TRUST: A CULTURAL RESOURCE
(Background paper for the project “Honesty and Trust”)
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1. The Concept of Trust in Modern Sociology

The roots of the concept of trust are to be found in philosophy, theology, socio-political thought and ethics (cf. Silver 1985, Misztal 1996). In this article the discussion will be limited to the domain of sociology, where during the last two decades of the Twentieth century the new wave of theoretical concern with trust has emerged.

In 1979 Niklas Luhmann related the phenomenon of trust to the growing complexity, uncertainty and risk characterizing contemporary society. For the first time, there is a suggestion that trust is not an obsolete resource typical of traditional society, but just the reverse, it gains in importance with the development of modernity. In 1983 Bernard Barber reviewed the manifestations of trust in various institutional and professional settings introducing the insightful category of “fiduciary trust”. In 1984 Shmuel Eisenstadt and Louis Roniger identified trust as a core ingredient in the patron-client relations, as they appear in various guises from antiquity to modernity. In 1988 Diego Gambetta, brought together a number of authors looking at trust and distrust in various domains, from various perspectives, and later himself presented the analysis of trust in closed, exclusive communities, like mafia (1993). In 1990 James Coleman provided the exemplary analysis of trust as a purely rational transaction, within the framework of rational-choice theory. This avenue was followed in a number of contributions in the nineties by Russell Hardin (Hardin 1991, 1993). From a macro-sociological perspective Anthony Giddens approached trust as the characteristic feature of late modernity, elaborating on Luhmanian themes of complexity, uncertainty and risk. In 1995 Francis Fukuyama provided the comprehensive exposition of trust as indispensable ingredient of viable economic systems, basing his argument on the experience of China, Japan and other South-East Asian societies. In 1997 Adam Seligman presented an interpretation of trust as a specifically modern phenomenon linked with the division of labor, differentiation and pluralization of roles and the consequent indeterminacy and negotiability of role expectations. In 1999 Piotr Sztompka offered a synthetic treatment of trust as a cultural resource necessary for viable functioning of society, illustrating his argument with the vicissitudes of trust in post-communist societies of Eastern Europe.

The importance of trust derives from some fundamental qualities of human action. Interacting with others we must constantly articulate expectations about their future actions. Most often we lack the possibility of precise and accurate prediction or efficient control. Facing other people we remain in the condition of uncertainty, bafflement and surprise. And yet, most often we cannot refrain from acting - to satisfy our needs, to realize our goals. Then we have to face risks that others will turn against us.

Trusting becomes the crucial strategy to deal with uncertain, unpredictable and uncontrollable future. Trust consists of two main components: beliefs and commitment.
Placing trust people behave “as-if” they knew the ways in which other people will act. But trust is more than just contemplative anticipation. People must also face the future actively, by committing themselves to action with at least partly uncertain and unpredictable consequences. Thus people gamble, make bets about the future actions and reactions of partners. To sum up, trust is a bet about the future contingent actions of others.

2. Targets of Trust

We vest trust in various objects. First, there is trust in the members of our family, pervaded with strongest intimacy and closeness. Then comes the trust toward people we know personally, whom we recognize by name, and with whom we interact in face-to-face manner (our friends, neighbors, coworkers, business partners etc.). Here trust still involves considerable degree of intimacy and closeness. The wider circle embraces other members of our community, known at most indirectly, by sight, and directly only through some individual representatives (inhabitants of our village, employees of our firm, professors at our university, members of our political party). The widest circle includes large categories of people, with whom we believe to have something in common, but who are mostly “absent others”, not directly encountered, and constructed as a real collectivity only in our imagination (“imagined communities” of our compatriots, members of our ethnic group, of our church, of our race, of our gender, of our age cohort, of our generation, of our profession etc.). Here trust in concrete persons shades off imperceptibly into trust in more abstract social categories.

The next target of trust are social roles. Independent of the concrete incumbents, some roles evoke prima facie trust. Mother, friend, doctor of medicine, university professor, priest, judge, notary public - are just some examples of the trusted personal roles, or offices of “public trust”.

Even more abstract case is the trust directed at institutions and organizations. The school, the university, the army, the church, the courts, the police, the banks, the stock-exchange, the parliament, are typical targets for this type of trust. An interesting variant of trust in institutions may be called procedural trust. It is trust vested in institutionalized practices or procedures. Good example is trust in science as the best method for reaching the truth, or trust in the democratic procedures (elections, representation, majority vote etc.) as the best ways to reach reasonable compromise among conflicting particular interests.

The next important category of objects endowed with trust are technological systems (“expert systems”, “abstract systems”, cf. Giddens 1990). In modern society people live surrounded by them: by telecommunications, water and power systems, transportation systems, air-traffic control systems, military command networks, computer networks, financial markets etc. The principles and mechanisms of their operation are opaque and cryptic for the average user. People usually take them for granted, do not even notice their pervasive presence. And everybody has learned to rely on them, to the extent, that their failure produces a major crisis.

Finally, the most abstract objects of trust are the overall qualities of the social system, social order, or the regime. Trust in them engenders feelings of existential security, continuity, stability.

The various types of trust reviewed above operate according to the same logic. Most importantly, behind all of them there looms the primordial form of trust - in people, and their actions. Appearances notwithstanding, all of the above objects of trust, even most abstract, are reducible to human actions. We ultimately trust human actions, and only derivatively their conglomerates, effects, or products.
3. The Substance and Grounds of Trust

The trusting expectations can be arranged along a sort of scale: from least demanding to the most demanding, and respectively from the weakest, least risky bets, to the strongest, most risky bets of trust. First, we may expect only some instrumental qualities of actions taken by the others: (a) regularity (orderliness, consistency, coherence, continuity, persistence), (b) reasonableness (giving grounds, good justification for actions, accepting arguments), (c) efficiency (competence, consistency, discipline, proper performance, effectiveness).

The second class of expectations is more demanding. We may expect some moral qualities of actions performed by the others: (a) we expect them to be morally responsible (i.e. engaging in principled, honest, honorable conduct, following some moral rules, showing integrity), (b) we expect them to be kind, gentle toward ourselves, treating us in human fashion, (c) we expect them to be truthful, authentic, straightforward, (d) we expect others to be fair and just (applying universalistic criteria, equal standards, due process, meritocratic justice). Generally speaking, betting on moral virtues of others is more risky, than believing merely in their basic rationality.

We may also make the strongest bets and expect from others what Bernard Barber called the “fiduciary” conduct and defined as “duties in certain situations to place others' interests before our own” (Barber 1983: 9). This category is exemplified by: (a) disinterestedness (i.e. acting without consideration of one's own interests or even against such interests), (b) representative actions (acting on behalf of others, displaying concern for the welfare of others, serving their interests, cf. Dahrendorf 1979), (c) benevolence and generosity (caring, helping, protecting, expressing sympathy, sensitive to the sufferings of others). This is the strongest, most risky bet because probability that most people will be disinterested is low, and that they will take representative duties, and engage in altruistic help is even lower.

There are three grounds on which decisions to trust (to place the “bets”) may be based: reflected trustworthiness, personal trustfulness and trust culture.

As far as trust is a relationship with others, granting trust is based on the estimate of their trustworthiness. Trust in this case may be considered as “reflected trustworthiness” of the partners: our perception of their reputation, performance or appearance. The probability of well placed trust raises with the amount and variety of true information about the trustee. Without such knowledge trust is blind and the chances of the breach of trust are high.

But trust is not only a calculating relationship, but also a psychological impulse (Wilson 1993). Innate trustfulness may push people to trust quite independently of any estimate of trustworthiness. This has nothing to do with knowledge about the partners of future engagements. Rather the impulse derives from past history of diverse relationships pervaded with trust, primarily in the family and later in other groups, associations, or organizations.

People may also be encouraged to trust by the surrounding cultural rules. Normative rules may push toward trusting, define trust as proper. If the rules demanding trust are shared by a community, and perceived as given, external by each member, then they exert strong constraining pressure on actual acts of granting trust. They may significantly modify the rational estimates of trust, as well as inherent trusting impulses.
4. Trust Culture

Trust culture is a system of such rules - norms and values - regulating granting trust as well as reciprocating trust. There are the normative obligations to trust and there are the normative obligations to be trustworthy, credible, reliable. One locus of both types of obligations are the social roles. There are social roles that refer to trusters and include a normative imperative to trust others. This is true of “helping professions”: the doctor of medicine, the defense counsel, the social worker, the priest etc. There are other social roles which refer to trustees and place strong emphasis on trustworthiness (the demand for meeting trust, i.e. acting reliably, morally, caringly). For example, university professors are expected to be truthful and responsible for their words, judges – to be fair and just in their verdicts, football referees - to be impartial. The more general rule of “noblesse oblige” demands exemplary conduct from those who have attained elevated positions in social hierarchy endowed with high esteem.

All those are role-specific rules of trust. But there are also more diffuse expectations to trust, which become pervasive in some societies at some periods of time. Francis Fukuyama makes a distinction of “high-trust cultures”, where he includes several countries of the Far East, and “low-trust cultures”, where he includes some countries of the West (Fukuyama 1995). Robert Putnam and Richard Stivers complain about the demise of high-trust American culture of the nineteenth century, and the emergence of the “culture of cynicism” at our time (Putnam 1995, 1995; Stivers 1994).

There are also culturally diffuse rules demanding and enforcing general trustworthiness. Mediaeval guilds, firms with long tradition, famous corporations, gold and diamond dealers, elite newspapers and journals, established publishing houses etc. put great emphasis on fulfilling the obligations and meeting trust of their clients. The “pride of the profession”, or the “honor of the firm” become general normative guidelines embracing various sorts of activities.

Once the trust culture emerges and becomes strongly rooted in the normative system of a society, it becomes a powerful factor influencing decisions to trust, as well as the decisions to reciprocate trust. It may become the strong stabilizing force guaranteeing persistence and continuity of trust.

5. The Etiology of Trust Culture

Several macro-societal circumstances may be hypothetically postulated as conducive to the emergence of trust culture. The first is normative coherence, as opposite to normative chaos, or anomie. The norms - of law, morality, customs – provide the solid skeleton of social life, and their effective enforcement assures their binding nature. This makes social life more unproblematic, secure, orderly, predictable, as there are fixed scenarios indicating what people should do and will do. Such normative ordering of social life raises the likelihood that other people will meet our expectations. The resulting feeling of existential security and certainty, encourages the bets of trust. But apart from that there are enforceable norms more immediately relevant for trust, demanding honesty, loyalty and reciprocity. Their presence raises the likelihood of such conduct, and assures us that our partners will fulfill obligations, and extend mutual trust.

The second structural condition is the stability of the social order, as opposed to radical change. If the network of groups, associations, institutions, organizations, regimes is long lasting, persistent and continuous, it provides the firm reference points for social life, a feeling of security, support and comfort. Repeated routines which people follow, allow to
predict their conduct. Similarly, meeting obligations and reciprocating trust becomes not so much a matter of duty, but rather an unproblematic, habitual response (“second nature”). People simply do not entertain the possibility that one could act otherwise. Trust may therefore be more easily offered, as the chances that it will be met, repaid or mutually extended are high. By implication, social change is compatible with trust only if it proceeds gradually, regularly, predictably, in a slow rhythm and consistent direction.

The third contextual, macro-societal factor relevant for the propensity to trust is the transparency of the social organization, as opposed to the pervasive secrecy. The easy availability of information about the functioning, efficiency, levels of achievement, as well as failures and pathologies of groups, associations, institutions, organizations, regimes provides the feeling of security and predictability. People are apt to relate to them with trust, because they are assured about what they may expect.

The fourth factor is the familiarity, or its opposite, the strangeness of the environment in which people operate. We mean by the environment the immediate “life-world”, natural, technological and civilizational milieu which surrounds the people. It includes various components: landscapes and topography, architecture, interiors, designs, colors, tastes, smells, images etc. This factor, like the earlier one has to do with accustomed routines. The experience of familiarity provides one with the feeling of security, certainty, predictability, comfort. In effect, it produces trust-generating atmosphere, where it is easier to believe that trusting predictions will be borne out, that entrusted values will be cared for and returned, and that others will reciprocate with mutual trust.

The fifth condition is the accountability of other people and institutions, as opposed to arbitrariness and irresponsibility. If there is the rich, accessible and properly functioning set of institutions, setting standards and providing checks and controls of conduct, the danger of abuse is diminished, and the regularity of procedures safeguarded. If people can resort to such institutions when their rights are not recognized, or the obligations of others toward them not respected, then they acquire a kind of insurance, backup option and therefore feel safer. Everybody is confident that standards will be observed, departures prevented, and that even if abuse occurs it will be corrected by recourse to litigation, arbitration, restitution etc.

6. Functional Substitutes for Trust

Trust has generally beneficial consequences for the partners in the social relationships, the groups to which they belong, as well as the peaceful, harmonious and cohesive quality of the wider social life. We may suspect that when trust is missing the resulting vacuum will be filled with some alternative arrangements providing similar functions and meeting universal cravings for certainty, predictability and order. These will be the functional substitutes for trust.

The typical and widespread ways of coping with deficiencies of trust may acquire a normative sanction, turn into cultural rules prescribing certain conduct, or even into complex institutions. The danger is that some of these practices, strategies, and institutions may be clearly pathological. Appearing as functional substitutes to correct for the unfulfilled functions of trust, they themselves produce dysfunctional consequences for the wider society.

The first adaptive reaction is providentialism; invoking of supernatural or metaphysical forces - God, destiny, fate - as anchors of some spurious certainty. They are thought to take care of a situation about which nothing seemingly can be done. This may bring some psychological consolation, but at the social level it produces disastrous effects - apathy, passivity and stagnation.
The second, quite perverse substitute for trust is corruption. Spreading in a society it provides some misleading sense of orderliness and predictability, some feeling of control over chaotic environment, some way to manipulate others into doing what we want them to do. The sane tissue of social bonds is replaced by the net of reciprocal favors, “connections”, the cynical world of mutual manipulation and exploitation.

The third mechanism is the overgrowth of vigilance, taking in private hands the direct supervision and control of others, whose competence or integrity is put into doubt, or whose accountability is seen as weak, due to the inefficiency or lax standards of enforcing agencies. Private security forces, the walled communities with sentries, private possession of weapons, burglar alarms in cars and apartments, private agencies for debt collection - all those are clear indicators that trust has collapsed.

The fourth mechanism is excessive litigatiousness. If trust is missing, the handshake will not longer do. People will try to safeguard all relationships formally: draw meticulous contracts, insist on collaterals and bank guarantees, employ witnesses and notaries public, and resort to litigation in any, even miniscule, event of breaching trust by their partners.

The fifth mechanism may be called ghettoisation, i.e. closing in, building unpenetrable boundaries around a group in an alien and threatening environment. The diffuse distrust in the wider society is compensated by strong loyalty to local tribal, ethnic or familial groups, matched with xenophobia and hostility toward foreigners. People close themselves in ghettos of limited and intimate relationships, isolated and strictly separated from other groups, organizations and institutions. By cutting the external world off, they reduce some of its complexity and uncertainty.

The sixth reaction may be called paternalization. When trust is missing, people seek protection in a father-like figure, a strong autocratic leader, a charismatic personality who would restore, if necessary by force, the semblance of order, predictability and continuity in social life. When such a leader emerges he easily becomes a focus of blind, substitute trust. A similar craving for abdication of responsibility is also satisfied by other institutions: spreading cults, sects, “voracious communities”, demanding full loyalty, and total undivided commitment. They become quasi-families, with a strong substitute father taking full care of the members.

The seventh reaction may be called externalization of trust. In the climate of distrust against local politicians, institutions, products etc., people turn to foreign societies, and deposit their trust in their leaders, organizations or goods. Such foreign targets of trust are often blindly idealized, which is even easier because of the distance, selective bias of the media, and lack of direct contrary evidence.

7. Operationalizing trust and distrust: the case of post-communist society

To demonstrate the possibility of studying trust cultures and distrust syndromes empirically, I take as a case the marked decay of trust immediately following the “revolutionary euphoria” of 1989. The collapse of the communist system, greeted with enthusiasm by large masses of people, soon after produced deep distrust syndrome, which persisted until the middle of the nineties. It is only around 1994-95 that the curves of deepening distrust turn and slow recuperation of trust begins. My empirical evidence will cover only that initial period of transformation accompanied by an emergence of distrust syndrome. The data will come from only one country of the region, namely Poland. This limitations are justified by the purpose I set myself in this paragraph, namely to illustrate the variety of possible empirical indicators of trust and distrust.
Empirical evidence for trust or distrust at the cultural level can be sought in three directions. First, we may examine inferential indicators. If our theoretical assumptions about the functional substitutes for trust are correct, the decay of trust will be marked by the spreading of such phenomena as: providentialism, corruption, vigilantism, paternalism, externalization of trust. Second, we may look at some behavioral indicators; what people actually do, or seem ready to do. More precisely – typical modes of actual or intended conduct, which would signify the lack of trust. Third, we may examine verbal indicators; straightforward declarations, evaluations of various aspects of social life, elicited by surveys and opinion polls, in which various types of distrust find more direct articulation. Thus, we must see how the post-communist people adapt to the new conditions, what they do and think in the period immediately following the change of the regime, and in this evidence unravel what might be the signs of deep distrust.

Several functional substitutes can be observed, indicating the deficiency of trust. First, the retreat from the discourse of agency (which was at its peak in 1980-81 and then at the end of the eighties) back toward the discourse of fate is perceivable in survey results. In 1994 68.3% of the respondents from the city of Warsaw believed that “the planning of the future is impossible because too much depends on chance”, 74.2% complained that “most people do not realize how their lives are guided by chance” and 62.8% claim that “most of us are victims of the forces which we can neither understand nor control” (Marody 1996: 216). The behavioral symptom is the eruption of gambling. The popularity of games of luck (Lotto, and others), emergence of casino chains, bingo establishments, as well the TV programs providing virtual experience of winning (e.g. by watching the Wheel of Fortune or many similar entertainment), may be indicative. In 1990 one fourth of the nationwide sample (26%) declared that they purchased some sort of lottery ticket (Source: CBOS Bulletin, No.8/1998, p.8). Second, people are clearly aware of the spreading corruption, nepotism, favoritism. In the nationwide poll carried in 1992, 86% of the respondents define corruption as a very grave social problem, and 54% claim that giving bribe is the only effective way to deal with the administration, even in simple, and uncontroversial cases (CBOS Bulletin, April 1992: 40-42). As the domains of life where corruption is most pervasive the respondents indicate the public and governmental sphere: administration and public institutions (44%), courts and judiciary (41%, police (39%). (Source: CBOS Bulletin No.5/1994: 113). Third, distrust in the social order and public safety is visible in the spread of all sorts of self-defensive and protective measures. Vigilance develops as the functional substitute for trust. The sales of guns, gas pistols, personal alarms, installation of hardened doors, specialized locks and other anti-theft devices at homes and cars, training of guard dogs, building the walled and heavily guarded residences and condominiums - have grown into a flourishing business. There is the real eruption of private institutions and organizations, making up for undependable operation of state agencies: private security guards, detective agencies, debt collectors etc. We also observe the growth of voluntary associations aimed at the defense of citizens against abuse: consumer groups, tenants associations, creditor groups, tax-payers' defense organization and the like. Fourth, the externalization of trust is visible in expectations of foreign help from the governments as well as international agencies, dependence on foreign investments, as well as the high support for joining NATO or European Union. More than 49% of the people are aware of European integration treaties, and 48% declare positive view of European Union and its policies. As much as 80% would like Poland to join European Union, and 43% opt for doing it immediately (Source: Gallup Eurobarometer, No. 3, Feb. 1993). The support for joining NATO is even stronger, as the result of pervasive external distrust toward Russia and other post-Soviet republics. But this substitution of external for internal trust is also
manifested in consumer behavior. People consistently prefer foreign over local products, even of comparable quality, and even if local prices are lower. This refers equally to agricultural products, food, clothing, technical equipment, all the way to automobiles. The positive stereotypes of foreign nations and firms, as producers of best goods, are common and uncritically accepted: German precision, Japanese innovativeness, French comfort, Italian style; and more concretely Mercedes as a synonym for best car, IBM - of best computers, Sony - of best audio-visual equipment etc. Another sign of externalized trust is to be found in saving decisions. Among those who do save, foreign currency is still considered more dependable by a large segment of population, in spite of much lower low interest rates compared to local currency. Approximately 36% of all savings are put in foreign currency, most of that in US dollars and Deutsche Marks (Source: GW, April 3), 1994), and 25% of the Poles believe that saving in dollars is the best defence against inflation (Source: CBOS Bulletin, January 1994). Fifth, the craving for paternalist care, strong ruler and simple solutions of economic problems, opens the doors for all kind of populists and demagogues. There is still a persistent expectation typical for the old regime “that the state is responsible for all aspects of economic and social life and, therefore, should solve all problems” (Ekiert and Kubik 1997: 26). This attitude explains perhaps why assuming that the wages were equal, 65% of the people would choose state owned enterprise, and only 15% the private one. (Source: CBOS Bulletin 4/95: 98). The case of Stanislaw Tyminski, the businessman from Canada who was able to draw almost one fifth of the electorate in the presidential elections by empty promises of immediate prosperity, seems a telling indicator of that populist-claimant orientation.

Let us turn now to behavioral indicators: the typical forms of conduct manifested by the members of society. Perhaps the strongest sign of generalized distrust in the viability of one’s own society is the decision to emigrate. This is the clearest form of the “exit option” (Hirschman 1970) which people take when life conditions become unbearable and no improvement is in sight. The stream of refugees fleeing East Germany in 1989 via Budapest, “boat people” escaping Haiti, Cambodia, Vietnam, or Cuba, or Mexicans sipping through American border, are strong indications that the people lost any “internal trust” in the political or economic system of their own society. At the same time, the functional substitute of “external trust” develops: either in the vague, diffuse notion of “free world”, “the West” etc., or in more specific idea of an intended, most attractive country of immigration. Now look at the Polish case. Long after 1989, when all previous political motivations are no longer present, considerable stream of emigrants is still flowing out of Poland, coming especially from higher educated groups and professionals (doctors of medicine, engineers, artists, musicians, sport players etc.). The ranking of the preferred directions of emigration is as follows: US, Germany, France, Switzerland, Canada, Italy, Australia, Austria, Sweden, Greece etc. (Slany 1997: 94). In the years 1991-95 there were 112 716 emigrants leaving Poland permanently (Source: Rocznik Demograficzny (Demographic Yearbook) 1997, p.312). In American “visa lottery” Poles consistently get largest quotas, which indicates that the number of applicants is also the largest. A very telling special case is provided by so-called resettlement to Germany of the Polish citizens claiming their German origins. According to the estimates of the German Red Cross, in 1980 there were at most 100 000 ethnic Germans living in Poland. And yet, after that date until 1991, 790 000 of “resettlers” came to Germany (Okolski 1996: 33). This shows the scale of “exit” drive and the aspiration to get rid of Polish citizenship by pretending and sometimes faking foreign origins. This is supported by survey data which show that 29% of citizens, i.e. approximately one in three, seriously consider emigrating (Source: Central and Eastern Eurobarometer, March 1993).
Around 59% of the people declare readiness to go abroad temporarily, for work (CBOS Bulletin, No.8/92: 46). And in fact, in 1995 more than 900 000 Poles travelled abroad, considerable percentage of those in search for temporary employment (Source: Rocznik Statystyczny 1997, p. 112).

The phenomenon akin to emigration, just another variant of the “exit” option, is the withdrawal from participation in public life (an internal exile). In spite of the new democratic regime, “the 'us-versus-them' conceptualization of politics, in which the 'state' is seen as the main antagonist of the 'society', was regaining its popularity after a short decline in 1989” (Ekiert and Kubik 1997: 26) Let us mention just two symptoms of this. One is the electoral abstentions. In the first democratic presidential elections in Poland, almost 50% of citizens have chosen to abstain, and in later municipal elections overall participation was around 34%, falling down to 20% in the cities. In the parliamentary elections of 1991 only 43% participated, and 57% abstained (Miszalska 1996: 172-188). Another aspect of the same is continuing reluctance to support the state in economic domain. In a relatively poor country, it is quite amazing how enormous amount of money can be raised in philanthropic actions, as long as they are defined as spontaneous and private, and not run by the government. The same people who donate huge sums for the “Great Orchestra of Festive Help” (a nationwide telethon to raise money for crippled children) will strain all their wits to evade taxes.

Pervasive distrust may alternatively be manifested by “voice” option rather than “exit” option. Those who do not want to emigrate or to choose passiveness, take to collective protest. The amount of “protest events” is a good sign of public distrust. Of course this must be accompanied by some level of trust in the contesting groups or movements and their potential efficacy. Distrust in official politics is substituted with trust in “alternative politics” from below. The life of post-communist society is quite reach in protest events. In the case of Poland, we observe repeated waves of strikes, street manifestations, protest rallies, marches, road blockades, prolonged fastings, expressing generalized distrust in government or more specific distrust in concrete policies. As Ekiert and Kubik claim on the basis of thorough analysis “Poland of the early 1990s would rank among the most contentious nations in the world” (Ekiert and Kubik 1997: 17). Their count of “protest events” shows 306 for the year 1990, 292 for 1991, 314 for 1992 and 250 for 1993 (ibid. p. 19). The numbers of workers on strike doubled between 1990 and 1991, from 115 687, to 221 547 (ibid. p.21). During the year from 1992 to 1993 the number of those who believed that nothing could be attained without strikes, rose from 20% to 40%. (CBOS Bulletin No.5/1993: 115).

Distrust may be spotted when we examine forms of behavior directed toward more distant future, in which some image of the future must be present. If that image is unclear, or negative we shall observe the presentist orientation, concern with the immediate moment, to the neglect of any deeper temporal horizon. In this respect some authors refer to contemporary Poland as a “waiting society”, showing “reluctance to plan and think of the future in a long time perspective” (Tarkowska 1994: 64-66) Generalized distrust in the future is reflected in many ways. One example is found in educational decisions, which in many cases are not correlated with tendencies in the labor market, nor motivated by long-range life-plans, but rather seem aimed at prolonging unproblematic youth by spending some years in enjoyable academic milieu, and postponing serious occupational decisions as long as possible. How else could one explain the top popularity of such university departments as archeology (and particularly Mediterranean archeology), history of art, religion studies, philosophy, psychology etc. (Source: recruitment statistics for Jagiellonian University at Krakow for 1992, 1993 and 1994). Other evidence of similar attitudes is found when we turn to some prevailing types of economic behavior. One of them is conspicuous spending on consumer
goods, to the neglect of investing or saving. 59% of the people declare that saving is entirely unreasonable (Source: GW October 18, 1994). Most people are still reluctant to invest in private business; only 14% consider it seriously, and only 7% are ready to invest in stocks (Source: GW, April 30, 1994) But even among those who decide to invest a characteristic pattern appears. It is striking, that most investments still go into trade, services, financial operations, rather than production, or construction (Poland: International Economic Report 1993/94:125). This reflects the uncertainty about legal regulations, terms of trade, consistency of economic policies. An attempt to make immediate profits, instead of waiting for larger but deferred profits, is the rational response to such anxieties. Similarly it is characteristic that the institution of life-insurance is still in its budding phase, and attracts only a marginal group of clients.

The institutional distrust in economic area may be indicated by the typical behavior of investors at stock exchange, a new institution in Polish economy. Most of the investors completely disregard “fundamental analysis” based on objective indicators of performance reported by the firms, using at most the “technical analysis” of price curves, according to some fashionable magical recipes (“Elliott Waves” are particularly en vogue). Investors seem to rely on wildest rumors, and exhibit pervasive suspicion of all official pronouncements, statistical data, or economic prognoses. They are pushed and pulled by blind imitation of others and herding instinct, which results in alternating waves of enthusiasm and despair.

In the area of services, the distrust in public institutions is glaring. If the choice is available, people most often elect private over public services. When socialized, state-run medicine lost monopoly, a large part of the patients switched immediately to private doctors and their clinics, in spite of high expenses. More and more private schools at elementary and secondary level are draining students from public education, in spite of excessive tuition. This slowly extends up to the level of higher education, where even highly prestigious state universities are abandoned by some students in favor of new private establishments. The assumption seems to reign, that the only dependable guarantee of good services is money.

Let us move now to direct opinions, evaluations, projections, in which people verbally exhibit some measure of distrust (the verbal indicators). At the most general level, the best indicator of trust is the appraisal of systemic reforms, their success up to now, and their future prospects. In 1991 only 13,6% of the respondents in the working class center of Lodz have considered the direction of changes as right and proper (Miszalska 1997: 50). In 1993 only 29% of the nationwide sample unconditionally approve reforms, while 56% declare distrust (Source: Eurobarometer, February 1993). In another poll 58% of the respondents appraise the current political and economic situation as deteriorating (Source: GW, February 22, 1994). In yet another, 69% judge that nobody is currently controlling the development of events in the country (CBOS Bulletin No.1/92: 8). When asked about more specific dimensions of reforms, only 32% declare that democracy is a good thing, while 55% are dissatisfied with democratic institutions (Source: Eurobarometer, February 1993). When relating it more concretely to our Polish democracy, people are even more critical: In 1993, 39% still describe the political system as non-democratic, with only 22% seeing it as close to true democracy (CBOS Bulletin No.5/1993: 18). Two years later 43% believe that democracy is functioning badly, and only 1% say that it operates well (Source: CBOS Bulletin No.1/1995: 62). Trust in Parliament is visibly falling down.

Similarly, only 29% believe that privatization brings “changes for the better” (Source: GW, April 17, 1994). And asked about who benefits through privatization, in 1992 46% indicate the wealthy people, 55% the con-men and tricksters, 20% – the old communist “nomenklature”, and only 4% - the common people (CBOS Bulletin No.9/1996, :102). And
who loses? 66% respond: “the common people” (ibid. :103). And in 1991 59% predicts the deterioration of personal economic situation (CBOS Bulletin No. 1/92, :9). In July 1993 the negative evaluation of the economic situation reaches its peak with 70% of the nationwide sample perceiving it as bad, and only 5% as good (Source: CBOS Bulletin No.2/1994, :6). For the whole year 1993 the standard of life of the Polish people is estimated as bad by 71-82% of the respondents (CBOS Bulletin, No.2/1994, :7). When pressed about the concrete changes, which after all did take place, the respondents show strikingly negativistic bias, perceiving mostly the dark side of reforms. As crucial changes, 93% indicate the growth of crime, 89% – the appearance of economic rackets, 87% – socio-economic distances and growing polarization into rich and poor, 57% – lessened social security and care for the needing, 62% – weakened mutual sympathy and helping attitudes among the people (Source: GW, June 17, 1994).

Another indicator of generalized distrust is the comparison of the present socio-economic situation with the past. Asked about their own, personal condition, 53% feel that they are living worse than before (Source: GW, June 17, 1994). In the industrial city of Lodz the percentage is even higher - 75% (Miszalska 1996:68). During the whole year 1993, only around 12-13% define their living conditions as good. (CBOS Bulletin 1/1994: 7). Appraising the situation of others, around half of the respondents believe that people were generally more satisfied under real socialism. This surprising result is confirmed by three independent polls, estimating the percentages at 52%, 48%, and 54% (Source: GW, June 28, 1994). When thinking about their society in the future, the people are even more pessimistic. Only 20% trust that the situation will improve, 32% expect the turn for the worse, and 36% hope that it will at least remain unchanged (Source: GW, April 17, 1994). Another poll shows as much as 64% of pessimists, against just 20% of optimists (CBOS Bulletin No.1/1994: 5). More concretely, referring to overall economic situation 62% believe that it will not improve (Source: Eurobarometer, February 1993), and 55% expect costs of living to rise (Source: CBOS Bulletin, January 1994). A confirmation of distrust in the future is found in the list of problems that people worry about: 73% indicate the lack of perspectives for their children as something that worries them most. (Source: CBOS Bulletin, January 1993).

More concrete institutional and positional distrust takes many forms. The trust in governmental institutions is consistently falling down. Even the Catholic Church, traditionally one of the most trusted institutions (with declared trust of the 82,7% of nationwide sample in 1990. See; Marody 1996: 252) seems to be affected by the climate of distrust, especially when it usurps more political role; 54% disapprove of such extension of the Church’s functions, and 70% would like the Church to limit its activities to religious area (Source: GW, May 10, 1994). The mass-media, even though much more independent and not linked directly to the state, do not fare much better. Apparently they have not yet regained trust, devastated by their instrumental role under real-socialism. 48% of the people still do not believe the TV, and 40% distrust the newspapers (Source: Eurobarometer, February 1993). The institutions of public accountability do not fare any better. The tax collecting offices are believed to be helpless against the tax fraud by 62% of the respondents, and only 14% consider them effective in tax collection (Source: CBOS Bulletin No.8/93, p/26). 72% disapprove of the operations of the police, 52% of the courts (Source: CBOS Bulletin 7/94: 72). The only exception is the army, which keeps its relatively high level of trustworthiness (with 75-80 % expressing consistent approval).

But it is the politicians that are treated with greatest suspicion; 87% of nation-wide sample claim that they take care only of their own interests and careers, and neglect the public good (Source: GW, July, 11, 1994). 77% believes that they use offices for private profit
(Source: CBOS Bulletin, October 1995: 1), and 87% that they take care exclusively of their careers (Source: GW, No.159/1994). If anything goes wrong in society, 93% of the people declare: “the politicians and bureaucrats are guilty” (Source: Koralewicz and Ziolkowski 1990: 62). 48% sees public administration as pervaded by corruption, and only 8% perceives corruption in private businesses (Source: GW, March, 19, 1994). The veracity of high offices is also doubted; 49% of citizens do not believe information given by the ministers (Source: GW, March 25, 1994), 60% are convinced that data on levels of inflation, or GNP growth, released by state statistical office, are false (Source: CBOS Bulletin, January 1994). Not much trust is attached to fiduciary responsibility of government or administration; 70% believe that public bureaucracy is entirely insensitive towards human suffering and grievances (Source: Giza-Poleszczuk 1991: 76). Fairness and justice are found to be absent in public institutions; 71% say that in state enterprises “good work is not a method of enrichment” (Source: Koralewicz and Ziolkowski 1990: 55), and 72% believe that people advance not because of success in work, but due to “connections” (Source: Giza-Poleszczuk 1991: 86). This extends to the courts of law; 79% claim that verdicts will not be the same for persons of different social status (Source: Giza-Poleszczuk 1991: 88). Police is considered with traditional lack of confidence, and hence public security is evaluated very low. 56% of the people try to avoid going out after darkness (Source: Polityka, May 14, 1994), 36% do not feel safe in the streets at all, day or night (Source: CBOS Bulletin, November 1993). To the question: “Is Poland an internally safe country?” 67% respond in the negative, and only 26% feel secure (Source: GW, March 21, 1994).

Any contact with politics seems polluting. Taking public office does not add to popularity, just the reverse. The distrust of active politicians is striking. In the prestige ranking of most popular persons, three top places are taken by persons visible on political stage, but not linked directly to any political office: an oppositional intellectual Jacek Kuron, Cardinal Joseph Glemp, and famous heart-surgeon Zbigniew Religa (Source: GW, June 18, 1994). When the question was asked in the reverse manner: “Who brought shame on Poland?” three Polish presidents; B. Bierut, W. Jaruzelski and L. Walesa come on top, together indicated by 49,7% of respondents (Source: Polityka, June 25, 1994). The case of Lech Walesa is particularly telling, as we observe dramatic fall of his popularity once he took presidential office. 24% of the people declare that he brings shame on Poland by the way he handles presidential job, as opposed to his earlier status of charismatic and heroic leader (Source: Polityka, June 25, 1994).

Finally, if we look at the interpersonal trust in everyday life, people also perceive its decay. In one of the surveys 56% estimate that the mutual sympathy and help have markedly deteriorated (Source: OBOP Bulletin No.10/1996: 2). According to the Polish General Social Survey the tendency of the falling interpersonal trust persists up to 1994. The belief that “most people can be trusted” was expressed by 10,1% of the nationwiude sample in 1992, 8,9% in 1993 and 8,3% in 1994. And the opposite view that “one is never careful enough in dealing with other people” was supported by 87,8% in 1992, 89,5% in 1993 and 90,3% in 1994 (Marody 1996: 224).

The picture, even if tentative and incomplete, is strikingly consistent. Trust appears to be the most rare of social resources. The “culture of distrust” seems to be deeply embedded. And once the decay of trust reaches this cultural level, distrust becomes contagious and self-enhancing. From now on it is a “normal”, accepted reaction to be distrustful, and all displays of trust are considered as signs of credulity, naivete, simple-mindedness, and meet with ridicule, mockery, and other negative sanctions. Sadly and paradoxically, cynicism is raised to a virtue.
As I have indicated before, this dismal situation starts to improve from the middle of the nineties leading to the slow, but persistent recuperation of trust. The process of healing is clearly under way. But I will not discuss the recent trends, as the main purpose of this empirical illustration was simply to show that trust and distrust cultures may be diagnosed at the macro level of culture with the normal tools of sociological trade.

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