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# Polish Political Theorists on the Position and Role of the Individual in Politics

**Abstract:** This article aims to survey the principal viewpoints of Polish political theorists regarding the position and role of the individual in politics. The discussion involves a thorough analysis of the categories of individual and collective political actors, their distinctive features, and the concept of agency and its new interpretations within the Polish political science. These new interpretations signal evolution in the traditional categorical framework in response to contemporary challenges. The study applies a method of analysis and synthesis incorporating aspects of the dialectical method. The outcome presents a juxtaposition of viewpoints within political science spanning the past several decades, identifying areas of convergence and significant divergences.

**Keywords:** political actor, individual actor, collective actor

## Introduction

The theory of politics is a well-grounded and expansive research domain with a comprehensive categorical framework, boasting a wide range of perspectives regarding the role of individuals and social aggregates within politics. Although various researchers, contingent on their adopted paradigms, accentuate different dimensions of agency as well as the entities to which these should be ascribed, particular convergences can be discerned. Recently, in the face of the substantial and rapid shifts of the contemporary world, emerging scholars in Polish political science have begun to augment traditional theoretical positions with new

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elements, often positing comprehensive redefinitions. This dynamism reinforces that the theory of politics remains a vibrant absorptive discipline, the exploration of which presents a formidable intellectual challenge.

As highlighted by Zbigniew Blok, the individual's role in the historical process can be construed within two models: deterministic and voluntaristic. The deterministic model presupposes a multitude of internal and external factors that condition human action, independent of individual will. Conversely, the voluntaristic model posits that the individual is the principal agent of change in the world (Blok, 2014, pp. 205–206). Contemporary Polish political theorists lean more heavily toward the latter model, albeit with diverse interpretations and numerous modifications. A discernible shift in this regard emerged during the turn of the 1980s into the 1990s, when a substantial number of researchers pivoted away from a rigid application of the Marxist methodology in the analysis of political phenomena, to instead favor a more varied array of research approaches drawn from the global academic research.

This article sets out to review the body of work in Polish political science over recent decades, focusing on the position and role of the individual in politics. The study will undertake an analysis of the attributes ascribed to individual and collective political actors, the dichotomies between them, and innovative theoretical approaches constituting a reconceptualization or expansion of existing viewpoints. Given the brevity necessitated by the publication format, this text essentially serves as a draft concentrating on the most critical and compelling (subjectively speaking) perspectives of Polish political scientists. The breadth of this topic in literature calls for its own comprehensive scholarly monograph that would encompass the body of work from several generations of distinguished researchers.

## Human being as an actor and agent

Considerations on the role of the individual in politics should begin with the fundamental division into either an activist or a passivist perspective. The activist views the individual as one who consciously influences the world around them and brings about actual change, while to the contrary, the passivist sees the individual as an externally controlled and passive element of a larger system shaped by factors found in the external environment (Sztompka, 1981, pp. 266–267).

The majority of Polish political theorists have embraced the activist perspective. Regardless of the adopted ontological and epistemological assumptions, the methodological disputes between individualism and holism, or the various positions and theories being espoused, there is a prevalent belief that

individuals can possess unique agency within the world. Consequently, human actors are considered the driving forces behind all changes. Jan Szczepański's concept of individuality is noteworthy in this context in identifying distinctive characteristics solely attributable to human beings, where every person possesses the autonomy to act, enabling them to fulfill their own needs and act in accordance with their intentions, free from social pressures. This autonomy forms the foundation of their agency (Szczepański, 1988, pp. 97–98).

Wiesława Sotwin made a significant distinction by proposing two approaches to agency: external and internal. External agency pertains to intentional control over the environment and emerges from an individual's engagement with the world across various domains. In other words, individuals shape their sense of "self" and agency through the perception of their influence on reality. However, this influence must reach a particular individually determined level. If that can be achieved in significant aspects of their lives, a lasting sense of agency is established. Internal agency, on the other hand, refers to an individual's self-determination and accountability for their actions. Freedom of choice is a prerequisite for such development, allowing individuals to control and shape their objective "self" (Sotwin, 2003, pp. 16, 26–27).

Agency understood as intentional actions undertaken by individuals to effect change is a critical conceptual category intrinsically linked to the individual within the activist perspective. It can manifest as both individual and collective action, as long as it is conscious and serves specific objectives (Iwińska, 2015, pp. 188–189). Consequently, this topic is key in the ongoing debate between proponents of methodological individualism and holism. While individualists attribute causal power to individuals and their characteristics, holists identify the sources of all political transformations within the social fabric as a whole (Pierzchalski, 2016, pp. 146–147).

A distinct division between individual and collective actions was established several decades ago by Artur Bodnar, highlighting their relational nature and the intricate nature of the events they encompass. A. Bodnar argued that all political actions should be viewed in the context of collectivity, even when decisions are made by individuals independently, as they are always influenced by a group of people. Thus, an individual is unable to act efficiently without the support of the collective (Bodnar, 1985, p. 104). The backing of a substantial social group is therefore indispensable.

Mirosław Karwat's work yielded intriguing conclusions regarding the political nature of individuals. According to Karwat, every person possesses a political persona: "as a political actor, each person exhibits a unique individuality; moreover, each person is a political individual, as not only are there no two identical individuals, there are also no precisely identical participants in politics" (Karwat, 1989, pp. 48–50). To elaborate further, our individual axiological systems and beliefs differentiate us from the rest of society, and the scope of our involvement

in public affairs is contingent on our distinct attributes. Karwat argues that the essence of political agency lies in sovereignty and rationality (which can be seen as gradable qualities), and all associated actions have a social character since they affect and are influenced by others (Karwat, 1989, pp. 53–54). Consequently, individuals play an active role in the political process and act as direct agents of events, while large social groups remain the ultimate actors.<sup>2</sup>

So, how should we define the consciousness and rationality of a political actor? What constitutes the core of these characteristics? Consciousness primarily refers to the capacity to recognize one's own needs and interests, to articulate them, and the ability to act in order to realize those intended goals (Gulczyński, 2007, p. 39). It also encompasses an understanding of an individual's position in the world, including the associated possibilities and obstacles. Undoubtedly, consciousness is a prerequisite for the existence of agency. Rationality, on the other hand, entails the pursuit of predetermined objectives in the most optimal manner. As emphasized by Tadeusz Klementewicz, "[...] between an individual's beliefs and their actions there are links which conform to the postulates of logic and mathematical decision theory. In particular, the motive behind an individual's conduct is the pursuit of maximizing anticipated utility" (Klementewicz, 1986, p. 76). Both of these categories shape the political sovereignty of the subject/actor. Andrzej Chodubski defines political sovereignty as "independence, autonomy in political activity regardless of official influences, [...] identification with a specific political reality (and assuming responsibility for it)" (Chodubski, 2007, p. 146). Therefore, a political actor can actively participate in the processes of political change at local or global levels.

Kazimierz Obuchowski proposed an intriguing perspective on agency within the realm of the social sciences, highlighting that a person is not inherently born an agent, nor is granted such status. Rather, a person can become an agent by possessing a defined identity, being aware of their needs and interests, and actively seeking to fulfill them. Importantly, this applies not just to individuals but also to institutions and the larger system (Obuchowski, 2000, pp. 11–12). Similarly, Józef Koziński's renowned concept of *homo transgressivus* describes individuals who actively initiate change, transforming themselves and the world, and shaping reality within specific boundaries. Koziński emphasizes that:

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<sup>2</sup> In this context, it is important to highlight that sovereignty and rationality, as attributes of a political actor, often stir up controversies in political discussions. Karwat's stance, although influential, does not enjoy unanimous support today. This is primarily due to the fact that these categories are subjective and prone to change, as they are manifest in diverse configurations within the realm of political life. Consequently, their precise demarcation in defining political agency may be problematic. How should one evaluate its presence and extent when one of these factors is absent or only present in a limited degree?

[...] the individual becomes an agent. Agency is an orientation that assumes individuals are causes or co-causes of events, in other words, they become decision-makers, rather than mere recipients of information. They initiate actions, demonstrate entrepreneurship, make choices, assess the probability and value of the consequences of the chosen actions, and take responsibility for risky endeavors, failures and defeats (Kozielecki, 1998, p. 41).

While these concepts were formulated within the realm of psychology, their application to political sciences offers a fresh and captivating cognitive dimension.<sup>3</sup>

Considering the diverse approaches mentioned, which characteristics should be attributed to the individual as a political actor? Firstly, an awareness of their own needs and interests, which would entail a capacity for reflection and reasoning. Secondly, a sense of personal identity that encompasses not only the person's existence, but also aspirations and affiliations. Thirdly, the ability to articulate interests and engage in rational and autonomous actions. Lastly, the capacity to effect tangible changes in the world is a defining aspect of political agency. It is important to note that these characteristics are highly subjective as the feeling of agency can be influenced by a variety of factors such as education, level of engagement, and personality traits (Sotwin, 2003, p. 21).

The development of the systemic approach in the social sciences has fundamentally transformed our perception of individuals within the socio-political reality. Ziemowit Pietraś advocates for understanding human actions in relation to the structure that significantly constrains them. Accordingly, an individual, as a political actor, is capable of action and consciousness, but their decision-making process is influenced by elements of the social system and stimuli from the environment (Pietraś, 1998, pp. 115, 116). Political studies conducted within the framework of systemic analysis or cybernetic approaches have led to a redefinition of the position and role of the individual in politics. To become a political actor, one must occupy a suitable position within the social system, although even then, stability is not guaranteed. The focus has shifted to the variability of the world, the dynamics of ongoing processes, and the dependence of individuals on the structure in which they operate. This has resulted in the formulation of a position where the social system itself is increasingly attributed with agency.

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<sup>3</sup> The subject of agency is a topic attracting the attention of researchers representing various scientific disciplines. In this context, it is worth mentioning Ryszard Cichocki's monograph titled *Agency in Society*, which offers a comprehensive review of the concepts of agency put forth by Polish psychologists, educators, and sociologists. The book also includes a thought-provoking analysis of the relationship between the individual and the social structure (see: Cichocki, 2003, pp. 113–132).

## Individual or collective actor?

Throughout the ages, many thinkers have posed questions about the primacy of entities present in the world. On an ontological level, this issue is addressed by two theoretical approaches: nominalism and realism. Representatives of nominalism acknowledge only the existence of individuals, who engage in acts of cognition in the world. Realists, on the other hand, attribute ontological primacy to social entities that exhibit properties not belonging to their constituent elements. In many respects, the dispute between these perspectives overlaps with differences in analysing phenomena characteristic of methodological individualism and holism. The task of the following part of the text is to present these two approaches in relation to the actor of politics – an issue that has occupied Polish political theorists for years.

The category of collective political actor poses significant analytical difficulties as it does not constitute a homogeneous whole, but rather groups with different needs and interests, often accompanied by contradictions. Society, therefore, has a distinctly different ontic status compared to an individual or social group. This was emphasized by Józef Lipiec, who pointed out that human beings are created to live in society, which is a fundamental condition of their existence (1972, p. 301). Moreover, this is not a new statement, as it dates back to Aristotle and his famous *zoon politikon*, which has subsequently been repeated in various configurations.

An interesting approach in this regard is represented by Artur Bodnar, who indicates that every political actor (including the individual) is dependent on the larger social group, since all their rights pertain to the social dimension. Additionally, the effectiveness of their actions depends on broader support, and the extent of their authority depends on the level of control exercised by the larger social group. That model clearly concludes that the agency of the individual is decidedly secondary in relation to society. Furthermore, it is also gradable and variable, stemming from the multitude of actors present in the political field (Bodnar, 1988, pp. 68–69). Similarly, Andrzej Czajowski also states that political activity is gradable – with passive citizens at the bottom of the hierarchy showing no interest in politics and with no influence, and at the top, political leaders who effect changes in the socio-political reality. Of course, there are also intermediate categories that, depending on various conditions, fall at different levels within this spectrum (Czajowski, 2013, pp. 143–145). Klementewicz goes a step further, emphasizing that all political actions have a collective nature – thus, there is a clear emphasis on the analysis of political phenomena at a macrosocial scale (Klementewicz, 1981, p. 5).

In contrast, Jan Zieleniewski highlighted that no collective “(as it does not have consciousness or subconsciousness) [...] can have a sense of freedom”. Consequently, there is no collective mind that unambiguously guides it toward

the achievement of its goal, but rather, a collective comprises individuals whose actions collectively shape the actions of the entire group. Zieleniewski categorically rejects the notion that collectives possess distinctive characteristics at a supra-individual level.

Traces of methodological individualism can be also found in Leszek Sobkowiak's works, where the intentional actions of individuals constitute the fundamental building blocks of social reality. All acts of collective agency are then a superstructure constructed upon human activity, with history being the outcome of the interplay between these two levels. Importantly, social structures are not fixed and unchanging; they undergo transformation and, at times, deformation (Sobkowiak, 2012, pp. 63–64). And although he does not explicitly state such, it seems that stability is more pronounced at the micro-level of individual human interactions. The variability of reality stems from the human factor itself – thus, the greater the number of individuals (and as the scale shifts to collectives), the more challenging it becomes to predict outcomes. In the age of intricate global networks, ensuring stability in any political domain proves to be a difficult task.

Jakub Potulski recognizes the validity of both perspectives: individual actors and collective actors in politics. He observes an unprecedented scale of empowerment of individuals in politics today, wherein empowerment refers not to a sense of distinctiveness, but rather to conscious and purposeful engagement with reality – a proactive role as initiators of action. Consequently, every individual possesses the potential to be a political actor, contingent upon various circumstances, and this attribute is gradable. Potulski underlines the tremendous significance of a psychological approach in this context. Analysing political actions and processes necessitates the consideration of personality as a key determinant shaping the decisions of political actors. Hence, he argues that analysing politics at the individual level is both valid and needed in comprehending the dynamics of the modern world and the processes unfolding within it (Potulski, 2007, pp. 170–172).

Sylwester Wróbel, known for his research on systemic analysis, provides insights into the role of the individual in socio-political reality. He highlights that functionalists can be divided into two branches. Some argue that personal traits and attitudes have a significant impact on the dynamics of the political system. Others concentrate their considerations on collective actions, which they perceive as the driving force behind all change. From this perspective, collectives possess substantial social and political power. Regardless of differences in their specific arguments, functionalist approaches share the belief that environmental stimuli play a crucial role as the primary source of intrasystemic changes (Wróbel, 1992, pp. 91–93). As this conceptual category inherently assumes complexity and heterogeneity, it should be noted though that functionalism leans more



towards methodological holism than individualism, even if incorporating elements from both perspectives.

In the realm of the social sciences, attempts have been made to transcend the individual vs. society dilemma by seeking intermediate categories. Piotr Sztompka proposes sociological structuralism as a solution to this problem, emphasizing that people are the only real beings that constitute society. They form a distinct social structure with unique properties. Hence, individuals are acknowledged as actors, but via their interactions with others (Sztatka, 2008, pp. 125–126), it is then the relational phenomena. This perspective aligns with the views of Stanisław Ossowski, who highlights that the level of interactions between individuals and the level of social phenomena influenced by collectives, should be seen as complementing and not contradicting each other. Ossowski argues that social phenomena arise from the actions of individual actors, which in turn, are, conditioned by the large social groups. Thus, a reciprocal process takes place (Ossowski, 2001, p. 27).

Within the framework of Marxist theory, this debate was also addressed several decades ago by Jacek Poprzczo, who, despite the inherent emphasis on the agency of large social groups in this approach, devoted his analysis also to the position and role of the individual in the world. The author explicitly underscores that the existence of society or classes does not preclude the existence of individuals, even within theoretical explanations. Thus, human agency emerges as an attribute derived from historical development, yet fundamentally tied to the individual. It is shaped both by society and the individual themselves. Moreover, the individual and society are two distinct yet integral entities that constantly relate to each other. Reducing them to a single dominant factor would significantly narrow our perspective. In precise terms, the individual serves as the “central point of social existence” (Poprzczo, 1988, p. 84). Society is not merely a sum of individuals, and the individual is not merely a fragment of the whole. They are separate entities that form an interconnected whole. The essence of the individual, as a distinct entity, lies in agency – the ability to think and act intentionally. Consequently, agency manifests itself within social relations, making the two levels inherently complementary (Poprzczo, 1988, pp. 60, 84).

The debate between individual agency and collective agency is sometimes equated by certain scholars to analyses conducted at micro- and macro-social levels. Micro-theoretical considerations center around actors as individuals, their attributes, and their capacity to effect change. On the other hand, macro-theory primarily focuses on social structure and its intricate interconnections. Markieta Domecka suggests that this traditional division is gradually losing its significance in contemporary discourse, where the two levels intertwine to complement each other and to form a cohesive whole (Domecka, 2013, p. 103). Consequently, many social scientists advocate acknowledging both levels of reality, which can



lead to a more comprehensive and cohesive understanding of the world. Can we not apply a similar notion to the realm of politics? Given that no individual exists as an actor and agent in isolation from reality, should we not strive to transcend the perennial disputes and dualisms?

Regardless of the chosen research orientation, it becomes evident that the category of political actor – whether individual or collective – inherently pertains to people. They constitute the very foundation and driving force behind all political activity. Consequently, the existence of the political subject undeniably requires a “human” context. As individuals shape society through their diverse actions, they themselves are influenced by the social context. Thus, the possibility of definitively establishing the primacy of a particular entity becomes elusive. Perhaps it is more appropriate to conclude that neither entity holds ultimate primacy, or on the contrary, both do.

## New approaches to agency in Polish political science

Filip Pierzchalski, a representative of the younger generation of Polish political scientists, dedicates considerable attention to the position and role of the individual in politics. In his work “Political agency in individualistic and holistic perspectives”, he conducts a comprehensive analysis of the categorical primacy between the individual and society. Pierzchalski acknowledges the significant strengths of individualistic interpretations of phenomena, particularly their precision in identifying agents of change and delineating their level of responsibility. However, he also recognizes their limitations, namely their narrow focus on specific areas of socio-political reality, disregarding aspects that are independent of individual actors. According to his argumentation, methodological individualism falls short in capturing the intricate networks of interconnections and interdependencies between phenomena. He emphasizes that “in actual political practice, we cannot fully explain the complexity and dynamics of society solely through the actions of individuals” (Pierzchalski, 2009, p. 245). Therefore, a comprehensive analysis that takes into account the networks of dependencies present in the world is necessary. Despite these considerations, Pierzchalski contends that both methodological individualism and holism are essential in political science, and the debate between them remains. It is worth noting that both perspectives are often subject to distortion, also within the social sciences academic literature (Pierzchalski, 2009, pp. 245–249).

Notably, Pierzchalski provides a comprehensive study of leadership from a morphogenetic perspective, drawing on the intriguing theoretical framework of Margaret Archer. This approach transcends the conventional dichotomy of part and whole, instead focusing on the reflexive agent as a catalyst for change, while embedded within the social structure. Consequently, agency can

be ascribed to both the individual and the collective, contingent upon specific socio-structural conditions, as it emerges from the dynamic interplay between human self and diverse social interactions. Therefore, the political actor becomes cognizant of an intrinsic causal potency to shape social structure, while remaining continuously shaped by the context (Pierzchalski, 2013, pp. 196–198). Although the morphogenetic perspective acknowledges the substantial role of the individual in political decision-making and actions, it is essential to clarify that it represents a strictly holistic stance. Within this framework, the actor/agent and structure are interdependent yet distinct dimensions of reality.

Pierzchalski suggests introducing the concept of emancipatory agency within the realm of political theory. This concept signifies a rejection of the current state of social life and political relations, and pertains to an actor that, during the process of constructing a personal identity, becomes conscious of the contradiction between own interests and the prevailing order within the given system.<sup>4</sup> Emancipation serves as a mechanism of empowerment and resistance, primarily characterized by nonviolent actions. It is “rather a specific subjective intervention aimed at correcting and amending given aspects of the democratic framework, and not a synonym for overthrowing or abolishing the formal-legal order” (Pierzchalski, 2016, p. 164). The phenomenon of new social movements, spontaneous citizen uprisings and protests against specific authoritative decisions, vividly exemplify this concept in practice and underscore the crucial role of political analyses that can encompass their dynamic and intricate nature.

The notion of emancipatory agency aligns well with the concept of “expressive agency” as proposed by Karwat. This concept refers to the capacity to articulate personal experiences and aspirations while simultaneously embodying the moods and expectations of the community. Expressive agency is observed among authority figures and opinion leaders such as journalists, artists, writers, scholars, and the clergy. They possess the ability to shape collective emotions and aspirations as they identify with them. This form of agency is distinctive in that it involves a reciprocal conditioning between the individual and the audience. The actor is influenced by the social atmosphere, being shaped by it, and subsequently becomes an active agent who reproduces, intensifies, and adapts it to their own expression. In effect, this actor is both the agent and object of social influence (Karwat, 2007, pp. 305–306).

In Polish political science, an intriguing approach is presented by Wiktor Szewczak, who incorporates a systemic perspective in analysing political agency.

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<sup>4</sup> This contradiction can also extend to the competition in the pursuit of agency, as attaining agency by an individual or a group can simultaneously impose limitations on agency of others. A subject that gains greater agency may have interests that diverge from or conflict with those of other participants in social relations. In the realm of current socio-political reality, where new social movements and grassroots uprisings abound, the process of emancipation can, and often does, involve objectifying others.

According to his analysis, when making binding political decisions, it is essential to distinguish between the praxeological dimension that encompasses the overall context of the decision-making process, and the axiological-teleological dimension that is connected to agency factors determining the ultimate goal of action. The actors are then large social groups whose needs and interests demarcate the conditions for the functioning of the entire system. Politics, in turn, is founded upon their inherent contradictions. Szewczak clearly distances himself from individualistic approaches in political science, considering them limited and incomplete (Szewczak, 2020, pp. 225–226). This approach offers added value through its explicit separation of systemic conditions and external stimuli from the “human factor” in political decision-making processes. It emphasizes that only the combination of these two dimensions ultimately shapes political agency – human actions are always mediated by the surrounding environment.

Szewczak draws attention to new phenomena in politics that demand comprehensive analysis, primarily increasing social diversity, which has led to fluid and amorphous societies. Many political processes now unfold beyond institutional frameworks, beyond the control of the state. Instead, many autonomous groups with flexible networked structures have emerged, focusing on specific issues. In this context, Szewczak refers to the emergence of a “new politics” that necessitates a redefinition of existing research paradigms (Szewczak, 2012, pp. 239–240).

Artur Laska also highlights the need for expanding contemporary political theories and rethinking the prevailing categorical framework. Laska explores spontaneous grassroots movements driven by a sense of injustice and discontent. He emphasizes that social intelligence is the foundation of agency, linking effective interactions with social consciousness. Through social intelligence, actors, whether singular or collective, can share needs and interests that they did not generate themselves. They can adopt and collectively experience the narratives of others, a phenomenon Laska refers to as “empathetic resonance”. This collective emotional connection forms a neural network that extends beyond the individual. However, this model faces obstacles, including the ongoing process of individualization, which erodes group identity in favour of self-determination. Consequently, new forms of social and political agency consolidate, referred to by Laska as “multiplicity”. Multiplicity represents decentralized “mass of self-organizing individuals who define themselves not so much through large structures (nation, state, religion, or class), but through themselves, and only form temporary task-oriented networks to achieve their specific goals and benefits” (Laska, 2020, pp. 248).

Multiplicity forms a complex network characterized by significant diversity, communication, and synchronization among its constituent elements. It transcends the traditional dichotomy of the rulers and the ruled and challenges the rigid boundaries between individual and collective actors, as multiplicity can be

defined as both. While multiplicity lacks the cohesive bonds found in earlier collectives, and operates without a hierarchical structure, common protest remains a viable and often highly expressive form of action (Laska, 2020, pp. 250–251). The spontaneity of these actions and the multitude of catalysts leading to these make it difficult to predict when the next wave of upheaval will occur. This uniqueness of multiplicity lies in its occasional nature, permeated with diverse interests and, at times, even contradictions. This presents a challenge and increasingly a clear threat to the functioning of democracy. This issue then definitely requires thorough examination.

## Final remarks

The role of the individual in politics has long been a central concern for theorists. Questions surrounding agency, the primacy of the agent, and the nature of social entities continue to fuel lively debates. In Polish political science, several elements have emerged in recent decades that resonate with most scholars. One key aspect is the emphasis on an activist perspective, viewing individuals or social groups as active agents of change, albeit with varying degrees of agency depending on the approach taken. Younger generations of Polish political scientists also increasingly recognize the importance of non-human factors that accelerate the dynamics of the world, drawing from astute observations of contemporary political processes. This necessitates a reconfiguration of existing political science categories, particularly in relation to the emergence of new dimensions of agency.

Within the realm of Polish political science, there is a growing recognition of the need to expand classical concepts and definitions to encompass the influence of social structure, given the rise of new social movements, alternative sources of power, and extensive global networks. Previous approaches, grounded in an activist perspective, primarily focused on individuals or social groups and their interconnections, placing human factor at the forefront. Even when the issues related to the influence of the environment were addressed, they were usually sidelined and treated as secondary. However, contemporary scholars acknowledge that the actions of political actors are mediated by a structure of heterogeneous elements extending beyond the purely social realm. They also recognize that the structure itself can be the catalyst for change, signifying a qualitative shift. The simplified diagram below illustrates the intricate interplay between individual agency, social structure, and the process of change.



**Diagram 1.** Changes in the approach to key terms in political science

Source: own elaboration.

All the aforementioned profound transformations and emerging circumstances call for a significant review of our understanding of agency. It is possible that we are witnessing the emergence of a novel type of actor that defies conventional dichotomies, such as methodological individualism versus holism, or nominalism versus realism. Several indicators support this notion. Encouragingly, Polish political scholars are unafraid of tackling such challenges and eagerly explore the realm of new political phenomena in their research. This demonstrates that the field of political theory continues to offer valuable insights and presents intriguing explanatory perspectives.

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