's work?” and “Are they asked for their opinion concerning organizational policies?” (scale: 0 = autocratic style, 20 = participatory style).

## Operationalizing Study

### *Aims and Research Questions*

The responses to the research questions of the present study reveal how the distance has changed in the last 30 years between Poland and countries at the hub in terms of cultural economic potential and how this relates to long-term processes. My observations will cover the years 1989–2022, although the observation period for some variables may be shorter due to lack of data.

Alongside systemic changes, a fundamental reorientation of the Polish economy took place after 1989. Thus, for instance, at the beginning of the economic transformation, the value of Polish exports in relation to GDP amounted to 15% but by 2020 had risen to 55.8% (Forsal 2023). The reforms preceding Poland's accession to the EU were implemented under international supervision and encompassed a wide range of phenomena, starting with the economy and ending with the legal system (Acquis 2023). The aim of the reforms was convergence with Western European countries (Gorzela 2020). The economic change indicator will be the level of advancement of six economic reforms in Poland, as published in European Development Bank reports from 1990 to 2014 (EBRD 2014). The indicator of change in public administration will be the ICRG QoG Index mentioned earlier.

Based on the values from the Global Innovation Index (GII 2022), patents per million inhabitants (QoG Time Series 2022), OECD databases (2020), and indicators from the World Economic Forum (2018), the following countries make up the European center of innovative development: Great Britain, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and Belgium. For the sake of clarity, we will call these the “center.” In general terms, the above-mentioned reforms comprise an imitative model of development aimed at emulating the most developed nations with respect to the economy and culture (Kleer 2016; Mozaryn, Rybicka, Wieszczycka 2016; Zarycki 2006; Krastev, Holmes 2020). The imitative development model led to inconsistency between the existing culture and the requirements of new technology, management methods, and legal norms. This gave rise to various types of stress and psychological malaise. Thus, for example, Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes claim that the imitative program of the Eastern European elite not only forced people to abandon their cultural customs, but also failed to fulfil their expectations in terms of well-being. The elections in Poland and in Hungary then caused the imitative elites to be pushed out of authority (Krastev, Holmes 2020), bringing in anti-imitative elites in their place. Anti-imitation appears in the declarations of leading politicians who put emphasis on “getting up off their knees” in negotiations with the EU, on native pride, sovereignty, and Catholic identity, as well as ideological criticism of the West.

The above considerations lead to the following research questions:

1. Are distinct elements of cultural potential for development related to economic development?
2. Have the economic and administrative reforms implemented coincided with a reduction in the distance in cultural potential for development between Poland and the center?
3. Following the removal of the imitative elite from power (2015), was there a halt in the administrative and economic move toward closer resemblance of the center, and was there any change in the cultural potential for development?

*Methods of Measuring the Relation between Cultural Potential  
for Development and Economic Changes*

The dependencies between the economy and culture have long been explored, but the direction of these dependencies is still a source of controversy. Thus, for example, capitalist economic institutions became widespread as a result of cultural changes (Weber 1994 and 1984), but the expansion of the folwark economy in sixteenth-century Poland was brought about by changes on the grain market, which first saw the spread of folwarks and only then the spread of folwark organizational culture (Hryniewicz 2007: 13–47). Inglehart’s studies (2018) show a similar direction of dependence, from the economy to culture. Meanwhile, the opposite direction of dependency is suggested by long-term studies of the relation between the economy and personality. First the spread of personality traits fostering the knowledge-based economy began, and then the economy began to expand of its own accord in the favorable psychological environment (Hryniewicz 2012). This means that cognitively the most worthwhile approach is to adopt an interactive direction of dependency between the economy and culture and to leave aside those methods that suggest the causality of the studied phenomena.

*Responses to the Research Questions: Are Distinct Elements of Cultural Potential  
for Development Related to Economic Development?*

The table presented below shows that the variables forming cultural potential for development are very strongly correlated with indicators of economic development, and this means that a high level of economic development requires favorable cultural conditions.

Table 1

**The relations of factors of cultural potential for development with indicators of economic development**

	GDP per capita at purchasing power parity (constant 2017 international USD)	Work efficiency. GDP per working hour	Innovation potential. World Economic Forum (Scale 0–100)
Trust in: people, legal institutions, parliament, parties, police, politicians. (Scale 0–10)	.540**	.442**	.641**
Individualism	.487**	.419**	.771**
ICRG QOG Quality of Government index	.813**	.762**	.850**
Corruption perception index	–.771**	–.697**	–.820**
Management style	.407**	.613**	.478**

\*\*Correlation significant at 0.01 (two-way). N = 194

Source: own calculations based on (Teorell et al. 2023 Data Set Time Series and Data Set Cross Section).

The table shows that the most important element for economic development is effective management via inclusive administrative institutions and lack of corruption. The link between a participatory style of management and work efficiency also deserves attention.

It concerns not only important innovations (symbolized by patents), but to a much greater degree, kaizen-type activity, which entails daily rationalization, enhancement of development, and so on. Studies in Polish factories show that a participatory style of management lowers the psychological cost of work and promotes innovation among employees in seeking improvements, new working methods, and so on. The autocratic style of management has the opposite effect (Hryniewicz 2007: 184 onwards).

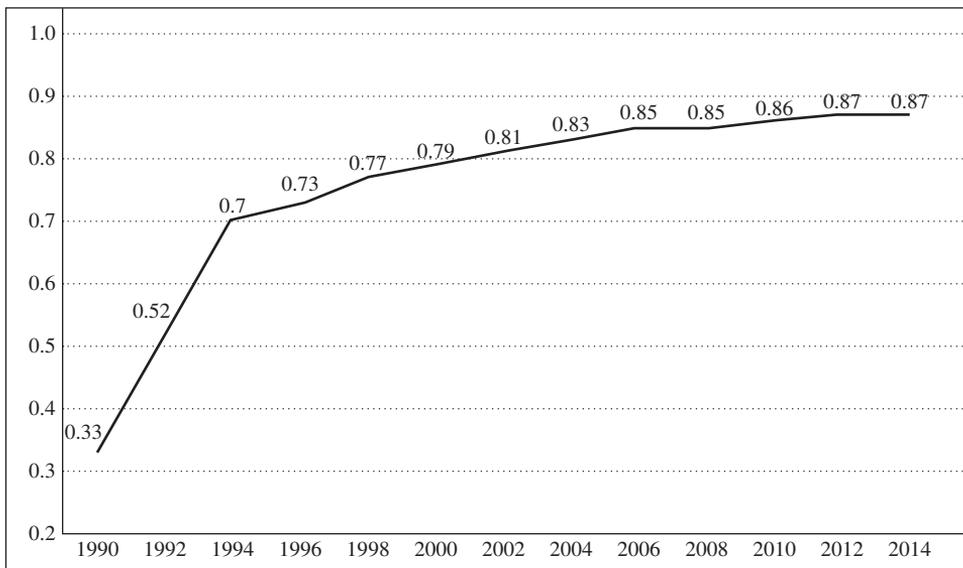
### **Have the Economic and Administrative Reforms Coincided with a Reduction in the Distance between Poland and the Center in Regard to Cultural Potential for Development?**

#### *Reforms and changes in the economy and administration*

In the 1990s, in Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries, a comprehensive transformation of institutions began in the economy, politics, legal system, and public administration in connection with EU accession (Acquis 2023). The economic reforms included large- and small-scale privatization, management of the economy, the restructuring of industry, and the liberalization of prices, trade, exchange rates, and competition policy.

Fig. 1

**Advancement in 6 reforms in Poland, in % distance from market economy standard in 1990–2014**

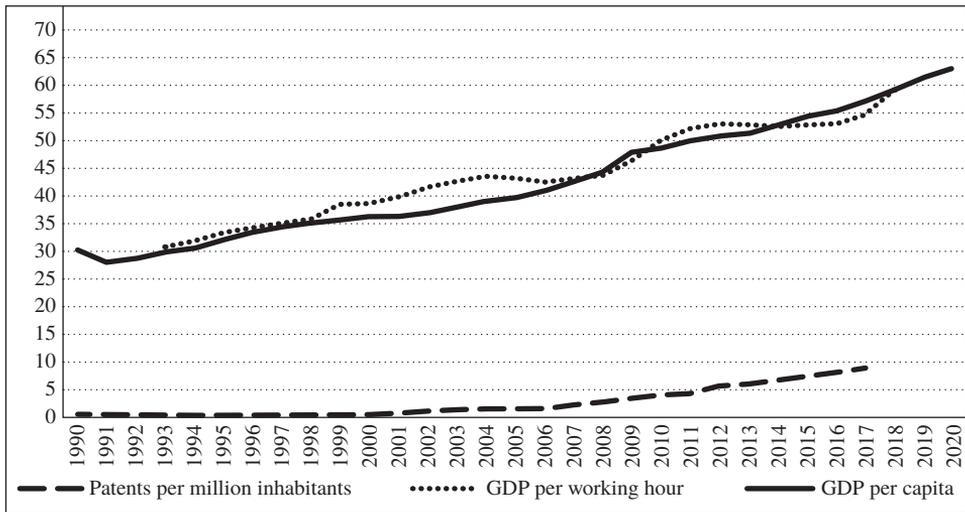


The reforms were conducted in collaboration with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and from 1990 to 2014 its experts gave numerical ratings for the implementation of these reforms on a scale of 1–4+ (EBRD 2014). As can be seen, the

greatest changes took place in the first four years. The reformatory zeal wore off slightly after accession to the EU, despite the fact that ratings equivalent to full market economy standards had not yet been achieved. A similar situation was reported in Hungary. In the opinion of one Hungarian researcher, one reason for this was the decline in international interest in the progress of reforms after 2004 (Szanyi 2016).

Fig. 2

GDP per capita, GDP per working hour and patents per million inhabitants in Poland, as a percentage of analogical values in countries of the centre



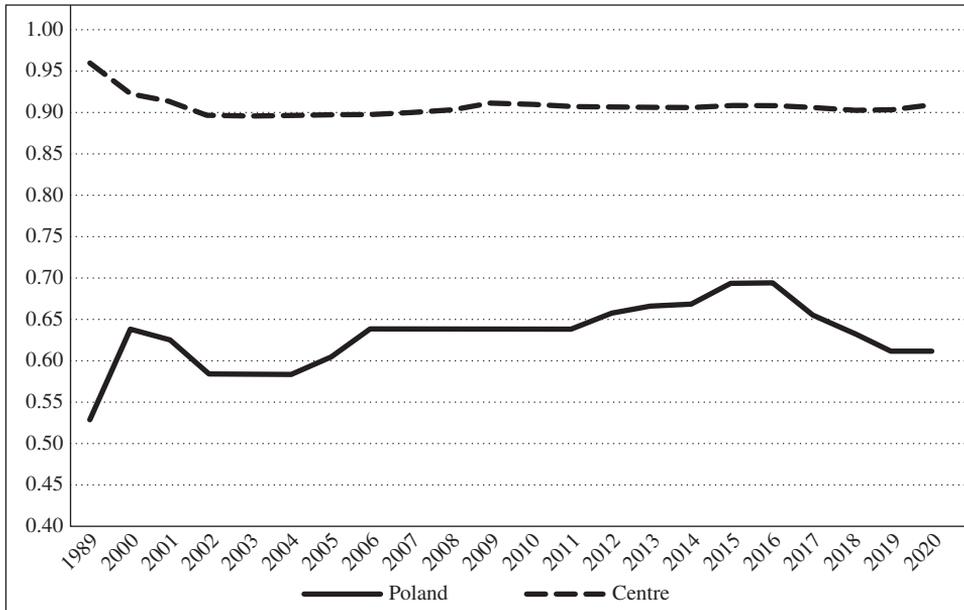
The next diagram documents the relatively rapid reduction in distance between Poland and the center in terms of work efficiency and GDP per capita. The value of this key innovation indicator (patents per million inhabitants), at only 9% of the value of the analogical index in the center, reveals the qualitative disparity in development paths. Countries at the center are making fair progress toward creating a competitive advantage in the knowledge-based economy. Meanwhile, in Poland, it is clearly still necessary to implement an imitative model of development.

In parallel to economic reforms in Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries, administrative institutions have undergone transformation (Nemec, Spacek 2017). These reforms were undertaken in collaboration with the EU government, as their aim was to prepare Poland’s administration to make effective use of EU cohesion funds. The most important improvements were greater bureaucratic efficiency and decentralized authority, as well as a strengthened role for lower-level public administration. In addition, the civil service was created.

From the viewpoint of Central and Eastern European countries, EU cohesion policy was not only a source of funds, but also of new methods of management, models of legislation, models of organizational structure, and ideas justifying their purpose.

Fig. 3

**Changes in the quality of government indicator ICRG QoG in Poland and in countries of the centre since 1989. Measured at national level**



### *Corruption*

Corruption stems from resource deficits and cultural factors, but the latter are more important (Nowakowski 1996; Tarkowska 2016; Gunarsich, Wibisana 2019).

In 2012 the methodology used to calculate the corruption estimate was changed, and therefore only data from after 2012 is fully comparable (Teorell et al. 2023: 276). Nonetheless, the earlier data gives a fair picture of the chaos that ensued during the first years of the transformation, and the effects of anticorruption efforts implemented under EU control appeared in the systematic fall in corruption from 2004 on.

The rise in corruption since 2015 has been confirmed in biannual studies of European regions. In the years 2013–2017, corruption in Polish regions fell and then increased distinctly (own calculations based on Charron et al. 2020). However, attitudes toward corruption did not change. Thus, unconditional condemnation of corruption was at the same level of 83% throughout the period 1989–2014 (own calculations based on the World Value Survey 2023). To conclude, we should point out that in terms of corruption, the gap between Poland and the center in the years 2012–20 has remained virtually the same.

### *Trust—social capital*

Until 2010, the level of trust in Poland rose slightly and then fell to the 2002 level. It is unlikely that these fluctuations were related to the dynamic of introducing reforms. Of much greater significance was the growing political conflict between two main players on

Fig. 4

**Corruption control in Poland and countries of the centre 1996–2020 (corruption control estimate).  
Low number—high corruption level**

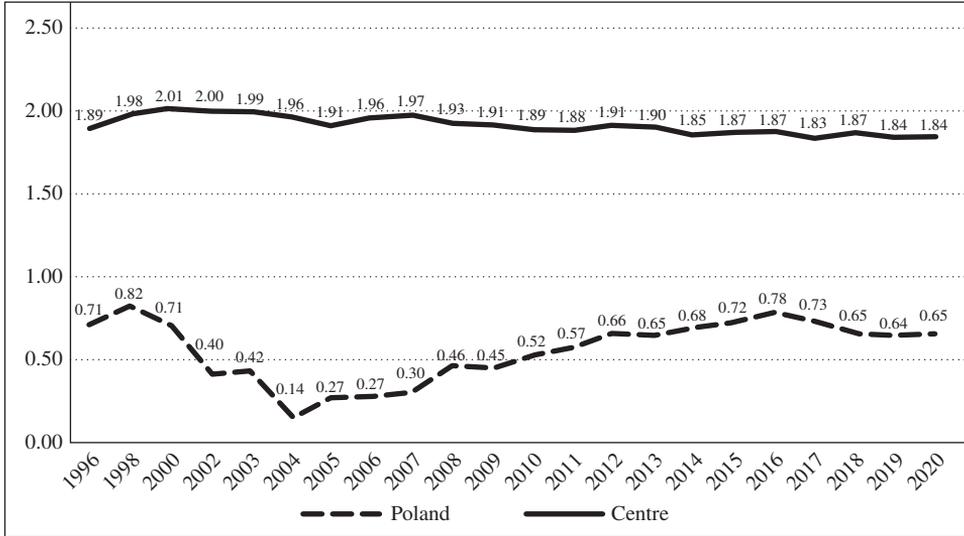
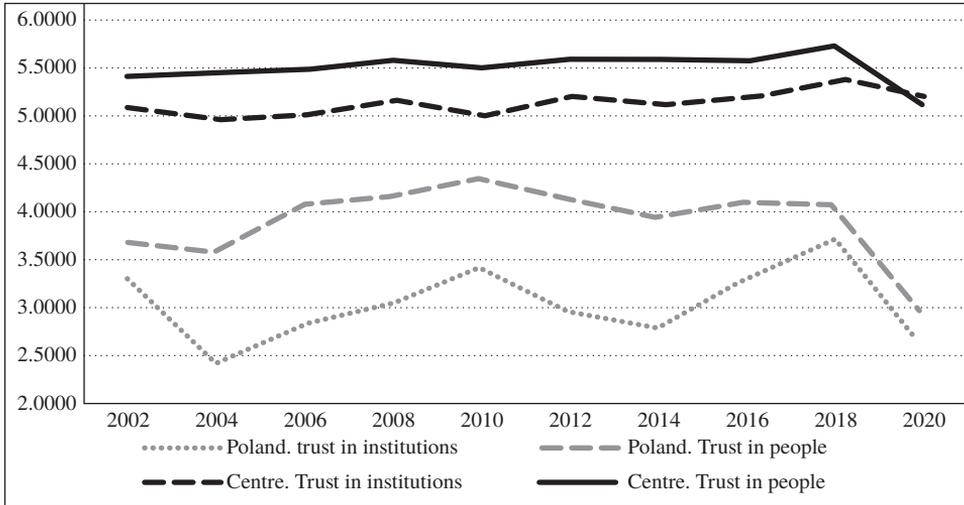


Fig. 5

**Trust in people and institutions in Poland and in countries of the centre.  
Scale: 0—lack of trust, 10—full trust**



the political stage—the conservative camp, with their supporters following the Smolensk catastrophe, and the democratic opposition.

In 2005, in WVS databases, the trust indicators among supporters of the Civic Platform party—whom we will call the pro-imitative camp—and the Law and Justice party (the anti-

imitative camp) were similar in principle: Civic Platform 1.78 and Law and Justice 1.80 on a two-point scale, with 1 = trust, 2 = lack of trust. Until the year 2014, trust in people rose among Civic Platform supporters to 1.70 and fell among Law and Justice supporters to 1.85, and this difference is socially significant (own calculations based on the [World Value Survey 2023](#)). Information from European Social Survey databases shows a dramatic fall in trust in the years 2018–2020, probably as the result of the electoral campaigns and election results in 2019. Among Civic Platform supporters, there was a fall from 4.5 to 3.1, and among Law and Justice supporters from 3.92 to 2.77 on a scale from 0–10 = full trust (own calculations based on [ESS 2023](#)). These changes clearly coincide with the linear graph of overall trust for the whole population in Poland ([Fig. 5](#)), which supports the thesis regarding the key significance of political conflict in Poland for the loss of social capital measured by trust.

In conclusion, we should remark that the distance in terms of social capital between Poland and the center has increased. The relative destabilization of social capital in Poland has decreased the chances for development. And thus, for example, the fall in trust in institutions in Poland in the years 2016–18 was accompanied by a drop in investment: from 20.1% GDP in 2015 to 17.5% in 2017, and to 16.7% in 2020 ([Investments 2023](#)).

#### *Individualism*

The available data<sup>1</sup> covers three series of research in the period 1994–2014. During this time in Poland the individualism indicator increased from 0.32 to 0.42, while in the center the indicator increased from 0.54 to 0.67, and thus there is a growing distance.

#### *Management style*

Polish managers are relatively more autocratic. In Poland and the center there has been a slight fall in the intensity of the autocratic management style.

The results of studies show a slight narrowing of the gap between Poland and the center in this regard.

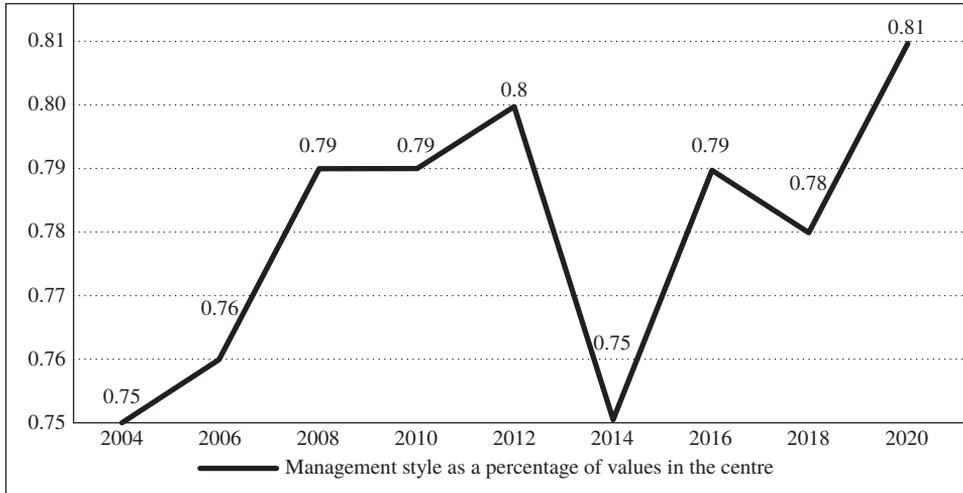
### **Following the Removal of the Imitative Elite from Government in 2015, Was There a Halt in the Administrative and Economic Move Toward Closer Resemblance to the Center, and Did the Cultural Potential for Development Change?**

The above graphs (3 and 4) show that after 2015 the quality of government worsened and corruption grew. At the root of a sound administration is an independent civil service. Its creation after 1990 was fairly arduous and rather incomplete. After 2015, new regulations were introduced as the elected party needed to find highly motivated people to implement its program, and de facto this involved abolishing the civil service as an impartial body of public officials ([Banaszkiewicz 2016](#); [Filar 2016](#): 6). Furthermore, the centralist stance of the government led to reduced autonomy for local governments and reinforced leanings

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<sup>1</sup> Studies for the years 2017–2022 were conducted in Poland using a different method, and therefore they are not comparable with the results of earlier studies.

Fig. 6

**Management style in Poland, as a percentage of the management style scale in the centre**

toward clientelism in relations between the government and local authorities (Swianiewicz, Lukomska 2020).

Toward the end of the imitative-elite government, the state share in the economy in Poland was the greatest among the OECD countries—three times greater than in Great Britain and the Netherlands (Filar 2019). After 2015, processes of state control and nationalization were initiated. Nationalization processes involved acquiring banks and private enterprises or taking over those in difficult circumstances, and additionally the implementation of anti-market regulations, as well as the use of preferred stock to acquire a controlling interest in private equity companies (Błaszczuk 2017; Filar 2019). Similar findings were recorded in Hungary, where according to Miklos Szanyi, the logic of privatization has been overturned.

It should be stated that in Poland, since the anti-imitative elite came to power, we have witnessed a halt in economic leanings toward the center, although regression in this area does not seem to be as pronounced as in the case of administration. The cultural potential for development has been reduced, as there has been a relative rise in corruption and decline in social capital, yet the gap in terms of management style has narrowed only slightly.

### **Assessing the Distance in Terms of the Cultural Potential for Development**

The slight cultural changes and rapid economic growth in the wake of reforms indicate that the reforms took place in a similar cultural environment. However, the relatively rapid economic growth in Poland was not associated with the development of a knowledge-based economy (see Fig. 2.). In the center, from the 1980s, a steep rise in the number of patents paved the way for the development of new, knowledge-based economic sectors. This was accompanied by rapid expansion in the R&D sector. Thus, in countries at the

center, the number of researchers per 1,000 employees rose systematically from 0.55 in 1993 to 1.29 in 2019, while in Poland in the same period the number rose and fell, reaching 0.75 in 2019. Cultural tendencies are well illustrated in the use of EU funds. Decisions on how funds are allocated result from the behavior of thousands of applicants and members of evaluation committees. Thus, for the “Research and Innovation” objective 2014–2020, Poland allocated 5.9% of the total funds granted, while the Netherlands allocated 34.7%, Denmark 22.2% and Germany 21.7% (Cohesion data 2014–2020). It is evident that in Polish economic culture, development is still equated with the prevailing industrial development paradigm. The relatively stable cultural distance between Poland and the center indicates a low receptivity to patterns of behavior that promote a knowledge-based economy.

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