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6.2. Civil experience, activities for the benefit of the community and civil skills

Antoni Sulek

Civil experience, activities for the benefit of the community and civil skills are indispensable to both a democratic society and its citizens. Democracy needs citizens who want and are able to make use of its mechanisms, and if the citizens are deprived of civil skills, they are unable to benefit from the opportunities democracy offers them, such as the possibility to express their preferences and fulfil their interests. The development of democracy and the increase in civil skills in society support each other. The places where citizens may gain experience and learn civil skills include voluntary organisations, activities and contacts that fill the space between an individual and the society, citizen and state. The network of such organisations and activities creates what we call self-organising civil society.

6.2.1. Assessment of systemic change and their influence on the life of Poles

The political and economic systemic changes in Poland since 1989, the establishment of democracy in the place of authoritarianism and the replacing of the command with the market economy, brought with them deep and far-reaching changes in society, changed the position of basic social groups and influenced the fate of millions. In order to assess these changes, the following questions were asked: *Do you believe that the reforms in Poland since 1989 were a success or rather not?* (question 43). The question has been posed since 1997, which allows us to follow changes in assessment over time. This is important because the influence, memory and assessment of such an enormous historical event as this have their own dynamic.

6.2.2. General assessment of the reforms and its social differentiation

The general assessment of the reforms initiated in 1989 is a difficult study material. Only just over half of those surveyed were able to provide answers at all, and 44.4% of these found themselves in the "difficult to say" category" - even among people with a higher than secondary education, this share is not much lower (41.3%) (table 6.2.1). However, those who are unable to provide an assessment of the reforms are slowly growing fewer. In 1997, there were 59.8%, the trend fluctuates visibly as between 2009 and 2011 the category lost 3.1 p.p. and since 2011 another 4.1 p.p., but between 2007-2009 there were 4.0 p.p. more undecided respondents.

The difficulty in formulating this assessment has many reasons connected to the complex character of the events assessed as well as the process by which these assessments are created. The post 1989 reforms are a complex of events ever further in the past and as the population loses those who actually remember them, the share of the answer "difficult to say" may grow in natural fashion. The assessments of these reforms do not arise only on the basis of personal observation as new generations form theirs on the basis of narrations of their elders or simply accept their assessment, and narrations present in the public domain are also important. These experiences and narrations are differentiated, as are also the assessments. But that is not only why the post-1989 reforms cannot count on a consensus opinion generally accepted in society. For that to be possible, a consensus among the political and media elite is essential in that it would shape mass opinion and raise it to the level of a socially accepted "common imagination". However, for many more years many Poles will not know what to think of the 1989 reforms, and so opinions will differ.

Respondents who assessed the post-1989 reforms as unsuccessful (53.9%) were 4 times more numerous than those with the opposite opinion (11.6%). In relation to 2011, these assessments became more negative as then 14% said the reforms had been a success as opposed to 37.2% who answered that this had not been the case.

The dominant opinion that the reforms had been *unsuccessful* varies with social position, however it does prevail over the opposite in all social categories by age, education, income, professional status and all place of residence classes. Therefore it is the real opinion of a definite, though relative majority. Our analysis will focus on the minority of the opinion that the reforms had succeeded, with the majority as the backdrop.

Of significance to the assessment of the post-1989 reforms is educational level (table 6.2.1), behind which label is concealed number of years in education and its kind, as is also profession and belonging to a definite level of society. In the four main educational groups (primary and lower, basic vocational, secondary and higher) the breakdown was 5.3%, 7.3%, 11% and 22.4% respectively. The rise in positive

assessments with education is slow and there is only a jump with higher education, and only in the elitist doctorate group do the positive opinions (36.9%) outweigh the negative (34.9%). Theoretically speaking one could expect that the opinions of the upper social spheres, which are propagated by the media, will "cascade down" to the high-school graduate and engineer groups, there to mix with already existing opinions and so on. However, compared to 2011, nothing of the sort was observed. Quite the opposite was, as in the masters' degree group there was a balance of opinions (a difference of 0.6 p.p.), and today negative opinions clearly prevail.

Table 6.2.1. Percentage distribution of answers to "In your opinion, were the reforms in Poland after 1989 in general successful or unsuccessful?" by educational attainment for the 18+

Educational attainment	Successful	Unsuccessful	Hard to say	N
Higher education with at least a PhD title	36.9	34.9	28.2	147
Higher education with at least an MA degree or an equivalent degree	26.5	34.1	39.3	3770
Higher education with an Engineer or Bachelor degree	15.4	36.6	48.0	1263
Post-secondary education	11.5	46.6	41.9	805
Secondary vocational	10.5	48.4	41.4	5499
Secondary general	11.9	42.5	45.6	2570
Basic vocational education	7.4	50.2	42.4	6724
Lower secondary	6.9	21.9	71.2	1524
Primary completed	5.3	48.8	45.9	3575
No education / primary not completed	6.0	42.8	51.2	213
Total	3039	14490	11632	26170

Correlation between place of residence class and assessment of reform had a similar direction and shape (table 6.2.2). Positive assessment of the reforms become more frequent with place of residence size very slowly and only in the largest cities of over 500 thousand residents does their frequency go above 21.8%, but even there they are far from parity.

Table 6.2.2. Percentage distribution of answers to "In your opinion, were the reforms in Poland after 1989 more successful than not?" by place of residence class for the 18+

Place of residence class	In your opinion, were the reforms in Poland after 1989 more successful than not?			
	Successful	Unsuccessful	Hard to say	N
Towns of more than 500k	21.8	39.6	38.6	3160
Towns of 200k-500k	17.0	42.4	40.9	2483
Towns of 100k-200k	12.6	41.6	45.8	2015
Towns of 20k-100k	10.6	44.5	44.9	5098
Towns of fewer than 20k	10.7	48.4	42.9	3119
Rural areas	7.7	45.2	47.1	10292
Total	11.6	43.9	44.4	26170

Income also influences the assessment of the reforms. 6.7% of the lowest per capita household income quartile assesses the reforms as successful, the two middle quartiles report 7.5% and 10.5% and the upper is 21.5% of those expressing an opinion

As far as the great professional groups are concerned, it is the private entrepreneurs who most often rate the reforms positively at 39%, and this proportion is for the group recognised to be the biggest beneficiary of the market reforms! Each of the remaining groups assess the reforms negatively many times more often than positively. Among public sector workers the proportion amounts to 15.8% to 44.7% and the private sector 14.3 to 41.7%. Among farmers it is 6.7% to 50.2% similarly to pensioners, those receiving welfare benefits, the unemployed and other categories of the passive professional.

In 2011, 26.5% of entrepreneurs claimed the reforms had been a success as opposed to the 31.4% who reported that they had not, though there was near parity among students (12.9% "successful" to 14.4% "unsuccessful"). These however, just like entrepreneurs in the last two years, drew closer in their assessments to the other social groups (10.4% to 24.4%).

Generally, beliefs about the success of the post-1989 reforms culminate in the upper-regions of the social ladder, while occurring much more rarely in the lower reaches where the dominant opinion that the reforms did not succeed is especially strong. This culmination of positive and negative ratings of reform is strengthened by the fact that the basic dimensions of social position like educational level, income and place of residence size interrelate. As a result, for example there are categories in which the combined influence of education, place of residence class and income cause positive assessment to be clearly dominant. Such a category would be, among all the city types, those with higher education in the upper income quartile, so that around 80% of those resident in towns of over 200 thousand with higher education and highest income assess the reforms positively. These categories are made up of few individuals and do not have a marked effect on the breakdown of ratings in the whole of society. Also, their influence on mass opinion are similarly small, and mass opinion is rather shaped by people's personal experience and opinions encountered in the immediate surroundings.

6.2.2.1. Factors shaping the general assessment of the reforms

The differentiating influence of social position (education, place of residence class and income) on the assessment of reforms may be explained with the aid of various factors that, being correlates or components of features of social position, influence that position more directly.

In previous editions of *Social Diagnosis* it was demonstrated that there continues to be a positive relation between the ratings of the conditions of *one's own* life and the *general* assessment of reform after 1989. People who answered the question "*When was life easier for you - before 1989 or today?*" as today, also clearly better assess the post-1989 reforms. For example, in 2009, among the respondents who subjectively felt that their life had been better before 1989, only 7.4% assessed the reforms positively and 59.9% negatively. However, of those who reported that their life had improved after 1989, 30.2% assessed the reforms as successful and 31.4% as unsuccessful. Because as time goes by the share of persons who can actually make the comparison between their lives before and after 1989 is shrinking all the time, this question has not been posed in this edition of *Social Diagnosis*.

An important shaping factor of the general assessment of post-1989 reforms is political values and the belief that democracy is a good system. On the acceptance of democracy scale, 25.5% respondents chose the opinion that "democracy is superior to all other forms of government", 13.6% that "sometimes non-democratic government can be better than democratic", 16% that "it does not matter whether the government is democratic or non-democratic" while 5.8% believes that "democracy is a bad form of government" and that 39% gave no opinion. Therefore, unreserved acceptance of democracy as a form of government is in Poland low; even though it gained 4 p.p. in 2009-2011, in the last two years it lost 2.7% so it is difficult to talk about a strengthening in the absolute faith in democracy.

Attitudes to democracy strongly depend on educational attainment. In the following four main education groups, the view of democracy as absolutely superior to other forms of government was expressed by respectively 11.6% (2011-14.4%), 16.7 (20.5), 27.1 (29.8) and 43.6 (45.6)% of respondents. Just as two years before, this view was shared by more than half respondents with an opinion only in the group of the highest educated.

Being in good personal economic shape also favours the affirmation of democracy. 38.7% of respondents in the upper-income quartile absolutely accept democracy, in the third 26.7%, in the second 19.5% and in the lower only 15.6%, which is two and a half times less than in the highest. Ratings also grow with size of place of residence from 19.2% in rural areas to 41.8% in the largest cities (over 500 thousand residents). The greatest growth (6.9 p.p.) takes place between towns of 200-500 thousand and that of over 500 thousand. The influence of each of these factors: education, income and size of place of residence, is therefore abrupt and the rise in the affirmation of democracy takes place only at the highest level of the three factors mentioned. While they are inter-correlated, each has its individual effect on the acceptance of democracy.

Such a low absolute acceptance of political democracy cannot favour society's positive evaluation of the reforms taken up since 1989. However it does explain some of the individual distribution of these assessments (table 6.2.3). People who treat democracy as the best form of government sharply differ in their positive assessment of the reform (28%)

The affirmation of democracy influences the assessment of the reforms on each of the four main levels of education as those who accept democracy without reservation much more often than is the norm see the reforms as successful (19.1% compared to 5.3% in the educated group, 18.9% compared

to 7.3%, 23.5% compared to 11% and 38.1% compared to 22.4% in the highest educated group), which is similar in all the classes of residence and income quartiles, and is therefore the real influence of acceptance of democracy on the assessment of the post-1989 reforms. Most likely, people who value democracy appreciate that Poland became a democratic country after 1989.

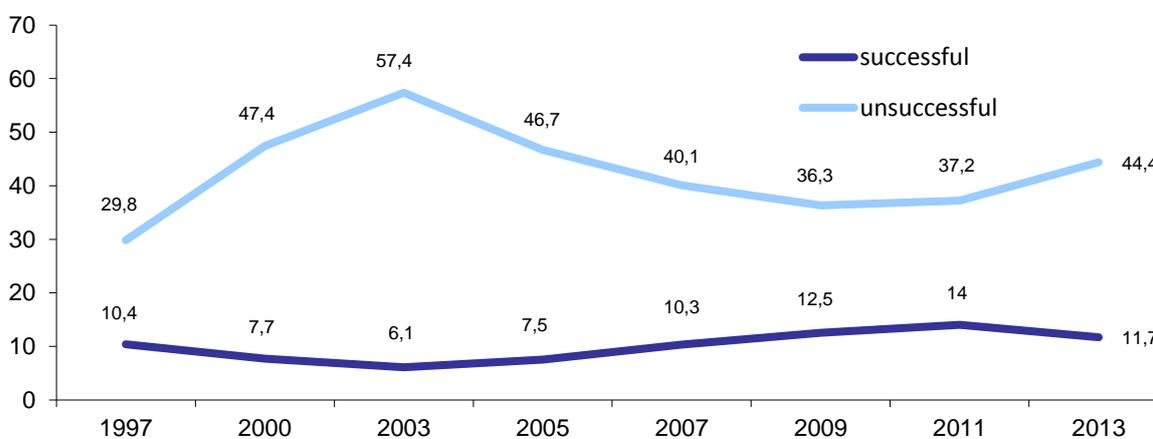
Table 6.2.3. Percentage distribution of answers to "In your opinion, were the reforms in Poland after 1989 more successful than not?" by attitude to democracy for the 18+

Which of these statements on democracy is closer to your attitude?	In your opinion, were the reforms in Poland after 1989 more successful than not?			
	Successful	Unsuccessful	Hard to say	N=100%
Democracy is a superior form of government	28.0	34.0	38.1	6596
Sometimes non-democratic rule is better than democracy	10.9	56.1	33.0	3512
It does not really matter whether the government is democratic or not	6.2	53.9	38.9	4170
Democracy is a bad form of government	5.5	71.2	23.2	1498
It is hard to say	4.4	37.8	57.8	1071
Total	11.6	43.9	44.5	25847

6.2.2.2. Dynamic of assessment of reform in 1997-2013

Dynamic analysis of social assessments of post-1989 reforms covers eight readings starting in 1997. Their results are presented in figure 5.11.1. Over that whole period the opinion dominated in society that the 1989 reforms had not succeeded. Negative ratings always occurred several times more often than the positive, and such a long-term statistical domination of negative ratings of the 1989 reforms has a tendency to turn into a self-perpetuating social dominance. A social climate is created in which a negative opinion of the reforms takes on the features of political correctness.

Over this whole period there is a lack of a single general tendency allowing the prediction of assessments, whether for their steady improvement or deterioration. Firstly, between 1997 and 2003 the already small minority positively rating the reforms actually shrank, while the opposite view doubled in size. However later, from 2003, a new trend appeared and the assessment of reforms systematically improved from 6.1% in 2003 to 14% in 2011, while the share of negative ratings fell from 57.5% to 37.2%, after which in 2013 there was another reversal. Negative opinions have risen to levels from before 2007 and the positive have fallen to that before 2009 (see figure 5.11.1). The improvement in opinions on the 1989 reforms may occur as a result of general economic growth and its positive effect on respondents. This influence cannot however be very significant as the events in question recede with time and mass opinion tends to see the association between the current state of the economy and the 1989 reforms ever less clearly. Meanwhile, socially accepted assessments of those changes have started to live a life of their own. Data source: 1997 - Czapiński, 1998, 2000-2011 - *Social Diagnosis*.



Data source: 1997 — Czapiński, 1998; 2000-2011 — *Social Diagnosis*

Figure 6.2.1. Percentage distribution of answers to "In your opinion, were the reforms in Poland after 1989 more successful than not?" between 1997 and 2013 among those aged 18 and above

6.2.3. Participation and serving functions in organisations

The degree of *participation in associations*, that is the percentage of the citizens who belong to a voluntary organisation, is the simplest measure of the state of a civil society. In 2013 in Poland, 13.7% of respondents belonged to some “organisations, associations, parties, committees, councils, religious groups or a clubs”. 10.3% of them were members of only one association, 2.5% of two associations, and 0.9% of two or more. 86.3% did not belong to any organisation. If the question about the membership used in the research (Question 48) was broken down and respondents were asked separately about their membership in associations, parties and committees and so on, this percentage would probably be higher. However, this demonstrates that only in the case of not quite 15% of respondents the membership in an association is important enough to recall when asked.

Supplementary to the question on formal membership was one on real activity in organisations like this (*Do you currently take active part in the activities of this kind of organisation?*). 72.2% of association members say they are active, and 27.8 admit not to being active in their associations. Few people belong to organizations, but once they are members, then they say they are active, with those who are members and active amounting to 9.9% of society.

The current edition of *Social Diagnosis* for the first time investigates to which kind of organization respondents belong. The following results were gained (figure 6.2.2). Those who belong to whatever organisation definitely more often (23.9%) are active in religious organisations. This result is worth noting because, in discussions about voluntary organisations and civil society etc., religious organisations are often missed out altogether.

Serving functions in organisations constitutes a higher level of participation in the civil society. 46% of respondents who declared membership in an organisation stated that they “fulfil some functions in these organisations”. This means that at present (only) 6.3% of Polish people serve roles voluntarily. This experience is of double importance for them; these persons not only participate in managing the organisation, but also have been elected to do so. The remaining 94% are deprived of this experience and the skills that it shapes.

In comparison with 2011, there has been a fall in the percentage of the persons participating in associations by 1%; however, we have no basis to interpret this fall (table 6.2.4.). In ten years of research (2003-2013) there has been either systematic increase or systematic decrease in interest in civil organisations, the association indicator changes irregularly between 12.1 and 15.1%. Civil society in Poland, understood as participation in voluntary organisations, has not been developing and has been failing to attract more people to its networks and structures. Similarly to fulfilling functions in organisations between 2003 and 2013 the share among respondents changed irregularly between 4.8-6.8%.

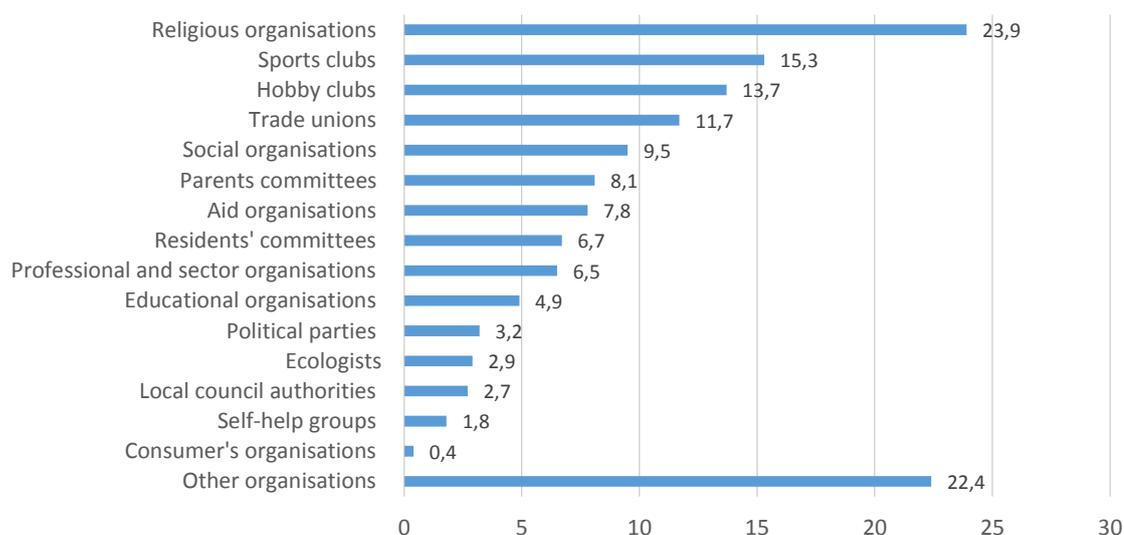


Figure 6.2.2. Percentage of active members of various organisations

Table 6.2.4. Percentage of active organisation members and the active in the community in 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011 and 2013 for the 18+

	2003 N=9380	2005 N=8539	2007 N=12747	2009 N=25568	2011 N=25580	2013 N=26170
Organisation members	12.2	12.1	15.1	13.2	14.8	13.7
Actively fulfilling functions among members	45.1	55.7	41.4	37.9	32.2	46.0
Actively fulfilling functions in general	5.3	6.8	6.3	5.0	4.8	6.3
Active in the community	12.9	13.6	14.1	15.6	15.6	15.2

Participation in associations is socially stratified and the differences between the groups result from diverse organisational offers addressed to specific groups and from various degrees of their willingness to join an organisation. The percentage of persons participating in associations is increasing slightly and irregularly together with the size of place of residence from 8.5% in the rural areas up to 12.9% in large cities. On the other hand, this percentage increases regularly together with their educational level of achievement (from 4.7% among the persons with primary and lower secondary education up to 15.7% in the case of the persons with higher education, see also table 6.2.3.) and income (next quarters 7.7%, 8.1%, 10.8% and 15.4%). The group with the highest percentage of persons participating in associations is the group of public sector employees (27.2%) while the groups with the lowest percentage of such persons include the unemployed (6.1%) and other professionally inactive (9.6%).

The effect of social position factors on members' activity in organisations is not great. In the for education groups, it changes in the range of 70.5-74.3%, in income quartiles 70.1-73.4% and in terms of place of residence 64.9-74.9%

In the case of serving functions in organisations the pattern of diversification is similar. The higher the educational attainment, the more frequently those persons have such experience. In the four main categories of educational attainment, the percentages of the respondents participating in organisations who also work in such organisations are as follows: 31.1%, 38.7%, 45.3 and 53.5%. The difference between the groups with extreme results is very great. Smaller is the differentiation in the income categories: in the following quartiles of income functions fulfilled by the following 39.1, 34.3%, 45.9% and 53.8 of the associated.

Educational attainment and income are then the basic factors of stratification, hence participation in associations depends on stratification; the strata from the upper parts of the social ladder participate in associations more often while the lower strata less often. Since educational attainment is connected with income, the impact of educational attainment alone, regardless of the income, was examined as well and vice versa. It turned out that at every income level, education retains its influence on association, though also at every education level both these factors, though linked, favour independent association.

The group of persons serving functions in organisations is similarly socially stratified. This experience is slightly more common among men than among women (50.1% in relation to 41.9% of the associated) with a small difference in the degree of participation in organisations between these two groups (14.3% in relation to 13.1%).

39.1%, 34.3%, 45.9% and 53.8% of persons participating in organisations from the further quartiles also worked in organisations. Similarly as in the case of participation in organisations alone, the impact of the attainment level is crucial here. The higher the category of educational attainment, the more persons served in organisations. 31.1% of persons participating in organisations with primary education also served functions in such organisations, just as 38.7% with vocational secondary education, 35.3% with general secondary education and 53.5% with higher and post-secondary education (see also table 6.2.3).

If we compare the diversification in the case of serving functions with the differences related to participation in organisations, these differences become more visible. At present, 1.7% of respondents with primary education serve in organisations, just as 3.8% of respondents with vocational education, 6.7% with general secondary education and 12.1% with higher education. Educational attainment, especially in the case of higher education, not only contributes to membership in voluntary organisations – persons with higher education are also more likely to work in such organisations. As a result, persons from the upper social strata, and in particular persons with higher education, are several times more likely to be elected and serve in civil organisations. Below the group with general secondary education such experience is very rare and at the lowest educational level even extremely rare as it is shared by only one and a half% of persons from this category.

6.2.4. Joint actions and work for the benefit of others

Participation in organisations is only one of the possible measures of a civil society's development. In Poland persons who want to do something for their communities are unwilling to establish formal organisations to this end. It is enough for them to initiate or join some *activities for the benefit of their own community*. However, the research shows that this phenomenon is as rare as membership in organisations. Only 15.2% of respondents were involved in "any activities for the benefit of the local community (gmina, housing estate, town or neighbourhood)" (Question 46) which would be important enough to recall in answering the question. In 2001 and 2009 the percentage of such persons was at 15.6%, but in 2007 it was 14.1%, in 2005 13.6%, in 2003 12.9% (see table 6.2.1). This slow but systematic growth in the involvement in the works for the benefit of the community observed during the last decade halted and it is not known when this will change.

Men are more likely to get involved in local initiatives than women (16.7% in relation to 13.9%). This kind of commitment increases together with educational attainment level. In the subsequent four main education categories the percentages of persons involved in local initiatives are as follows: 6.1%, 12.5%, 16.2% and 23.5%. In the subsequent income quartiles, 15.7%, 11.6%, 11.3 and 16.1% of respondents were involved in local initiatives.

An even more informal form of taking part in the community's life is *unpaid work or services for persons outside the family or for a social organisation*, which was measured only in the previous (2011) edition of *Social Diagnosis*. This type of social activity covers many diverse actions, from spontaneous neighbourly help in rural areas to organised voluntary services. During the year this type of activity was performed by 19.6% of respondents.

Men prevailed in this group (22.6% in comparison to 16.9% women). This type of activity is less frequent and it is slightly more frequent in large cities (22.6% in cities with 200,000-500,000 inhabitants and 24.8% in cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants). In the lower income quartile such activities were initiated by 16.5%, in the middle 50% 18.0%, and in the upper quartile 25.4% of respondents. The factor which had the greatest impact on this type of activity was educational attainment, and in the main four subsequent education categories the percentages of persons taking up such activities were as follows: 7.6%, 17.2%, 20.15% and 30.3% with a four-fold difference between the extreme groups.

Therefore, not only the membership and active participation in formal civil organisations are clearly dependent on the social group, measured by educational attainment, but also participation in work for the benefit of the community as well as work for other persons or for a social organisation. Social inactivity, avoiding grassroots initiatives for the benefit of others or social organisations are common in Poland, and among the persons with primary education the experience of social activity is very rare, several times less frequent than among the persons with higher education. The persons with higher education visibly stand out above the rest.

6.2.5. Participation in public meetings

People participate in democracy not only when they participate in organisations or do something jointly for others or for the benefit of their community, but also when they gather, discuss and decide on something together. Participation in public meetings is an easily accessible phenomenon. Such events occur in virtually every environment and the only cost the participants incur concerns their time. Participation in such meetings allows for learning about the issues outside one's life, listen to various arguments, express own opinions, influence decisions, decide on something jointly and take responsibility for one's decisions. Moreover, the participants may take part in voting, elect bodies at least for the time of the meeting, and sometimes also choose their representatives, listen to their reports and learn about the meeting's procedures and organisation. Preparing and leading meetings, commenting on a certain matter publicly as well as participating in decision making processes all constitute important civil skills. At a public meeting these skills are not only practised but also developed as this is the place where people learn how to be active citizens.

The research demonstrates that every sixth respondent (17%) participated in a public meeting during last year (outside the workplace). Some meetings were probably forgotten as unimportant, though on the other hand certain earlier meetings were probably remembered as being more recent (the telescoping effect). Since 2003, this percentage rose up to 2011, after which it dropped sharply by 5 p.p. to the lowest ever studied level (figure 6.2.3)

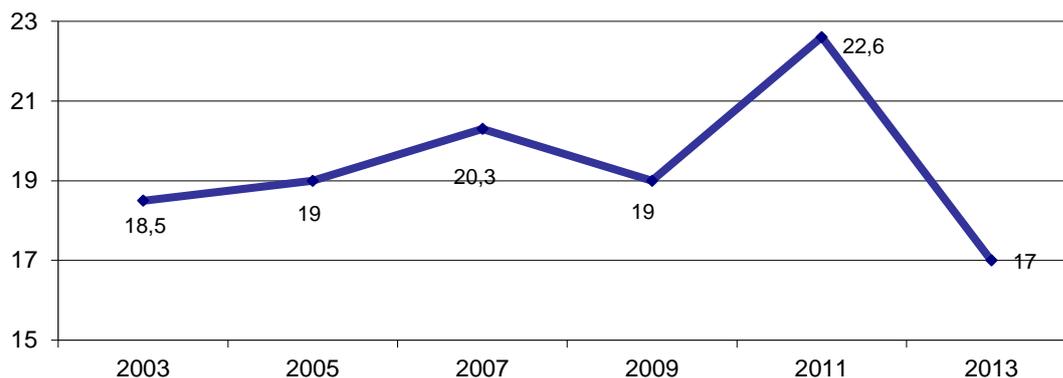


Figure 6.2.3. Percentage participating in public meetings in 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2013 for the 18+

6.2.5 Participation in elections

Participation in elections is the most common civil experience. When asked about the participation in the last (2011) government elections, held in 2013, 64.6% of respondents responded positively, 30.1% answered negatively, and 5.3% were not yet 18.

The percentage of persons who voted in the elections resulting from the research is highly overstated in relation to the actual turnout of 48.9%, as announced by the National Electoral Commission (www.pkw.gov.pl).

The retrospective overstating of the turnout by voters is common in surveys and explained by how respondents conform to the good citizen model. Approximately 2/3 of *Social Diagnosis* respondents declare their participation in elections, regardless of the election type and the actual turnout. In 2007, 65% of respondents declared voting in the local government elections in November 2006, where the actual turnout was 46%. Similarly, in 2009, 66% of respondents declared voting in the parliamentary elections in 2007 with an actual turnout of 54%. However, it may be assumed that this bias is not systematically connected with social factors and thus, in general, it does not prevent an analysis of the social conditions of participation in elections.

Participation in elections is connected with the social status, measured by educational level of achievement. In the main four education categories the percentages of persons taking part in elections were as follows: 50.1%, 53.5%, 70.4% and 81.2%. In the following income quartiles this percentage is 57.6%, 63.8%, 72.2% and 78.9%. Generally, similar results and relations were observed in the previous editions of *Social Diagnosis*, both in 2009 were asked about whether they had voted in parliamentary elections, and as in 2011 when the respondents were asked about their participation in the previous local government elections.

All surveyed types of social experience and civil activities are then connected, some even considerably, with social status measured by educational attainment (see table 6.2.5.).

The lower the educational attainment, the more inactive and less experienced people are as regards organised grassroots activities. The higher the educational level, the more frequently people set up organisations and become members of already existing ones or voluntarily serve functions in such organisations. Also they are more willing to take part in initiatives for the benefit of their own community. Moreover, they more frequently participate in public meetings and, as determined in *Social Diagnosis* 2007 and 2009, they organise such meetings and speak at them, as well as are more willing to sign collective letters, protests and petitions and so more often they participate in local and national elections more often. People with higher education are better organised in social terms and better at voicing their interests. They know how to take advantage of the opportunities democracy offers them at the local level.

A summary measure of the social experiences and civic activities is presented as an index – which consists in the number of experiences where each of the six experiences was counted as one point. The index has the following distribution (table 6.2.6.):

An average value of the index for the total respondents is 1.27, and the modal value is 1 (47.1%). In the last year, 28% of respondents had no social or civil experience as defined herein. The value of the index depends highly on participation in government elections, the figure for which is considerably overstated. If it were possible to correct declarations of participation in elections, the index value would be even significantly higher. This considerable impact of participation in elections on the index demonstrates that elections are a special standard of civil life in Poland and also how uneventful this life is in between the elections; many Polish people take up social and civic activities only in the years of elections.

Table 6.2.5. Distribution of social experiences index and civil activity for the 18+

Educational attainment	Organisation membership	Fulfilling functions in organisations as members	Community service	Voluntary work	Public meeting attendance	Voting in 2010
Higher, at least a PhD	44.5	79.8	72.2	42.5	54.8	88.6
Higher, at least an MA or equivalent degree	25.2	69.8	51.6	26.3	27.6	84.9
Higher, Engineer or Bachelor degree	16.9	71.7	56.5	16.7	20.3	73.8
Post-secondary	16.4	78.3	52.4	17.7	19.5	74.3
Secondary vocational	15.6	74.7	48.0	17.3	18.6	72.0
General secondary	13.3	73.3	38.6	13.9	14.9	66.8
Basic vocational	8.7	69.3	37.3	12.1	14.1	63.7
Lower secondary	14.6	78.8	42.3	14.5	13.4	83.0
Primary completed	5.6	70.3	31.5	6.3	8.9	51.3
None / primary not completed	1.6	81.2	9.7	2.1	3.9	30.4
Total	13.7	72.2	46.0	15.2	16.9	64.6

Table 6.2.6. Distribution of the social experience index and civil activities for the 18+

Index value	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
0	28.0	28.0
1	47.1	75.0
2	11.2	86.2
3	5.6	91.8
4	3.1	94.9
5	2.7	97.6
6	2.4	100.0

The index demonstrates the importance of educational attainment for all social and civil experiences (figure 6.2.4.).

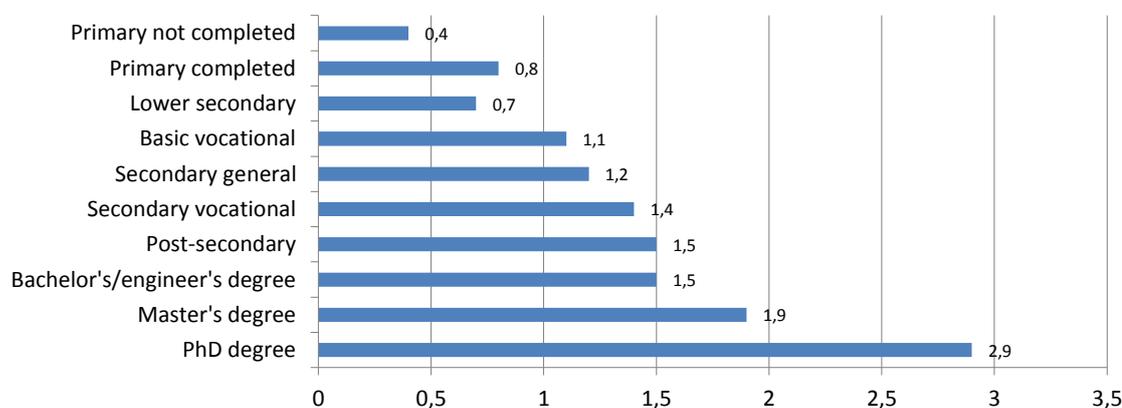


Figure 6.2.4. Social experience index and civil activities by educational attainment for the 18+

Social experiences tend to accumulate; the persons who are members of an organisation, those who act for the benefit of the community, work for others and for social organisations and participate in public meetings are very often the same people (table 6.2.7.).

Table 6.2.7. Intercorrelations (Pearson's *r*) between civil experience for the 18+

	2	3	4	5
1. Voting in elections in 2011	0.14*	0.14*	0.12*	0.12*
2. Community service		0.40*	0.40*	0.37*
3. Public meeting participation			0.32*	0.35*
4. Voluntary work for social organisations				0.34*
5. Membership of organisation				

* $p=0,000$

6.2.7. Acceptance of democracy and trust in people in relation to social and civil experiences

The social experiences and civic activities of Polish people are visibly dependent on social status. Theoretically speaking, they should be also dependent on individuals' political values (acceptance of democracy) and their psychological dispositions (trust in other people). The acceptance of democracy as a form of government may include the acceptance of democracy as a general rule of living in a society as well as an idea of local democracy and civil society. It is commonly understood that trust in other people contributes to self-organisation in society and participation in collective actions, which in turn reinforces trust.

The data suggest that the acceptance of democracy does not increase in any systematic way the value of the index of social experiences and civil activities (table 6.2.8.). While it is true that in every group of educational attainment, those persons who accept democracy unconditionally have a higher index value than the respondents that see democracy as a bad form of government, though in none of the educational groups those who absolutely accept democracy do not have the highest values of that index from all other categories of attitude to democracy. The acceptance of democracy as a political principle has no greater impact on participation in civil life at the local level and observed here correlations have to a great extent a superficial character linked to, as I have shown above, the influence of education on both of these variables.

Table 6.2.8. Social experience index and civil activities by acceptance of democracy as a form of government and trust in people and educational attainment for the 18+

	Educational attainment				Total
	Basic and lower	Basic vocational/lower secondary	Secondary	Higher and post-secondary	
Attitude to democracy*					
Democracy is better than any other form of government	0.87	1.11	1.52	1.91	1.55
Sometimes non-democratic rule is better than democracy	0.90	1.25	1.52	2.04	1.55
It does not really matter whether the government is democratic or not	0.74	0.94	1.36	1.60	1.12
Democracy is a bad form of government	0.75	0.97	1.31	1.80	1.14
Total	0.78	1.01	1.35	1.80	1.26
Trust in people					
Most people can be trusted	0.79	0.92	1.56	2.21	1.52
One cannot be too careful in dealing with people	0.78	1.05	1.36	1.72	1.26
It is hard to say	0.61	0.84	1.00	1.60	0.97
Total	0.76	1.00	1.35	1.80	1.27

* Respondents who answered the democracy question "It is hard to say" were not taken into account

Participation in civil society, learning and using civil skills are more clearly related to trust in other people, expressed in the answers to the following question: "In general, do you believe that most people can be trusted or are you of the opinion that one can never be too careful with people?". In 2013, 12.2% of respondents, which is less than in 2011 and 2009 (13%), but slightly more than in the previous studies,

ticked the answer “most people can be trusted” (in 2007 – 11.5% and in 2005 and 2003 – 10.5%). 77.3% chose the answer “One cannot be too careful in dealing with people” and 10.5% of respondents did not have an opinion on this subject (“It is hard to say”).

However, since – just as the acceptance of democracy – trust in other people is more present in the upper education categories, the question arises about its separate impact on participation in the life of civil society, independent of education. The analysis demonstrates the lack of the systematic impact of trust on the index of activities. Trust does not have an influence on the index in the group with primary education, but raises it in the upper groups of education.

Trust requires active citizenship only after reaching or exceeding the threshold of secondary education. Other factors related to education have greater influence than trust towards people. These factors include, for example, greater interest in public matters, a more developed network of social contacts, lifestyle with more space for motivations other than the economic, as well as organisational skills connected with knowledge of procedures and regulations. The impact of these factors is not overly high though, since the indicators of active citizenship in Poland are low and thus their diversification explained here is also slight.

6.2.8. Summary

The research shows a low level of Poles’ social and civil experiences as far as participating in organisations and grassroots initiatives, public meetings or voluntary activities is concerned. Polish people participate in organisations rarely, they also infrequently act for the benefit of other people, organisations or their own communities and they are unwilling to gather to plan and act jointly. Therefore, they have few opportunities to learn how to be socially active in an organised way and gain the skills necessary for living in civil society. Polish people do not know how to organise themselves effectively and act together except for strikes or protests against the construction of a road in the neighbourhood, a waste landfill in their local area or the construction of a hospice in their town. They do not know how to act jointly because that having modest experience of doing so, they have not learned how. They do not know how to act, since they do not act, and they do not act since they do not know how: a vicious circle of passive citizenship.