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The Chicago School Through a Polish Lens: Krzysztof Czekaj's Legacy in Urban Sociology

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Abstract

This paper honours the late Professor Krzysztof Czekaj (1958–2024), a pioneering figure in Polish urban sociology. Czekaj was the first scholar to extensively explore the Chicago School in Polish, and his seminal 2007 book, *The Sociology of the Chicago School and Its Reception in Poland* (Czekaj, 2007), meticulously explored the historical context and contributions of this influential school of thought. He critically evaluated its enduring legacy.

Maps played a central role in Prof. Czekaj's work. Inspired by the work of William I. Thomas, Florian Znaniecki, and Jane Addams, Czekaj adopted Chicago School methodologies, particularly the use of maps and personal documents, to investigate crime in Poland, especially in the Silesian region. He placed particular emphasis on periods of economic hardship and social transformation, notably after the collapse of communism in 1989. His research focused on local and urban issues by employing social mapping to examine and address social problems in Poland. Throughout his career, he mentored countless sociology and social work students. His book on the Chicago School (viewed over 7,300 times on Academia.edu) continues to shape the field.

This paper explores how the Chicago School tradition informed Czekaj's work. It will examine how he adapted Chicago School methods (Park, 1915) to the Polish context (Czekaj, 1992, 2007), using archival court documents to map social factors such as alcohol abuse, unemployment, and crime in Silesian cities. These projects resulted in the publication of *Atlases of Social Problems* for various Silesian cities (1995–2012) and *Local Strategies to Solve Social Problems* (1997–2015). Both monographic series are collectively known as the *Silesian Cities Series*. By analysing Czekaj's work, we gain a valuable Polish perspective on the global history of the Chicago School.

Keywords Social Problems · Urban Sociology · Chicago School · Poland · Krzysztof Czekaj

Introduction

This article is devoted to the work and contributions of Prof. Krzysztof Czekaj, who sadly passed away on the 25th February 2024. Prof. Czekaj was a great proponent of the Chicago School. He was the first scholar in Poland to write substantially about it in the Polish language. His book *The Sociology of the Chicago School and Its Reception in Poland* (Czekaj, 2007)¹ discussed the history and contribution of the Chicago School. In the book, he described the work of, amongst others, Louis Wirth, Clifford R. Shaw, Everett Hughes, Edwin H. Sutherland, Herbert Blumer, and Jane Addams. Czekaj critically assessed the contribution of the Chicago School's legacy. The School also enabled him to rediscover his scholarly identity and to concentrate on important matters. This, in turn, facilitated the formation of academic alliances and friendships, which ultimately influenced his academic work related to his favourite maps. As such, this paper will summarise how the Chicago tradition influenced the work of Prof. Czekaj and how he repurposed it in order to facilitate the work carried out in Poland. It also provides a compelling global historical perspective on the Chicago School.

Intellectual Origins

Prof. Czekaj's remarkable parents were both teachers who offered him great personal and intellectual grounding. They instilled in him the love for learning and teaching which led him to become a student-centred academic teacher, rigorous researcher, and prolific author who became respected for his academic contributions. He also built a network of people who were more than happy to work with him on various academic projects, as exemplified by the numerous academic outputs on which he collaborated with other scholars. In his work, he managed to link social conditions to a specific set of ideas (further into his career with emphasis on the Chicago School). He discussed topics and various research interests, namely, the Chicago School (Czekaj, 1992, 1998, 1999, 1999, 2007, 2012, 2017; Czekaj & Faliszek, 1992; Czekaj & Wódz, 1991; J. Wódz & Czekaj, 1992; K. Wódz & Czekaj, 1992, 2002); on the subject of human ecology (J. Wódz & Czekaj, 1992); social transformation (Czekaj, 2002); the elderly (Wódz et al., 2004a, b); the sense of safety of urban dwellers (Czekaj, 2004); social activism and the function of NGOs (Czekaj & Niesporek, 2005a); the role of local communities in tackling social problems in urban settings (Czekaj & Niesporek, 2005b); and methods used for diagnosing social problems and marginalisation (Czekaj & Zawartka, 2005; Czekaj & Zawartka-Czekaj, 2007).

The first attempt by Prof. Czekaj to learn more about the Chicago School can be traced back to the 1980s, when the Polish People's Republic was still behind the Iron Curtain. At the time, the access to books and works of any American authors (or any English-speaking material, for that matter) was somewhat hampered by the way communists portrayed the ideas and work of people from outside the USSR as

¹ This book played a crucial role in advancing his habilitation process which was completed at the University of Wrocław in 2008.

subversive. Therefore, having a chance to catch up on lost time after the collapse of communism in Poland, he wanted to devote more of his attention to authors from outside Poland and the School was ideal for him as he already had an interest in the subject matter for years.

While researching the works of Chicago scholars, Czekaj was quite surprised that the Chicago School did not receive greater recognition in Poland and remained underappreciated until his own publication. It was to his amusement, especially since Florian Znaniecki (a co-author with W. I. Thomas² of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*) returned only a few years after the First World War to Poland, the School was well positioned to receive a greater recognition in Poland. However, this turned out differently. In Czekaj's own words (2007, p. 10), “[t]he different approach to the discussed discipline of Florian Znaniecki meant that the sociology of the Chicago School was almost from the beginning marginalised and excessively criticised in Polish sociology”. This only meant that the School needed to be promoted more among Polish scholars.

In his seminal book, Czekaj proposed that the Chicago circle of sociologists can be considered a scientific school, based on the criteria discussed by scholars like Jerzy Szacki, Florian Znaniecki, and Janusz Goćkowski (Czekaj, 2007). The book also examined the controversy around labeling this group as a ‘school’ when those scholars did not perceive themselves as such. Czekaj viewed the work of Chicago sociologists through four key strands by identifying orientations around (1) the urban-ecological sociology led by Park and Burgess, (2) the social psychology orientation influenced by Thomas, (3) the ‘prognostic’ approach pioneered by Ogburn, and (4) the criminological strand associated with Shaw and McKay (Czekaj, 2007). Overall, Czekaj portrayed the Chicago School as a rich and diverse intellectual tradition that had a lasting impact on the development of sociology in the United States and beyond.

For him, what resonated most with the Chicago School was the social conditions in which the scholars representing that School carried out their research. They did it initially in the USA during a period of stagnation, recession, and crisis, and the profound systemic transformations that followed. The importance of this is that somewhat similar conditions were present in Poland after 1989. Then, the Polish state found itself in a different geopolitical situation with a crisis of identity (the formerly communist state was transforming to become fully democratic) where the transformation from a centrally steered economy to a more democratic and free-market economy led to a social crisis. This opened new opportunities for many people but also meant that others lost their jobs, and stability and had to reinvent themselves in new conditions. This was when the pauperisation of some sections of society mixed itself with the rapid enrichment of other quarters of society. Inequality grew, and social problems began to accumulate. What surely struck a chord with Czekaj was the unavoidable comparison of these two places (Chicago of the 1920s and the 1930s and Poland in the 1980s and the 1990s) at different points in time and space, however, joined together by sharing so many characteristics, but not always in the most obvious ways.

² Czekaj was aware of Thomas' moral scandal and took note of it on more than one occasion in his book (Czekaj, 2007).

He admired the ability of many representatives of the School to combine empirical data with theoretical generalisations and theories (Czekaj, 2007). On this basis, Czekaj made an effort to study the achievements of the School and the possible usefulness of their scholarly outputs for studying societies undergoing systemic changes. He sparked a discussion around these and managed to introduce the School to several thousands of his students and more than one generation of researchers during his 43 years of academic practice.

Until the publication of his book in 2007, neither Robert Ezra Park nor Ernest Watson Burgess received significant attention from Polish researchers and there was no major publication in relation to their work in the Polish language. Czekaj's input into promoting the ideas of the School did not stop there. He initiated and co-organised a conference in 1991 at the University of Silesia, *The Chicago School in Sociology. The Tradition of Social Thought and the Requirements of Contemporary Empirical Sociology*. It attracted not only Polish sociologists, but also foreign academics, including Professor Charles E. Bidwell and Professor Dennis Smith (Czekaj & Faliszek, 1992).

In his seminal work, Czekaj also critically assessed the rightfulness of the use of the term *Chicago School* as seen by some as a monolithic homogeneous tradition, and he noted the fact that most publications refuse to acknowledge the input of female figures and activists, like, Jane Addams, Sophonisba P. Breckenridge, and Edith Abbott (Czekaj, 1992, 2007; Deegan, 2017). In this work, he also analysed the original publications and outputs of the scholars of the Chicago School, and also performed a meta-analysis of texts which discussed or critically assessed the work of these Chicago Sociology scholars.

Looking for the roots of the School itself, Czekaj considered that some of the School's scholars had European education or family origins. Considering this connection, he was attuned to the circular nature of thought generation. As he was assessing the roots of the School, he paid sufficient attention to the fact that some of the initial sociological ideas were being relocated from Europe, and then reimagined and reinterpreted in the USA. After a while, these concepts (supplemented with new ones) travelled back to Europe through the system of academically connected vessels to spark academic discussions and inspire further research (as was the case with Czekaj himself). He became inspired by Chicago sociology as if he was the School's distant, overseas, intellectual cousin. Also, he was aware that several figures which were instrumental in working on the sociological ideas in Chicago studied, or were born, in Europe (in most cases in Germany³), for example, that was the case with Albion Small, William I. Thomas, George H. Mead⁴, Charles Henderson, Robert Ezra Park, and Louis Wirth (Czekaj, 2007). During the second part of the twentieth century, the work of Chicago School became to a degree extra-local to Europe and Poland. However, that did not stop Prof. Czekaj from redirecting his academic interests to pursue knowledge related to the Chicago School. This shift in his career meant that he academically evolved from initially researching issues of sexuality and socially

³ As a result of these various personal and professional relationships, the connections between German sociology and the Chicago School are of a loopback nature (Czekaj, 2007).

⁴ George H. Mead studied in Leipzig and Berlin between 1888 and 1891. He attended lectures by Georg Simmel in Berlin (Czekaj 2007).

sensitive subjects to studying the work of a group of overseas academics during the next stages of his academic journey.

Prof. Czekaj was continuing the intellectual legacy of Florian Znaniecki (1882–1958), Ludwik Krzywicki⁵ (1859–1941), and Janusza Ziółkowski (1924–2000). Florian Znaniecki concentrated in part on the humanistic meaning of space and the importance of focusing on the perception of and impact on the studied space by the researcher (Czekaj, 2007; Lisiecki, 2015). Janusza Ziółkowski followed Florian Znaniecki's heritage by emphasising a holistic approach to urban studies and interventions. His work considers the specific consequences for city inhabitants. He acknowledged that urban planning is inherently a social activity influenced by an urban planner's social background and life experiences (Lisiecki, 2015). This approach resonates with Louis Wirth's understanding of the importance of urban planning in relation to solving problems and achieving the aspirations of city dwellers (Czekaj, 2007; Lisiecki, 2015). However, Ziółkowski remained somewhat critical of Znaniecki's negative attitude towards the School itself after his return to Poland⁶, especially knowing his contribution to it. Ludwik Krzywicki was another prominent sociologist in the interwar period who made significant contributions to the institutionalisation of sociology in Poland and frequently cited the achievements of the Chicago School's leaders and participants in his works (Czekaj, 2007). Czekaj was next in line to tap into that pool of knowledge and line of thought (offering options for people to solve their own problems through or with the help of urban planning). Ziółkowski and Czekaj were both proponents of utilising sociological imagination for the purpose of social and urban planning.

Czekaj was familiar with the Chicago School's process of developing theories, their connection to broader social contexts, and how to implement these principles effectively in a Polish context. While understanding their roots and constraints, he remained optimistic about the possibility of employing them outside of their places of origin and in a different social setup. He willingly exposed himself to the full breadth of the School's intellectual resources, exploring the processes of knowledge creation, the social structures that facilitated this process, and the historical circumstances that may have influenced these structures (Czekaj, 2007).

Since the Chicago School became central to his choice of research topics, he became interested in urban practices and communities. For Czekaj, the city resembled a living laboratory and a canvas for urban experimentation. He holistically looked at municipal matters. Some of his research focus inspired by the Chicago School included "homelessness, problems of everyday life of local communities, disorganization of the family, the formation and duration of social institutions and the

⁵ Interestingly, in 2010, Prof. Czekaj was the winner of the prestigious, individual Ludwik Krzywicki Award of the Polish Academy of Sciences in the field of sociology for the first Polish language, sociological monograph on sociology of the Chicago School and its reception in Poland (Czekaj, 2012).

⁶ Regarding Florian Znaniecki's attitude towards the Chicago scholars, Czekaj (2007, p. 334) noted that "there was the aspect of individual animosities between scholars, including the element of silencing the contributions of sociologists from the old continent, such as F. Znaniecki, P. Sorokin, and R. MacIver, to the development of young American sociology". These personal grievances did not prevent Znaniecki from contributing to the development and flourishing of Polish sociology by tapping into the legacy of Chicago sociology (Czekaj, 2007, pp. 348–9).

sociology of professions, adult and youth crime, suicides and mental illnesses, ethnic and racial conflicts, strikes, collective actions and riots, violence, organization of services and entertainment, night life of a big city, and many other problems resulting from the functioning of an urban agglomeration” (Czekaj, 2007, p. 18).

Since his early research endeavours, Czekaj has analysed the complexity of the social community (Czekaj & Zawartka, 2005) while considering city-forming factors, such as its geographic location, impact of commerce on the growth of the city, or its geopolitical importance. While considering urban policies, he acknowledged that urban challenges and social friction can stem from high population density and the complex ways in which people interact within these environments. Another factor that exacerbated social problems was the uneven development of districts and infrastructure, and ecological threats to the lives of citizens (Czekaj & Zawartka, 2005). Moreover, Czekaj considered how individual aspirations and motivations, including needs and desires, contribute to a range of prosocial and antisocial behaviours and influence broader social interactions (Czekaj & Zawartka, 2005). All of this led him to study juvenile subculture, criminal groups which originated from the same neighbourhoods, unemployment, poverty, alcoholism, and crime.

Chicago School Methodologies

Prof. Czekaj early on in his career was in search of new methods or the reinvigoration of the old ones to diagnose social and urban problems. Recognising the importance of diagnostic research on social problems and urban planning, his research focused on maps as a form of social illustration and a means of analysing spatial distribution. Maps were seen by him through the prism of the technique of mapping social problems and phenomena as a tool in the process of sociological cognition and knowledge creation (Czekaj, 2007). The Chicago School tradition informed Czekaj’s work especially in relation to the method of mapping social problems in urban areas (Czekaj, 2007, 2017; Czekaj & Zawartka-Czekaj, 2011). His focus was primarily on local, urban matters and mapping social problems while embedding empirical sociology in Poland.

Even though Czekaj was responsible, and best known, for popularising the Chicago School’s ideas amongst Polish academics, he was not the first person who utilised Chicago sociology in Poland in the twentieth century. In Poland, there are very few examples of the use of maps in social research which are linked with the tradition of the Chicago School. Notable exceptions of social geographers include the works of Waław Piotrowski from 1966 and Grzegorz Węławowicz from 2003. The ecological research traditions of studying urban maps began in two Polish cities: Łódź and Katowice (Czekaj & Zawartka-Czekaj, 2011). Adapting the Chicago School’s methodology to Polish conditions began with Piotrowski’s study of the city of Łódź⁷ (Czekaj, 2017; Piotrowski, 1965, 1966). Later, Czekaj undertook several projects across Silesian cities. These projects utilised archival documents from local courts

⁷ An alternative approach to studying urban areas is described as the mental tradition of research maps (related to the work of Kevin Lynch and his collaborators) (Czekaj, 2017).

to provide insights into social factors related to alcohol problems, unemployment, social assistance, criminal offences, and societal changes. The results were subsequently published as *the Silesian Cities Series* (1999–2012).

Piotrowski in his study utilised the technique of interviews with an expert-social informant and introduced quasi-mental maps of social phenomena and problems (displayed by means of spot maps and social indicator maps). This was most likely done for the first time in Poland. His maps, while adopting the sociological cartographic technique, showed the city of Łódź through the prism of Burgess' concentric zones. Piotrowski transformed the usual criticism of the Chicago School's eclecticism into a strength, arguing that this trait enabled the movement to endure and adapt to diverse conditions beyond the American context, a point he illustrated in his monograph (Czekaj, 2007, 2017; Czekaj & Zawartka-Czekaj, 2011). Czekaj was impressed with the wholesome approach to studying and analysing urban spaces which he later employed in his own research (Czekaj, 2007).

Maps

The maps were central to Prof. Czekaj's work. He saw maps as an indispensable tool in the process of social planning, preparation of development strategies, and social problem-solving (Czekaj, 2017). The sociological research map has played a crucial and distinctive role in shaping the conceptualisation of the city, a role typically regarded as geographical. Broadly speaking, maps are integral to human imagination and often help organise a vast array of facts (Czekaj, 2017:319). For him, maps always served as diagnostic tools used for building connections and finding correlations in spatially distributed data. In his research, Czekaj focused on economic hardship and social change, particularly after the collapse of communism in 1989. In general, maps were used by Czekaj as an "element of the process of creating development strategies or operationalisation programs, including solving social problems" (Czekaj & Zawartka-Czekaj, 2011, p. 41).

Czekaj believed that the methodologies developed by the Chicago School still had merits in the study of the city in the twenty-first century in the diagnosis of social phenomena as well as social and urban problems. Inspired by William I. Thomas, Florian Znaniecki, and Jane Addams, Czekaj used Chicago School methods—like maps and personal documents—to study crime in Poland, particularly in the Silesian region. He also linked his theoretical roots outside Poland to Charles Booth and Jane Addams⁸. Booth's study was carried out in London in 1886 and consequently published in 17 volumes (1892–1902). He also influenced Jane Addams's work on her classic Hull-House study (Addams & Hamilton, 1910; Czekaj, 2017; Deegan, 2017; Residents of Hull-House, 1895), with the first chapter written by Holbrook (1895) specifically on maps. The work of Jane Addams and the Chicago School of Sociology was considered by some to be the "golden era" of maps (Czekaj, 2007). Research

⁸ Jane Addams was the first American woman to win the Nobel Prize (1931) (Czekaj, 2017).

maps were also discussed in the work of Shaw and McKay (1942)⁹. Another important contribution, significant to Czekaj, comes from Sophonisba P. Breckinridge and Edith Abbott (1917; 1912). For the first time, they proposed the use of spot (dot) maps in sociological research (Czekaj, 2007, 2017), where every dot represented one court case (Czekaj & Zawartka-Czekaj, 2011). The same technique was used by Palmer (1928), who focused mostly on research maps and distribution patterns (Czekaj, 2017). The spot maps technique was used by Czekaj in his work for the first time in 1986, while researching the capital of the Silesian region, the city of Katowice, in an attempt to capture every single case of specific social phenomena (Czekaj, 2017). Another attempt to dive into this work and use crime maps occurred while researching Katowice between 1987 and 1990. In 2012, as a result of the follow-up of that research, two types of maps were used for the first time in Poland, point and percentage maps, also in a digital version (Bartoszek et al., 2012). One of the factors which needed to be considered was the so-called Silesian syndrome, which consisted of “the catastrophic ecological situation of the region, economic backwardness and urban and architectural chaos” (Czekaj & Faliszek, 1992, p. 235) of the region at the time. Another investigation relevant to Czekaj was Durkheim’s suicide study which was supplemented with seven research maps (Czekaj, 2017). More contemporary examples of work on maps that Czekaj was familiar with was by David A. Smith and Michael Timberlake (1995), and Delmelle (2016) (relating to Los Angeles and Chicago 1970–2010). He was also quite impressed with a succinct description of the fact-mapping method discussed by Erle Fiske Young¹⁰ (1925).

Spot Maps and the Silesian Cities Series

As a methodologist, Czekaj specialised in the methodologies of social work and practices in social assistance. From his perspective, maps were indispensably linked to social policy, work, and planning. Based on the Chicago School and the work of Jane Adams, Krzysztof Czekaj developed a method for inventorying, presenting, and analysing social phenomena and problems in the city (Czekaj & Zawartka, 2005). Czekaj saw urban social life in a broad sense, especially in the context of the importance of social interactions and social problems which cities are plagued with and how these can be aided by social workers. Consequently, his focus was primarily on local and urban matters and mapping social problems while embedding empirical sociology in Poland. He created and recreated the concepts and visions of the city by integrating earlier research findings and placing his work within a wider academic framework by highlighting the distinctive contributions of his studies (Czekaj, 2017). While helping to re-imagine and re-shape cities and towns, he leveraged technological advances by utilising geographic information system (GIS) mapping software, including its latest versions and features (Czekaj, 2017). He also considered the interplay between social

⁹ This study included a total of 63 maps. An updated version of the work of H. D. McKay released in 1969 comprised of 107 radial and zone maps in total (Czekaj, 2017).

¹⁰ Erle Fiske Young attributed his inspiration to the work of R.E. Park and E.W. Burgess and their approach to analysing maps (Young, 1925; Czekaj, 2017).

issues, research maps, and social planning through the lens of *smart cities* (Czekaj, 2017; Czekaj & Zawartka-Czekaj, 2011).

Czekaj developed innovative methods for graphically presenting social data through social fact mapping. He aimed to strengthen the empirical foundation for urban interventions. Czekaj primarily focused on four types of maps: dot (spot), rate, zone (featuring concentric “theoretical zones”), and radial maps (used to analyse crime rates and demographic composition) (Czekaj, 1999, 2007; Czekaj & Zawartka-Czekaj, 2011). In his research on Silesian social issues, Czekaj and his collaborators utilised spot maps, where each dot represented a case study¹¹.

To capture all data, archival documents were used with a special emphasis on (1) actuarial data, (2) court records and other official documents (court records, court judgments, municipal legislative actions, votes cast during legislative voting, and budget decisions), (3) government and quasi-government documents (crime statistics, hospital records, and meteorological data), and (4) articles and information from newspapers and mass media (Czekaj & Zawartka, 2005). This allowed for the creation of a fuller picture of the municipal human constellation, which is closer to a more comprehensive examination and is not performed on a sample. In this scenario, the geographical distribution indicated either the address of persons involved in any of these case studies or where a specific incident described in that case took place (Czekaj & Zawartka, 2005). Czekaj believed, which was in line with Chicago sociology, that the court documents offer a static snapshot in time of social phenomena that are rich sources of demographic and geographic data (Czekaj, 1998).

One main premise behind Silesian studies was that the researchers can better understand city dwellers by studying (1) their opinions in relation to city life; (2) institutional documents that provide knowledge about facts and events in the city, on a microcosmic scale of the individual and the entire group in which they live, perform social roles and functions, and how well and adequately city departments deliver their services to its citizens; and (3) the observation by researchers of urban spaces and their inhabitants (Czekaj et al., 2009). Consequently, Czekaj also used quantitative sociographic methodology (Jahoda et al., 2007). Sociography, as a monographic method, is a partial observation method used to describe contemporary human societies, which are directly observable and analysable, or it can be a comprehensive overview of a given community seen as a social unit (Czekaj et al., 2009). The sociographic analysis of urban issues within the Silesian Voivodeship facilitated the identification of communities at risk of social disorganisation. This approach has enabled the implementation of targeted strategies to strengthen community cohesion and address social problems (Czekaj & Zawartka-Czekaj, 2011).

The results of these studies were then published collectively as the *Silesian Cities Series* (Czekaj, 2007, 2017; Czekaj & Zawartka-Czekaj, 2011)¹². The diagnosis

¹¹ Each dot represented a case study (Czekaj & Zawartka-Czekaj, 2011) from official sources such as employment offices, social welfare centers, courthouses, addiction treatment clinics, and sobering-up centers.

¹² The Silesian Cities Series encompasses two distinct monographic sets: Atlases of Social Problems (1995–2012) and Local Strategies to Solve Social Problems (1997–2015). These publications covered various Silesian cities, including Bielsko-Biala, Czeladź, Częstochowa, Gliwice, Katowice, Ruda Śląska, Siemianowice Śląskie, Świętochłowice, Tarnowskie Góry, Tychy, Zabrze, and Żory.

of social problems is crucial for practical applications. It supports social services throughout the entire process, from planning and implementing prevention programs to addressing and mitigating social issues¹³ (Czekaj & Zawartka-Czekaj, 2011). Each of these studies resulted in the production of wall, portable, and electronic maps used by municipal authorities to inform their various policies. As a result, Czekaj often acted as an official consultant for local government institutions. Silesian studies inspired sociologists in another Polish city, Wrocław, to conduct a similar study in 2005 (Czekaj & Zawartka-Czekaj, 2011; Kłopot & Skiba, 2006).

Popularising Knowledge, Teaching, and Students

As noted earlier, Prof. Czekaj was a populariser of the achievements of the Chicago School of Sociology. For example, in 1991, he co-organised a conference on *The Chicago School in Sociology. The Tradition of Social Thought and the Requirements of Contemporary Empirical Sociology* (Czekaj & Faliszek, 1992) that took place in Katowice, Poland, at the University of Silesia. This conference was dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the University of Chicago and its Institute of Sociology. It explored how empirical research, including the use of maps, contributes to the comprehension and reimagining of urban spaces. The first day of the conference was devoted to compiling the contributions of specific representatives of the School and often contextualising that in the context of specific research projects happening in Poland at the time. The second session of the conference focused on exploring the potential applications of Chicago School's broadly interpreted theories in modern sociological research in Poland (Czekaj & Faliszek, 1992)¹⁴. His influence stemmed from his reputation as a sought-after expert on the topic of the Chicago School, and as such, he acted as a reviewer for many university presses and publishing houses, and as an external examiner.

Students were always important to the representatives of the Chicago School. Similarly, Czekaj loved interacting with students and passing on the baton to the next generation, as he always saw them as either future professionals or academics¹⁵. Over the years, Prof. Krzysztof Czekaj taught in a number of Polish cities, for example, Krakow, Katowice, and Łódź and interacted with hundreds of students

¹³ It might be somewhat surprising to the international audiences that the reader will not find much discussion on, and examples of, the direct implications of race in Czekaj's work. This is due to very limited effects of globalisation on Polish society and the fact that Polish society was racially homogenous at the time when most of his empirical research was carried out. However, in his theoretical consideration, Czekaj never omitted race as an important social factor.

¹⁴ These discussions culminated in the 1992 publication of a book titled *The Chicago School in Sociology* (K. Wódz & Czekaj, 1992). Professor Bidwell, who participated in the conference, wrote especially for that occasion an article titled *Chicago Sociology and the Future of Sociological Research*. That was not the only conference on Chicago sociology in Poland in which Czekaj participated. For example, on the 5th June 2018, Prof. Krzysztof Czekaj delivered an inaugural lecture at the scientific conference *Sociology—schools, paradigms, and research directions. Workshops of masters—2018 edition* at the University of Rzeszów, Poland (Jamrógiewicz, 2018).

¹⁵ Over the span of his academic career, Czekaj has supervised one doctoral student, over 50 masters, and over 200 undergraduate students.

studying sociology and social work¹⁶. One of his ideas while teaching methods was to equip students with the skills to construct maps that would aid their research and to effectively analyse existing maps to gain insights. He wanted to make the knowledge as widely accessible, appealing, and understandable as possible to his students. To this day, his book *The Sociology of the Chicago School and Its Reception in Poland* (Czekaj, 2007) in its eBook version has had a profound influence (to date, it has been viewed over 7,300 times on the Academia.edu platform).

Conclusions

Prof. Krzysztof Czekaj is mostly known for his propagation of the ideas initiated by the Chicago School. Throughout the years, he has presented a body of research unknown more broadly to the Polish audience. Czekaj, thanks to his academic contributions, became part of the intellectual debates that originated in Chicago over a century earlier. The Chicago tradition influenced his work, and how he modified and applied it to a specific Polish context. He tapped into the School's ambitions to develop its ideas outside of Chicago and the United States. While developing intellectually earlier in his career, Czekaj dedicated his time to studying Chicago sociology, which in return, rewarded him with a unique personal sociology of ideas that he developed as a result. As expected, over the years, Czekaj went through a developmental phase as a thinker, scholar, and teacher. This intellectual transition was informed by the Chicago School. The School's ideas and techniques acted as a moment of significance for his career. His passion for the Chicago School of thought led him to research maps from multiple perspectives and evaluate their utility for research activities. He progressively made it his own, building upon the solid foundation of knowledge he had gained from his exposure to the School and its scholars. However, this does not imply that he was uncritical of it or accepted it without reservation¹⁷.

Czekaj has made significant contributions to contemporary urban sociology through the employment of maps. Through the years, maps have been one of the main focuses of Czekaj's work. For him, maps can be used as tools for analysing social phenomena, identifying patterns, informing urban policies, highlighting marginalised experiences, and uncovering hidden histories that can reveal often-overlooked aspects of a place. He saw maps as a tool that helps in shaping urban space with especially "excessive concentration and intermixing of residential and industrial development" (Czekaj & Faliszek, 1992, p. 235). For him, maps were not merely a graphic portrayal of facts (Czekaj, 2017); they were useful for studying and diagnosing social

¹⁶ He investigates the safety challenges encountered by social workers amidst globalisation in Polish society (Cywinski & Czekaj 2018). While examining the role of social workers and their influence on local groups and individuals, he emphasised to practitioners the specific knowledge practices that help construct and rebuild the fabric of a community.

¹⁷ For instance, he was very much aware of the conflict relating to the way of carrying out research, that is. qualitative vs. quantitative sociology; the discontent between sociologists from the University of Chicago on one side and sociologists from both Columbia University and Harvard University which became very obvious in the mid-1930s; and the fracture in the American Sociological Society (now Association), which led to the foundation of the Sociological Research Association in 1936 (Czekaj, 2007).

problems and for the purpose of urban planning. He loved searching for and finding patterns, and considered methodological experimentation to create new ways to capture, show, and analyse data spatially while using maps. Using the methodology developed by the Chicago School, he adapted it to Polish conditions and conducted several projects in various cities in the Silesian region. These projects were carried out using archival documents produced by local courts which contained information on various social factors related to alcohol problems, unemployment, social assistance, criminal offences, and societal changes. In his view, maps were especially useful for discovering hidden facts and relationships in the city and developing and testing urban theories through maps (Czekaj, 2017). These projects resulted in the publication of *Atlases of Social Problems* for various Silesian cities (1995–2012) and *Local Strategies to Solve Social Problems* (1997–2015). These monographs became branded as the *Silesian Cities Series*.

The late Professor Krzysztof Czekaj was in the process of compiling a book to summarise his extensive work on mapping. This forthcoming publication aimed to synthesise his past research with forward-looking ideas. Particularly it meant to concern smart cities, and theoretically bring his journey full circle by revisiting his academic roots and incorporating contemporary advancements in the field. Czekaj believed urban sociology and research mapping techniques could reimagine Polish cities. He championed the value of research mapping in studying urban social phenomena and planned to investigate how modern digital technologies, like GIS, could further enhance its application. Just weeks before his passing, Czekaj also signed a book contract as a co-editor for *Polish Contributions to Criminology* (Kaucz et al., 2025). This volume intended to feature a chapter summarising his mapping work which would have served as a springboard for his planned book. Czekaj's embrace of Chicago School thought was driven by intellectual passion rather than geography. He significantly influenced subsequent generations of researchers by inspiring them to critically engage with the School's principles and adapt them for local contexts. His work provided compelling examples of how specific research techniques can be effectively repurposed and reapplied beyond their original developmental settings.

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