

Queuing In Poland-A Culture Of Waiting?

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Introduction

Being in Poland for the first time at the beginning of 1994, I spent a lot of time observing what was happening around me. While shopping at a local fruit and vegetable market in Wrocław, an interesting phenomenon could be observed. There were four counters where apples were being sold. In front of one counter about five people were waiting. When someone arrived, he/she joined this small queue, and did not go to another counter. Similar situations could be observed on different other occasions. There are some possible explanations for this behavior. It could be that people joined the queue purely out of habit, it could be that they joined the queue because they thought that if people are willing to queue there the quality of the apples must be good, it could be that they knew the seller, or even that it was pure coincidence. Together with an interest as an economist in the functioning of the former "socialist" economy and its transition to a more Western-type market-oriented economy, this was the motivation to do some more research on queuing.

In this paper, the first results of a questionnaire that was administered at the end of 1998 and the beginning of 1999 with more than 400 Poles will be presented. The main topics to be discussed are questions like: what products were people queuing for, who had to queue, what did they have to sacrifice in order to queue, what were they doing while queuing (e.g. complaining, gossiping, talking about politics, meeting friends, trading, etc.), did they enjoy queuing and do they sometimes long for the "queuing atmosphere" ("atmosfera kolejkowa"), could they arrange goods without queuing (e.g. via informal networks, bribes, black market), and how they now spend the time they do not have to spend on queuing. In Section 2, the phenomenon of queuing in Poland as a so-called "Soviet-type economy" is discussed within a cultural framework, and the question of how far culture influences economic reality, and of how far economic reality influences culture, is elaborated. Section 3 explains how the questionnaire was carried out, followed by section 4, where the preliminary results of the questionnaire are presented and analyzed. In Section 5 a summary is given and some concluding remarks are made.

A Framework for Analyzing Institutional Change

In this section, the phenomenon of queuing in Poland before 1989 will be discussed within a cultural framework, together with the question of how far culture influences the economic reality, and the other way round. The

first question to be answered is what is meant by culture: The aim here is to sketch a framework that can be used to assess the Interaction between changing culture and changing economic (and other) rules of the game. Berger (1995) sees culture as "a set of tools ... , instruments, like hammers, wristwatches, and bureaucratic memos that get us through our days and help us through the night" (1995:8). He deals with what he calls "pieces or chunks of culture, like norms of marriage, courtship and divorce, linguistic usage, taken-for-granted categories of thought, mass media images, varieties of taste, and age-grading practices" (1995:9-10). Berger approaches culture in the materialistic way as do anthropologists, using tools, artifacts and things. This "material" culture is opposed to the so-called "non-material" culture. In the latter case, meanings, symbols, and values are of great importance, and they are attributed to or inferred from "material objects, practices involving their use, and other customary behavior ... " (1995: 16).

Another way of looking at culture is culture as a "way of life." In this sense, culture is the behavior based upon beliefs, values and assumptions. Cultural behavior can be distinguished from human and personal behavior. An example of human behavior is eating regularly. Personal behavior is, for example, that you always eat your dinner at five p.m. Cultural behavior is eating at a table or eating with a knife and a fork (Storti 1997). There exists a problem with this example, however. How do we define eating habits of a nation in this example? When Southern Europeans eat late at night, and the Dutch eat between five and six p.m., is this personal or cultural behavior? In the case of eating and drinking, cultural behavior can be clearly seen on social occasions. "Meeting together, people eat and drink a lot. Polish courtesy requires that the host or hostess encourages guests to help themselves to food and drink. To show that the dishes are tasty, guests should agree to second helpings. Refusal is considered impolite" (Miodunka] 993:93). Drinking alcohol is strongly connected with making friends and tightening contacts (Miodunka 1993:94). It can be extremely difficult to refuse drinking; alcohol is often poured into glasses without asking. On several occasions I have observed the host more or less "force" guests to drink, as not being willing to drink would be considered as rude. Furthermore, I was told by self-declared "real Poles," ¹that when Poles celebrate and drink a bottle of vodka, tradition demands that the bottle should be emptied.

Culture can be interpreted as an informal institution, in other words informal constraints. North (1990:3) defines institutions as the rules of the game in a society, as constraints devised by human beings which shape human interaction. Institutions can be distinguished as being either formal or informal institutions. Formal institutions consist of such entities as laws, regulations, and the system of property rights. Informal institutions are, for

¹ I put "real Poles" between quotation marks, because since I have lived in Poland, I have not met many "real Poles" who could explain to me exactly what a "real Pole" does. I have heard many contradicting stories, meaning that different realities exist. This is another way of saying that we have to be very cautious when we try to characterize people.

example, conventions, norms of behavior, and culture (Platje 1998:] 62). According to North (1990:40), informal constraints came into existence to co-ordinate repeated human interaction. Informal constraints are (1) extensions, consequences, and modifications of formal rules, (2) socially sanctioned norms of behavior, and (3) internally enforced norms of behavior. This means that formal rules (for example, the economic system) shape informal institutions (for example, culture), and that informal institutions influence formal rules. Change of formal rules is often a question of years/decades, while informal institutions like culture are more likely to change over several generations, and the process is more spontaneous (uncalculated). In the context of this paper the approach taken describes the interaction between formal and informal institutions. In what respect do informal rules change or reinforce formal rules, and the other way round? The question is: if an institutional equilibrium is attained, where informal institutions reinforce formal institutions, or not (Furubotn/Richter, 1997:23).² The type of change that took place after 1989 in Eastern Europe is quite exceptional. Formal rules changed in a relatively very short time. Besides, the change of system-specific features, an institutional transformation that took decades in Western Europe, would have to take place in a few years. From the outside, Poland seems to be changed (advertisements, colorful shops, etc.), but the mentality of many Poles has changed less, which can be experienced in public places, public transport, or shops. In personal contacts Poles are in general very gentle, but in these situations (queues, finding a place in the train), they can be unpleasant and rude, a leftover of the so-called "shortage economy" where it was important to be quick on such occasions. A good example of how formal rules interact with informal rules is the phenomenon of queues in former Soviet-type economies³ like Poland.

² An excellent example of a situation where an institutional equilibrium is certainly not the case is given by Kubik (1994: 1 04), who reports how in April 1978 he observed the preparations for the May Day celebration in Poznan. The streets were "richly decorated with red and white-and-red flags, posters, and stickers." Besides the slogans "Long live the First of May" and "Proletarians of all countries unite" something blue caught his eyes, "in the Communist color symbolism ... usually associated with peace." He describes his observation as follows: "I was shocked. The banners read "Mother of God be always with us" and "Welcome, Holy Mother of God -our Queen." A closer look at the walls of the surrounding buildings revealed another surprise. Red banners and posters were placed on the walls or windows-on their outer surfaces. But from the inside of almost every window, the dark face of the Black Madonna of Czystochowa gazed out on the street. It would be very difficult to find a more explicit and dramatic exemplification of the schizophrenic pervading public life in Poland, almost from the interception of state-socialism."

³ The phenomenon of queuing (or waiting in line) can be found in many societies. In the United States in] 973 long lines could be seen at gasoline stations due to the price controls of the Nixon administration (Barzel, 1989). Queues were a permanent feature of the Central and Eastern European "Soviet-type economies," however, described by the Hungarian economist Kornai (1980, 1985) as shortage economies.

Many goods and services were heavily subsidized, and maximum prices existed. A consequence of maximum prices for (for example) consumer goods is that the quantity of a good demanded by consumers exceeds the quantity supplied by the producers (in this case, mainly state-owned enterprises). Money was not enough to buy many products, and informal arrangements came into existence to allocate those products, such as queues, the black market, and networks of friends. In the so-called "shortage economy" there was competition between buyers (who used many of their skills and creativity to get the necessities of life, not for productive and innovative behavior), not between sellers. Narojek (1995 :27) argues that the individual, in exchange for being deprived of his/her own initiative, is freed from market competition and the connected risk of failure. He argues further that collectivization of economic rationality exerts a deep influence on the human interactions in the mechanism of community life.

Queuing can be divided into physical and non-physical queuing (Kornai [1980] 1985 ~ 1992). Non-physical queuing often takes the form of a waiting list, like for an operation in hospital. The research presented in this paper concentrates on physical queuing. Before 1989 the average Pole had to queue in order to buy consumption goods, or arrange it in another way. In common language terms like "zalatwic", literally meaning "to take care of", and "kombinowac" are still used. The term "zalatwic" substituted the word "kupic (to buy) in the face of recurrent shortages of goods (Marczuk 1998:48). Many products had to be arranged and organized. "Kombinowac," literally meaning "to put together," was (is) commonly used in the meaning of "to get something by a wangle." It was hardly possible to get by in a "normal" way before 1989. It can be said that there was a culture of waiting, arranging, and wangling caused by the economic reality. Now the question is how far this queuing, arranging, and wangling influenced the way of life of people, and how this has changed now.

Obtaining consumer goods can be put in a cultural perspective by using the difference between formal and informal rules of the game. The formal rules of the game determine what people can do, and people find "their own way" to carry out activities. When, for example, alcohol is in shortage due to maximum prices, people have a strong incentive to make it themselves. Examples of this are the prohibition in the 1920s in the USA and home-made moonshine in the former Soviet-type economies. When shortages are a permanent feature of an economic system, like in the case of socialist Poland, this type of behavior can become a "way of life." It has to be mentioned that shortages had different intensities during different years. In Poland the situation worsened after the imposition of martial law in 1981 (the 1970s were relatively prosperous due to huge loans from abroad taken by the Gierek administration), when, using Kornai's (1992) terminology, the "normal shortage" of classical socialism, i.e. "a degree of temporal stability ...in the shortage...in a particular country over a fairly long period" (p. 252) was disturbed, with a consequence of longer queues and more illegal trading and bribery, bringing about more chaos and deprivation. The research conducted

here tries to give a general picture of queuing in the 1980s and its consequence for the "way of life," leaving aside particular cases of intensified shortages.

A useful definition of culture in this context is given by Boyd and Richerson (1985), who define culture as the "transmission from one generation to the next, via teaching and imitation, of knowledge, values, and other factors that influence behavior" (p. 2). This definition implies, as was mentioned before, that cultural change is a rather slow process. It often takes more than a generation to change a "way of life." When there is a culture of waiting, how fast does this change? Observing queues in supermarkets, trains, and other places from 1994 on, many older women seem to have developed "queuing skills." When a little space in the queue was left, they often used this possibility to be served before their turn. Behavior at train stations is very interesting. In socialist times trains used to be overcrowded, so people had to be very quick to get a place. Looking at the number of passengers Polish railways (PKP) transports, the number of passengers transported per year has been falling from 1,100,508,000 in 1980 to 434,221,000 in 1996, and is still falling. In millions of passenger kilometres the decline is relatively smaller, from 46,325 million passenger kilometres in 1980 to 26,569 million in 1996 (GUS 1997:41]. This is an indication that trains are not so crowded as they used to be. However, even when the train is almost empty, people still try to get as fast as possible into the train in order to get a seat, especially elderly people.

Using the preliminary results of more than 400 survey questionnaires, we will analyze the following questions:

- For what products were people queuing? Although due to the price liberalization in 1990, shortages disappeared, and as a consequence, queues, not all problems with obtaining goods were gone.
- Who had to queue? Generally it can be said that people had enough money to buy goods, but shops were empty. Nowadays shops are full, but many wallets are empty. In the current economic situation, growing income differences can be seen, and some can buy and some cannot. Before 1989 there were queues, and it can be argued that everyone had to queue. This would make people equal, income did not matter, only the price of the product plus the time spent in the queue had to be paid. It can be expected that this is not the case. The question is: what was the cost of people's time sacrificed for queuing? People value their time differently, and it is more likely that more pensioners can be found queuing than working people, while probably due to tradition and the opportunity cost of time, more women queue than men. People are very inventive, and a "division of labor" can take place. People start queuing for each other, people queue for someone else for payment (called "stacz"; there were even organized groups of them), and some people specialize in queuing.
- What did people have to sacrifice in order to queue, and do they sometimes long for the "queuing atmosphere" ("atmosfera kolejkowa"), could they arrange goods without queuing (e.g. via informal networks,

bribes, black market), and how do they now spend the time that they do not have to spend on queuing?

- What were people doing while queuing (e.g. complaining, gossiping, talking about politics, meeting friends, trading)? The question is: If it was a complete waste of time, or a social occasion, was the type of behavior different from "normal" social occasions. and did it reinforce certain types of behavior? The last question will be approached more intuitively.

How the Research Was Carried Out

During the last months of 1998 and the first months of 1999, a survey was administered and returned from 418 Poles. As a part of their coursework, students in Gdansk (the Department of Scandinavian Studies), Opole (the Faculty of Economics) and Wrocław (the Faculty of Law and Administration) were asked to take questionnaires and ask their parents, grandparents, friends, and acquaintances to fill them out. The common feature is that these students attended an economics course in English. Besides these, students from the Faculty of Philosophy and Sociology in Gdansk and secondary school students took questionnaires home, while two students carried out questionnaires in homes for the elderly in Opole and Wrocław. My landlord carried out some questionnaires among his colleagues at work, a PhD student took some questionnaires to the countryside near Krotoszyn, and another student took questionnaires to Klodzko, near the Czech border.

Results and Interpretations

Gender and Age

The questionnaire was completed by 418 Poles of 15 years and older. Younger people were not in the target group, because it was assumed that as they were five or six years old in 1989, they probably never had queued. In Table 1, the sample is differentiated by gender and age. What is striking is that more women than men filled out the questionnaire. Some students taking questionnaires to their family reported that men were rather unwilling to participate, probably due to a lack of time and the fact that it took between 30-40 minutes to fill out the questionnaire (as was measured in a trial),

Table 1-Gender and Age

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In Table 2 an overview is given of how large the proportion of a certain age group should be in the sample if census data from 1985 and 1996 were taken. For 1985, children between nil and six years are excluded, while for] 1996 children younger than fifteen are excluded. This comparison is made in order to adjust for changes in the proportion of age groups in the total population. Someone who in 1996 belonged, for example, to the 45-54 age group in 1985 belonged to the 35-44 age group. The aim is to see if the proportional representation now is similar to the proportions in the total population in 1985. What can be observed is that in the sample, people under 35 are underrepresented compared with their share in the data from 1985, people between 45-54 are strongly over-represented, while the age group over 74 is under-represented, and approaches the current factual share in population. For the sake of the research, the group of people over 35 is the most interesting, so the desire was expressed for people to take questionnaires to older people (parents and grandparents). This explains the under-representation of the "under-35" category. Many students still live at home, or go home during the weekend, and have good opportunities to administer the questionnaire to their parents. Many parents are in the 45-54 age category, which for a large part explains the overrepresentation of this group. The fact that the questionnaire was quite long partly explains the under-representation of the category over 74. A student from Opole expressed another problem with this age category. It was his grandfather who mainly queued, but he died a few years ago.

Table 2: Comparison of the sample population with the actual population age distribution in the years 1985 and 1996 (in 1985 age group 0-6 excluded, in 1996 age group 0-14 excluded).

(Source: GUS, 1997) 90; own calculations)

Who Was Queuing With Whom, and for What Were They Queuing?

Tables 3 and 4 show who was queuing and with whom they were queuing, differentiated by gender, party membership, and age. More than 95% of all respondents reported to have queued before 1989, and less than 5% (19 respondents) reported to never have queued. Among the people who never queued were five schoolchildren, two drivers, two managers, a civil servant, a lecturer, an inspector, an accountant, two shop assistants, an architect, someone who declared to work, a director of a company, and a factory owner. Leaving out the schoolchildren, about four percent of the respondents now aged 35 and older never queued. The shop assistants explained that they supplied themselves in the shop where they worked and with help of colleagues working in other shops. Of the 14 people working, 6 reported to have worked more than 50 hours per week, while the other eight worked between 40 and 49 hours per week. Twelve of the nineteen reported that other people were queuing for them. Two of them most often paid for it, two paid in the form of services, while five of them did not do anything in return. In the last case it is likely that mainly family were queuing for them. Six declared they often managed to get goods without queuing, four sometimes, and three seldom. This was mainly via contacts with people working in shops, friends/acquaintances, and bribes. A manager declared that he often got goods via the producer, while the director of a company managed to barter within the company. Party membership does not seem to have influenced whether people queued or not.

Seventy-two percent of all respondents mainly queued alone, while more than 230/0 queued with friends or family members. More men queued alone (77.80/0) than women (69.1 %), while women queued more with family, which is related to the fact that many women were queuing with their children. This explains at least partly the fact that more than 400/0 of the respondents under 25 reported to have queued with family. More party members seem to have queued alone, but the sample size is too small to draw any conclusions.

Table 3: Did you queue and with whom did you queue most often? Division by gender and party membership. (n=418)

Total	
Queued alone	301 (72.0%)
Queued with	59 (14.1%)
family	
Queued with	39 (9.3%)
acquaintance	
s / friends	
Did not	19 (4.6%)
queue	
Total	418 (100%)
Men	105 (77.8%)
11	8.1%
7	5.2%
135	100%
Women	195 (69.1%)
47	16.7%
28	9.9%
12	4.3%
282	100%
Party member	45 (83.3%)
4	7.4%
1	1.9%
54	100%

Table 4: Did you queue and with whom did you queue most often? Division by age group. (n=418)

The questionnaire asked how often people queued for a selected group of consumer goods. The top five products for which people queued often were meat (68.40%), toilet paper (45.5%), coffee (41.90%), sugar (33.8%), and milk products (29.0%) closely followed by chocolate, gasoline, and fruit. If the percentage of people queuing sometimes or often is counted for a certain product, the result becomes: meat (87.1%), toilet paper (75.3%), coffee (64.6%), sugar (63.1%), chocolate (56.6%), closely followed by milk products and fruit, while bread scored 41.7%, leaving gasoline behind. Meat, toilet paper, and coffee were especially in short supply. One respondent wrote that she stopped eating meat due to the long queues. Other people did not drink coffee even until 1998 because coffee (or coupons for coffee) were traded for cigarettes and they got used to not drinking coffee. People did not have to queue so often for vegetables, because many had a small plot where vegetables were grown or had some family living in the countryside supplying them. What can be clearly seen is that people rather often queued for so-called "necessities." It has to be mentioned that queues in some years were longer than in other years, and the mid-1980s were reported to be especially bad. It is more likely, however, that people got more dissatisfied when they lacked those basic goods, especially keeping in mind the "prosperous 1970s," when the Gierek administration borrowed large amounts of money from abroad mainly for importing consumer goods. A question to be researched is: Who in general were queuing for products like TVs, furniture, fridges, and other such products, and can indicators for the existence of a black market be found?

What had to be sacrificed, and what were people doing while queuing?

Slightly more than a quarter of the respondents who queued mentioned spending time with family/children/grandchildren (further referred to as "family") as the most important alternative that had to be sacrificed for queuing. Almost a quarter would have had to work, while work around the house / in the garden counted for a bit more than 22%, and hobby/sport/reading was mentioned by 150/0 of the respondents. The number of people who reported that they sacrificed work is interesting. This means that if they worked in a state enterprise, they lowered the costs for themselves at society's expense. Among this group also were some farmers. Farming was mainly private business (although prices and distribution were heavily controlled by the state), so this time loss came at their own expense. As second most important, family scored the highest (28.7%), while about 20% and 14% respectively reported working around the house and hobbies. Meeting friends was mentioned by almost 10% of the sample. When the totals of all activities mentioned are taken without ranking of order, the same pattern can be seen, family being most important, followed by working around the house, hobby/sport/reading, and working.

Table 6: What would you have to do if you did not have to queue? Choose from 3 possibilities, numbering from most important to least important.

Activity	Most important	2nd most important	3rd most important	10(3.2%)	44 (14.1%)	Mentioned but not ranked
Total Work	71 (24.0%)	17(5.7%)	30 (11.00/0)	128 (10.87%)		
Work around the house/ in the garden	67 (22.6%)	61 (20.6%)	60 (22.1%)	232 (19.7%)		
Spending time with family/ children! grandchildren	79 (26.7%)	85 (28.7%)	34 (10.9%)	55 (20.2%)	253 (21.50%)	
Hobby / sport/ reading	45 (15.2%)	41 (13.9%)	44 (14.1%)	57 (21.0%)	187 (15.89%)	
Nothing	0(0.0%)	1 (0.3%)	4 (1.3%)	3(1.1%)	8 (0.68%)	
School	7 (2.4%)	5 (1.7%)	3 (1.0%)	40.5%	19 (1.61%)	19(1.610/0)
Study	2 (0.70/0)	3 (1.00/0)	8 (2.6%)	6 (2.2%)		
Meeting friends	11 (3.7%)	28 (9.5%)	36 (11.5%)	59 (18.80/0)	28 (10.3%)	103 (8.750/0) 101 (8.58%)
Watching TV	5 (1.70/0)	12(4.1%)	25 (9.2%)			
Something else	7 (2.40/0)	5 (1.7%)	7 (2.2%)	4 (1.5%)	23 (1.95%)	
Nothing mentioned	2 (0.7%)	38 (12.80/0)	64 (20.4)	104 (8.84%)		
Total	296 (100%)	296 (100%)	3]3 (1000/0)	272 (1000/0)	1177 (100%)	

On the question of how often it happened that someone queued without result, while he/she was in the queue at the right time, 57 of the 395 reported that this often happened (14.4%), 191 said sometimes (48.30/0), 114 seldom (28.9%) and 33 never (8.4%). One respondent explained that she never queued without result, because when the queues were too long, she resigned from queuing and bought what was available without queuing.

Twenty-five percent of the respondents who queued mentioned as most important sacrifice for queuing work, 5.7% responded that it was second most important, and 3.2% as most important, giving a total of 33% of all people queuing sacrificing work. Table 7 shows how many people queued during work time: 6.9% queued often during work time, 29.1% sometimes or often, approaching the 33% mentioning to have sacrificed work for queuing.

Table 7: Did you queue during work time before 1989?

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Total
Total	202 (51.5%)	76 (19.4%)	87 (22.2%)	27 (6.9%)	392 (1000/0)
Male	65 (52.0%)	30 (24.0%)	22 (18.4%)	7 (5.6%)	135 (1000/0)
Female	137 (51.3%)	46 (17.2%)	64 (24.00/0)	20 (7.5%)	267 (100%)
Party member	25 (46.30/0)	8 (14.80/0)	18 (33.3%)	3 (5.6%)	54 (100%)

When people are too busy to do something, or they do not want to do it, they often try to manage it in another way, one of which is letting someone else do it. To the question of whether children, parents, acquaintances and/or friends queued for them, 66.5% of the respondents (276 out of 415) replied "yes," 33.50/0 (139 out of 415) said "no." Of the people who said "yes," 129 (46.8%) did not pay for this, two paid in money (0.7%, these were the people that did not queue at all!), 61 (22.1 %) most often paid in services/favors, 59 (21.4%) queued in return, while 10 (3.6%) paid in other ways. Fifteen respondents (5.4%) did not specify whether they did or did not pay in return. A total of 41.1 % of the respondents (163 out of 397) reported to have queued for somebody else, and 58.9% (234 out of 397) never did. The difference in the results to this question might be caused by the fact that in the questionnaire results, respondents in the 75+ age group are missing due to the difficulties of getting them to fill in the questionnaire and the fact that many of the people who probably queued for others (pensioners, grandmothers) do not live anymore. Another explanation is that this is an indicator that some people specialized in queuing for others.

When queues are long, or people are waiting for the goods to arrive, there is an incentive to arrange the distribution of the goods in question in such a way that less time has to be spent in the queue. A good example of this is a waiting list ("lista kolejkowa"). To the question of whether situations existed where they could write their name down on a waiting list, 169 out of 396 (40.9%) replied "never," 117 (29.6%) "seldom," 103 (26.0%) "sometimes," and 14 (3.5%) "often." Although the number of respondents who mentioned "working" as the most important sacrifice seems to indicate a large cost to the economy,⁴ and the other categories indicate sacrifice of family life and activities around the house (which probably took place, but then by someone else, or at a different time), activities that people employed while queuing have to be considered to get a better view on the cost of queuing.

People waiting on a certain occasion start to do something with their time. What they reported that they did differs depending on the time that had to be spent on waiting, and whether queuing takes place inside or outside. In the case of queuing, the question is whether it is a social activity where people meet each other and communicate, whether some people make use of the opportunity to extend their network (making useful contacts), or trade. Reading can be a useful activity, while it also can happen that people only stand and think, or complain more than normally. The largest group reported that often they were just thinking (about 30%), and this is still the case when the group mentioned sometimes is included (about 640/0). Other popular activities that people reported under this category often were complaining and reading (about one quarter of the respondents), meeting friends (17%), talking

⁴ This of course depends on how much work time those people sacrificed, and what the productivity of their work was.

about politics⁵ (about 15%) and gossiping (more than 1%). This implies that often time was spent in a social way, while quite a large group "reduced the waiting time" with reading. Only a very small part traded often or made useful contacts. The question is whether the amount of time people were complaining differs from "normal" social situations, and in how far complaining on those social occasions is reinforced due to phenomena like

queuing.

Looking at the categories "often" and "sometimes" together, "thinking" remains the most popular response, while around half of the population reports to have complained, read, and/or met friends. Two out of five talked about politics, one out of three gossiped, while one out of five made useful contacts. This indicates that sometimes, besides reading and studying, time was used in a productive way by making useful contacts, while more than 5% arranged something. A category not explicitly mentioned concerns people talking about small day-to-day problems, and how to solve them, how to repair this, how to prepare that. On social occasions, quite often useful information is exchanged, and from interviews with people I got the impression that this was also the case in queues. The fact that queuing time was spent more or less usefully, does of course not mean that people liked to queue. This question will be dealt with later.

Table 8: What were you doing while queuing?

Activity	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Total
Complaining	96 (24.6%)	157 (40.1%)	86 (22.0%)	75 (19.2%)	391 (100%)
Talking about politics	108 (27.6%)	102 (26.1%)	101 (25.8%)	57 (14.6%)	391 (100%)
Gossiping	171 (43.7%)	93 (23.8%)	83 (21.2%)	44 (11.3%)	391 (100%)
Studying	306 (78.3%)	38 (9.7%)	35 (8.9%)	12 (3.1%)	391 (100%)
Reading	130 (33.2%)	61 (15.6%)	111 (28.4%)	89 (22.8%)	391 (100%)
Meeting friends	109 (27.9%)	90 (23.0%)	126 (32.2%)	66 (16.9%)	391 (100%)
Sleeping	370 (94.6%)	9 (2.3%)	9 (2.3%)	3 (0.8%)	391 (100%)
Praying	335 (85.7%)	30 (7.7%)	22 (5.6%)	4 (1.0%)	391 (100%)
Thinking / meditation	85 (21.7%)	57 (14.6%)	133 (34.0%)	116 (29.7%)	391 (100%)
Resting	338 (86.5%)	33 (8.4%)	12 (3.1%)	8 (2.0%)	391 (100%)
Trading / making appointments/ arranging-wang	109 (27.9%)	32 (8.2%)	42 (10.7%)	90 (23.0%)	391 (100%)
Making useful contacts	22 (5.6%)	22 (5.6%)	77 (19.7%)	69 (17.6%)	391 (100%)
Nothing	194 (49.6%)	50 (12.8%)	70 (17.9%)		391 (100%)

⁵ Some respondents said that it was too dangerous to talk about politics: This of course depends on how well people knew the other people in the queue. Talking about politics could also, for example, take the form of telling political jokes.

It is worthwhile to compare activities while queuing by gender. The results are summarized in Table 9, where only the categories "often" and the sum of "often" and "sometimes" are presented. Although the sample only consists of 125 men and 265 women, some interesting differences can be discovered. Women complained and gossiped more, while men talked more about politics. Almost 28% of all women complained often, compared with almost 21 % of all men. Looking at respondents who indicated that they complained sometimes or often, the percentage for women becomes almost 58, for men 44. With gossiping, the difference becomes even larger. Eleven percent of all women declared that they gossip often, against less than six percent of all men. Thirty-nine percent of the women gossiped sometimes or often, and the same is said by 190/0 of all men. With politics, it is the other way round. Eleven percent of the women and more than 21 % of the men often talked about politics. These numbers become 35% and 51 % respectively -if the people talking about politics sometimes are added.

Table 9: What were you doing while queuing? Division by gender.

MEN (n=125)-WOMEN (N=265)

women I have met deny that on average women gossip more than men. The question is: when is someone gossiping and when just "exchanging information and facts" as many gentlemen seem to do? This topic need further study, and only a few suggestions can be made here.

The relative amount of men making useful contacts is a little higher than the relative amount of women. The difference with respect to trading/arranging something is even smaller. The differences are too small to draw any conclusion, but can be a stimulus for a further elaboration of the role of men and women in the so-called "parallel economy."

Analyzing what people were doing while queuing differentiated by age groups shows the following tendencies. A considerable amount of each age group complained while queuing, and the differences do not seem to be significant. Talking about politics was mainly an activity of people of 35 years and older (15 years ago they were 20 years and older). Relatively speaking, people in the age group 55-64 talked more about politics than other age groups. On average more than 14% of all people talked often about politics, and for the age group 55-64 this was almost 33%. Taking those respondents who marked "sometimes" or "often" talking about politics together, the respective percentages become 41% and 64%. People of 65 years and older (those who were 50 years and older 15 years ago) hardly ever studied while queuing; this was more common for people now under 65. Reading was a popular activity, with the high score for the age group 35-44. Meeting friends was a quite popular activity as well, and is, like the response "thinking," quite equally distributed among age groups. If the groups "sometimes" and "often thinking" are added, a declining trend by age can be

seen from 80% of the group under 25, 71% of the group between 35 and 44, 64% between 45 and 54, 55% between 55 and 74, and 31% over 74. People under 35 did not report to pray sometimes or often. Looking at trading/arranging and making useful contacts, there are no big differences between age groups.

Peoples' Assessment of Queuing Activities

Although it can be argued that many people tried to spend their time in the queue in one or the other way usefully, the majority of the respondent considered their activities while queuing to be a complete waste of time (more than two-thirds of the sample), while about 30% thought that their activities were sometimes useful. Only a few people considered their activities a being quite useful or very useful. When gender is considered, there is hardly any difference. People under 35 mentioned relatively more often "sometimes useful," while people between 65 and 74 relatively more often mentioned "complete waste of time."

Table 11: How do you assess standing in the queue before 1989?

How do you assess queuing before 1989?	Number of respondents
Very annoying	244 (61.1 %)
Annoying	114 (28.8%)
A bit annoying	23 (5.8%)
No problem	6(1.5%)
Quite pleasant	7 (1.7%)
Pleasant	1 (0.3%)
Very pleasant	1 (0.3%)
Total	396 (100%)

A person who reads an entire book while queuing probably spends the time in a useful way. Meeting friends, talking, etc., can also be quite useful. Why, then, does such a large portion of the sample consider their activities while queuing to be a complete waste of time? To get a better view on this problem, two other questions have to be considered: "Do you sometimes miss the "queuing atmosphere" ("atmosfera kolejkowa"), and "How do you assess standing in the queue before 1989?" The number of people reporting that they sometimes miss the "queuing atmosphere" is slightly larger (28 of 396, or 7.1 %) than the number of people regarding their activities while queuing as quite useful or very useful (16 of 392, or 4.1%). Only one of the 396 respondents considered queuing to be very pleasant, one pleasant, and seven quite pleasant. A total of 244 (more than 60%) assess queuing as very annoying, and 114 (about 30%) as annoying. One respondent reported he liked queuing because he had an audience for telling jokes. Another respondent liked queuing because of the social aspect-the possibility of talking to friends and acquaintances. The fact that most of the people did not

like queuing at all could have had a large influence on how they consider the usefulness of their activities in the queue.

How is the time that was gained with the disappearance of queues being used today?

What do people who do not have to queue anymore now do with the

time they have gained? Three activities could be mentioned in order of importance. More than 30% mentioned spending time with their family as most important, working more professionally -(more than 200/0) comes in second place, followed by work around the house (15.50/0), and hobby/sport/reading (13%). When the respondents working more professionally and those having their own business are added together, it turns out that one in four spends the time gained on economic activities. In Table 12, the most important activity that people undertake due to the disappearance of queues is compared with what people reported to have sacrificed for queuing (Section 4.3). Although there are small differences, a similar pattern between what had to be sacrificed and what they now do more often can be observed. A larger part of the sample (32%) reports to spend more time with their family than those who mentioned this as a sacrifice (27%). When all of the times that they were mentioned are compared, the difference becomes smaller ("sacrificed": 21.5%, "spending more time": 22.19%). Watching television has become a bit more popular: "sacrificed" before: 1.7%, "more watching": 3.7%. When the category "second most important" is compared, the following percentages are obtained: "sacrificed": 4.1 %, "more watching": 90/0. Comparing the percentages for items mentioned in all categories ("sacrificed": 8.75%, "more watching": 10.44%) a similar trend can be found. This might be connected with the huge increase in the choice of television channels. Working around the house was sacrificed most often by 230/0 of the population, while 15.50/0 reports to spend more time on it now. Comparing the total time mentioned, the difference becomes negligible (19.71 % and 19.76%), maybe indicating a shift in preferences (as second most important sacrifice, it was mentioned by 20.6%, as second most important way of spending time, by 25.80/0).

A last question to be considered is whether people today also have to make use of acquaintance /friends ("znajomosc") in order to obtain goods, two of the 408 respondents said "often," (0.5%), 13 "sometimes" (3.20/0), 62 "seldom" (15.2%), and 331 "never" (81.10/0).

Table 12: A comparison between the most important activities that had to be sacrificed for queuing and the most important activities people undertake due to the disappearance of queues.

Activity Sacrificed	Spend more time on it now	
Work more professionally-owned business	71 (24.0%)	80 (25.8%)
Spending time with family / children / grandchildren	79 (26.7%)	99 (31.9%)
Work around the house / in the garden	67 (22.6%)	48 (15.5%)
Hobby / sport / reading	45 (15.2%)	40 (12.9%)
Watching TV	5 (1.7%)	12 (3.9%)
Study / school	9 (3.1%)	18 (5.8%)
Meeting friends	1 (3.7%)	5 (0.6%)
Something else	7 (2.4%)	8 (2.6%)
Nothing mentioned	2 (0.7%)	0 (0.0%)
Total	296 (100%)	310 (100%)

Concluding Remarks

The aim of this paper is to put the phenomenon of queuing in Poland before 1989 in the context of cultural change, discussed in the more general framework of institutional change. The important question is how changing formal institutions (e.g. the economic system) interact with changing informal institutions (e.g. culture), bearing in mind that change of formal institutions is rather a matter of decades, change of informal institutions a matter of generations. What products were people queuing for? The products that turn out to have been most scarce are meat, toilet paper, coffee, sugar, milk products, chocolate, gasoline, and fruit. At the beginning of 1990, queues disappeared due to price liberalization. Many products could be obtained, but there still were some problems. Own observations made in 1994 gave the impression that toilet paper was more valuable than gold. For many years in many places and trains it was almost impossible to find any toilet paper. Visiting friends made similar observations in 1997. Lately toilet paper could be observed in places where it hardly ever appeared before. Could a "toilet paper indicator" be used here to describe a changing reality? This indicator would show a quite positive development. Some people nowadays also have to make use of acquaintances/friends ("znajomosc") in order to obtain goods; however, the number of people who have to do this is quite small. There is a strong indication that the economic situation for many people has normalized, that they do not have to rely on a "network of friends" anymore to get by.

Who had to queue? Ninety-five percent of the respondents had to queue before 1989. Only a few: schoolchildren and working people-especially in shops and with influential positions in companies-never had to

queue. On the one hand it is shown that some people managed to get the products they wanted without queuing, while on the other hand it can be argued that almost everyone was touched by the phenomenon of queuing. However, a "division of labor" took place, and some people specialized in queuing. Two-thirds of the sample declared that other people queued for them, while more than 400/0 queued for someone else. It is known that many pensioners queued, who are underrepresented in the sample due to the fact that some of them are no longer living. The point of "division of labor" has to be elaborated more deeply by trying to answer the question of how often and how long people used to queue, which is quite difficult due to the fact that it happened more than 10 years ago.

What had to be sacrificed for queuing? A quarter of the sample mentioned work, which considered together with spending time with family and work around the house / in the garden an important sacrifice. The sacrifice of work is confirmed by the fact that 33% reported to have queued during work time. This was rather a social loss than a private loss. How large was the loss in work force productivity due to this fact is difficult to estimate due to the existence of hidden unemployment. People tend to use time gained due to the disappearance of queues for similar activities that were mentioned as a sacrifice during the previous queuing. Several differences can be observed in the responses of spending time with family, working around the house, and watching television.

What were people doing while queuing? Thinking was most often mentioned, people read a lot, complained quite often (more women than men), talked about politics (more men than women), gossiped (more women than men), and some were making useful contacts or were trading/arranging things. Was queuing a complete waste of time? It could be said that time was used in a useful way; a large majority of the respondents, however, do not consider their activities while queuing as useful, while only a small proportion sometimes long for the "queuing atmosphere." Was behavior in the queue different from "normal" social behavior? This question is difficult to answer. Many people disliked queuing. Phenomena like queuing, shortages, and the political situation are good themes to complain about while queuing, and telling political jokes can unload annoyance. But this does not imply that on social occasions people do different things. When there are annoying things in life, people will talk about them on social occasions. People will make useful contacts, arrange some business, have deep thoughts when the company is not so interesting. I expect that on "normal" social occasions not so many people are in deep thought, and reading is almost out of the question. Negative experiences while queuing will have had influence on the motivation to work, and have been a good reason to complain on social occasions. Was the type of behavior different from "normal" social occasions, and did it reinforce certain types of behavior? What I heard about Poles before I came to Poland in 1994 was that they are pessimists and have a "black sense of humor." In my first Polish language textbook from 1993 it was written (Miodunka: 1993): "The

questions *Co slychac? Jak si~ masz?*⁶ do not belong to the greeting ritual, but they are treated as asking for information. This is why Poles often answer them telling about their bad mood, their complaints and worries, etc. The interlocutor normally continues the conversation by asking about their problems, offering help, etc." (p. 19). Five years ago I regularly met the "tomorrow it could be war" attitude, and I meet less of the pessimism that goes together with that nowadays. People seem to be more optimistic in their day-to-day life. This is an indication that queues, shortages, and even disappointments that go further back into history have had their influence on culture. The new reality, where many people see that they can influence the outcome of their actions, and connected with that, an increasing prosperity, leads to a more optimistic approach. Does this mean that the "black sense of humor" and cynical Poland are gone? On the surface, especially in cities, the "way of life" has changed very quickly, while in the countryside negative tendencies can be observed; as was mentioned at the beginning, however, culture is a phenomenon that rather changes over generations. In this respect it might be said that when the economic circumstances change, culture and traditions will change later with the rise of a new generation.

Queues have gone. Have they really? As many people, I regularly have had to queue for the doctor or to pay bills at the post office. Buying a train ticket just before weekends or holidays can be a real queuing experience. And what are people doing while in a traffic jam? Queuing is a common feature of life, it can be found in any society. When people queue nowadays in, for example, supermarkets, they have a much bigger certainty that they can buy what they intended (if there is enough money in the wallet). What has disappeared is queuing as a permanent feature of day-to-day life. What remains are some cultural features and customs and habits concerning queuing, leftovers of the old system.

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⁶ *Co slychac?* can be translated with *What's new?* (Miodunka 1993 :9) , while *Jak si~ masz?* can be translated with *How are you?*

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