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Explanatory Qualities of the Concept of "the Political" in Polish Political Science Research

Abstract: The aim of this article is to look at “the political” as an explanatory category. “The political” is a concept naming a feature of political phenomena, which means that it belongs to the foundations of political sciences. It has a profound impact on the development and structure of knowledge of political phenomena. Moreover, it is also a significant research object among political scientists. Especially in recent years, the phenomenon and concept have been reworked in various dimensions, indicating the distinctiveness of the problem. This makes it possible to ask the question about the status of “the political” in relation to the explanatory function of political sciences. A working axis that would serve to explicate “the political” in Polish political science research, while at the same time systematising its complexity, comprises two levels: a subjective level and an objective level. The former should be understood as being strongly related to the researcher and their decisions. The latter is related to the object of cognition, the matter under examination.

Keywords: “the political”, explanation, theory of politics, metatheory, political science

The properties of concepts have been and still are the subject of disputes in the fields of linguistics, philosophy of science, methodology of social sciences and psychology of cognition. In the field of the theory of concepts itself, according to Robert Piłat, we will encounter such positions as the classical theory, with its Aristotelian roots and the assumption that concepts refer to necessary and sufficient conditions; more contemporary theories, such as those referring to

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relations of similarity between distinguished specimens and other objects; as well as concepts referring to patterns delineating certain sets of properties; and last but not least, a group of views expressing the belief that concepts are theories making it possible to explain various factors, and in this view, concepts remain somehow dependent on the other elements of the subject's knowledge of the world (Piłat, 2007, pp. 33, 43). However, irrespective of the adopted position, what is indisputable here is the significance of the problems accompanying concepts, from the issue of representation to the aspect of their relation to the processes of cognition. On the basis of the psychology of cognition, among the functions of concepts, Tomasz Maruszewski distinguishes the one that leads to explanation and understanding. The author states that due to the fact that we include particular objects in the scope of a concept, we are able to use the already acquired knowledge of other objects within this scope, which allows for the reconstruction of the mechanisms occurring in specific circumstances. In the long run, this enables accurate inference, which is also a function of concepts. Although Maruszewski emphasises the importance of concepts, he simultaneously draws attention to the pitfalls, such as bias resulting from an excessive reduction of differences between objects falling under a given concept (Maruszewski, 2011, p. 323 et seq.). Nevertheless, with the recommended vigilance, an analysis of the cognitive value of meaningful concepts in social sciences, as well as in a specific discipline, appears to be an important task, especially taking into account the aforementioned functions and the position emphasising concepts as mini-theories referring to the knowledge possessed by the subject and serving to explain phenomena (cf. Maruszewski, p. 324; Piłat, 2007, p. 43), by orientating them. This position seems particularly adequate in relation to the specificity and condition of the aforementioned sciences, as well as the role played in them by concepts.

In view of the above introduction, the aim of this article is to analyse “the political” as an explanatory category, which is fundamentally substantiated by two aspects. Firstly, “the political” is a concept naming a feature of political phenomena, which means that it belongs to the foundations of political sciences as a field of knowledge about such phenomena. This knowledge is profoundly influenced by “the political”, particularly regarding its elaboration and structure. Secondly, “the political” itself is also a significant subject of deliberations in political sciences. In particular in recent years, the phenomenon and concept of “the political” has been reworked in various dimensions indicating the distinctiveness of the very field of these studies (cf. Ozimek-Hanslik, 2023a). This makes it possible to ask the question about its status in relation to the explanatory function of political sciences.

The obviously multi-dimensional matter of the entire field of deliberations on “the political” requires, at the outset, to arrange the threads occurring within it and, at the same time, to define the order that organises this argument.

Aspects of "the political"

The definition of explanatory qualities seems to clearly formulate the objective of this study. Before doing so, however, it would be appropriate to comment on the problems that accompany the term "explanatory" in order to prevent misunderstandings. The notion of explanation evokes naturalistic connotations, whereas at least a significant part of research in Polish political theory – including, above all, research on "the political" – although largely shaped by explanatory assumptions, is not an explanation in the spirit of positivism. This has influenced the nature of research that refers to the concept of "the political". In the case of the theory of politics discussed here, this explanation is supported by a qualitative analysis that does not aspire to construct generalisations, but is characterised instead by logical coherence and argumentation, while in reworking mechanisms, concepts, and processes, it operates with an in-depth reflection on meta-theory and the issues related to the conditions of cognition (Ozimek-Hanslik, 2023b). This peculiarity of the domestic theory of politics, suspended between the theory of politics and political theory, constitutes the right context for understanding explanation. Deliberations on "the political" in this area have been similarly oriented.

In view of the above, "the political" should be treated as a cognitive (analytical) category applicable to political science research and a meta-theoretical category being the subject of methodological and theoretical considerations, and also serving to reflect on the conditions of explanation and theory formulation. In both cases, we concentrate on the problem of the spectrum of the understanding of phenomena, although it is explicated in two different aspects. To put it differently: the matter is complex insofar as the analytical, cognitive aspect of "the political" is problematised within the framework of political science research. Thus, this concept not only is a tool used to explain, but also delimits the field of explanation, allowing for the identification of the research problem, in accordance with the metaphor of a "spotlight illuminating" the research area, presented by Zbigniew Blok and Małgorzata Kołodziejczak (Blok, Kołodziejczak, 2015, p. 26). In this sense, "the political" offers the reconnaissance of the terrain. This is derived from what role this category plays in political sciences and what significantly determines this analysis.

It seems necessary to become aware of the numerous problems to be able to delineate the aspects of the concept of "the political" in deliberations on its explanatory qualities. In view of this, there are two levels serving as a working axis to explicate "the political" in Polish political science research in a certain complexity, while at the same time systematising this complexity: a subjective level and an objective level. The former should be understood as being strongly related to the subject of the research and decisions made by the subject. The latter, on the other hand, concerns the object of cognition, the very matter that is studied.

It is in relation to these two levels that some important observations can be presented. These are observations concerning the field of research in Polish political sciences in terms of the problem indicated in the title.

The subjective level

As it has been mentioned above, it is directly related to the researcher and what determines their actions in the process of cognition. Consequently, it requires meta-theoretical reflection. It is impossible to consider “the political” as a cognitive category without a thorough reflection on the assumptions that precede the very determination of what is political. After all, it is there that decisions preceding the cognitive process are made, determining its orientation, and ultimately influencing the cognitive qualities of the concept. In this sense, “the political” as a meta-theoretical category also fulfils an explanatory function, as it explains the effects of particular paradigmatic decisions rather than others, and consequently the trajectories of the cognitive process.

The concept shows an affinity with other concepts that, in the humanities, refer to fundamental, unstable concepts that significantly orientate the reality under examination (observation), whether it be “theory in miniature” (Bal, 2012), or Walter B. Gallie’s “essentially contested concepts” (Gallie, 1956). In this sense, it is an initial interpretation of a phenomenon, which tangibly represents the fundamental condition of political sciences, which is paradigmatic pluralism. While it has been extensively discussed in many publications in the political science circles, the debate on “the political” seems to have pointed to its most practical dimension (cf. Ozimek-Hanslik, 2020), which leaves its trace on research conducted in the discipline.

Consequently, “the political” highlights the intentional aspect of scientific practices. Thus, it can be successfully treated as a vantage ground for tracing any “presuppositions” determining the subsequent stages of cognition. The problem of conceptualisation of “the political” brings to the fore not only the decisions of the subject, but also the subject itself, their relations with the object of cognition, which makes it possible to analyse its lack of neutrality, which in this context is also expressed in the operationalisation of the criteria of “the political”. For it is here that the first problem question arises: What kind of “the political”? In other words: What do we mean when we study “the political” or the political character of a phenomenon? “The political” in this sense is a form of framing. After all, using the concept of “the political”, we also express our own attitude towards relevant political science issues, so the concept itself already at this stage explains to the reader or listener the initial package of scientific beliefs characteristic of a particular researcher (cf. Ozimek-Hanslik, 2023a). Thus, using the concepts

of politics and "the political" in a consistently non-synonymous way, we assume the absence of one field's monopoly on political phenomena and the necessity to search for it in non-obvious social spaces, and this happens according to certain criteria that are not always identical and sometimes not even similar. This is, in fact, a political scientist's first assumption about the studied reality and one of the aspects of "the political" that carries with it a practical statement.

These tropes have been clearly highlighted in numerous publications. Let us have a closer look at a few of them. Mirosław Karwat points out that the explanation of politics and political phenomena must be preceded by theoretical effort to determine the preliminaries of these phenomena, especially taking into account the conditions of multi-paradigmatism when no uniform criteria are present (Karwat, 2016, p. 135). But this is not all, because beyond the choice itself, the entanglement of the researcher is also expressed in this term. "The political" of some phenomena does not raise much doubt, but "the political" of others is no longer so obvious. As a result, as Karwat states, "'the political' has a performative flavour". In other words: "the political" will be whatever the subject conducting the research deems as such (2016, pp. 136–137). Hence, the aforementioned author writes elsewhere about the necessity of keeping distance from "one's own politicisation" (Karwat, 2006, p. 38). It is not a question of taking an objectivist position and denying entanglement, but rather of being aware that it is indispensable. A similar line of reflection has been developed by Łukasz Młyńczyk, which is accurately illustrated in the following statement: "A political scientist, by definition, must study what is political, and thus does not so much observe the object under study as becomes a part of it". This assigns to political scientists the task of identifying the socio-political events in which they participate, which, according to Młyńczyk, raises methodological problems of a certain type. This prompts reliance on scientific (political) intuition to a greater extent, as a method is not something universal. It is primarily a function of the perception of the object, and beyond this, the researcher is also an important context for it (Młyńczyk, 2013, pp. 13–14). As explanation in this context encounters certain limitations, it becomes clear that, in the spirit of Dilthey, reflection on the political takes the form of an interpretation by no means from an external position, thus expressing anti-naturalistic inclinations.

The problem of "the political" and its criteria, not infrequently tacitly accepted, has gained a certain autonomy as a research problem, yielding in this respect interesting conclusions concerning the conditions for the development of knowledge of political sciences and its structure. These issues are an interesting field of research on ideological entanglements. I perceive this as a peculiar feature of the Polish theoretical-political discourse on "the political" (cf. Ozimek-Hanslik, 2023a). This significance of the selection of criteria has also been the subject of publications, commentaries and research conducted by political scientists. As early as in the 1980s, Franciszek Ryszka highlighted the problems

arising from semantic misunderstandings, in which he saw the frequency of applying contextual definitions. These included ambiguities concerning the term “politics” in various spaces: paradigmatic orientations, cultural circles, practical or theoretical activity. He pointed out that the language of scientific description can be a tool for explanation and a critique of the language of politics, which, as he ascertained, becomes politics itself or is a form of ideologisation of political problems. This is preceded by the selection of “fields of observation” that comprise “the political”, the associated modes of description, which subsequently allows for the construction of theory. There is, however, a heuristic value in this differentiation, among other things, for the history of political ideas, which directs our observation towards values and norms inherited from the past. Political sciences can thus be seen as critical knowledge of collective and individual activities concerning a whole range of timeless issues, just to mention “freedom” and “welfare” as examples. And throughout history, “values have changed agency and addressees” (Ryszka, 1988, pp. 134–135).

It is not surprising, then, that “the political” has, as it were, returned to the bosom of political sciences along the path set by philosophies of politics such as those articulated by Chantal Mouffe (cf. Mouffe, 2008), Ágnes Heller (cf. Heller, 2005), or John Rawls (cf. Rawls, 2012), and through them posed the question concerning the principal political concepts and the phenomena constituting the political. In this sense, “the political”, its provenance, become an object of cognition, also as a meta-theoretical problem. For example, Lech Rubisz perceives here the classical political-doctrinal division, with the proviso that it contains a certain simplification. He attributes a conservative character to Schmitt’s conceptualisation (cf. Schmitt, 2012), where one of the constitutive elements is, among other things, unification, “the political” is an adjectival synonym for politics, and liberal democracy is seen as a depoliticising system. For him, a liberal concept is one in which “the political” as the possibility of aligning the interests of different social groups crowns the pursuit of freedom, expressed in public activism, and the best space in which it can be achieved is liberal democracy, which due to its characteristics is the most political system. He places Bernard Crick in this category (cf. Crick, 2004). Leftism, on the other hand, is characteristic of those concepts of “the political” that focus on the conflict that constitutes “the political”, which allows for the achievement of full pluralism in democracy. The attitude towards liberal democracy, which is seen as depoliticised because it eradicates differentiation from the public sphere, makes it a concept related to Schmitt’s concept. This concept should be associated with Mouffe (Rubisz, 2014, pp. 26–30). However, making such classifications effective, we enter the arena of ideological disputes, which further complicates the matter (Minkner, 2015, pp. 59–60).

In view of the proliferating political science studies on the political in the second decade of the 2000s, there are attempts to reflect on, and sometimes

apply "the political" deriving, on the one hand, from the circle of understanding rooted in the Polish theoretical-political discourse, and on the other hand, from Western European and American discourses. The dilemmas related to the planes of work on "the political" and the function ascribed to it, and consequently the inadequacy of "different forms of the political", became clearer then. They reify the peculiar suspension of Polish political theory between the theory of politics and political theory. Kamil Minkner aptly explains this problem by making an important clarifying distinction between "the political" as an analytical category and "the political" as a conceptual problem. The former is to have a cognitive function, oriented towards explaining social and political reality (for the record: in the sense mentioned earlier). The conceptual context, on the other hand, concerns the formulation of concepts of the political with a clear commitment on the part of the authors, not infrequently entangled in current political practices aimed at socio-political change. Their genesis is most often the circle of the philosophy of politics. These ideas can be either normative (projecting, valuing) or critical (explaining by exposing contradictions) in nature. Moreover, in some cases these two variants will overlap (Minkner, 2015, p. 59), which begs the question of applications and their consequences in political scientists' research endeavours.

In summary, "the political" is an excellent observatory of scientific discourses and their trajectories, reflecting researchers' deepest beliefs that determine our scientific decisions. Ultimately, its explanatory qualities, as well as the fact that the political has "become independent" as a research problem and has itself become an object of explanation, presented at the subjective level, allow for the reconstruction of the ideological meanderings of the conditions of theory and knowledge building in political sciences.

The objective level

The objective level, as stated before, no longer concerns the researcher so much, although it will clearly be a consequence of the researcher's conduct, as "the political" as an analytical category, with all its heuristic potential on the ground of the object of cognition. The concept will thus be treated in this context as somewhat subservient to the research process.

The catalogue of studies to be discussed here probably does not exhaust all those available, but, as I believe, it presents a certain qualitative review that allows conclusions to be drawn regarding the explanatory function of political sciences and an observation of the directions of undertaken research. What is important and needs to be added is that I refer to research that nominally uses the concept of "the political". Indeed, we could expect political scientists, if not to

specialise in, then at least to be aware of, this concept. There is no reason to explicate the qualities of “the political” in any particular way on the basis of interchangeable applications, synonymous with politics, etc., or unsupported by any direct references to the political. Then we learn nothing about the potential of the category if it is not used in all its specificity. Hence, in order to demonstrate the explanatory possibilities it offers, it is important to apply it in some of its distinctiveness to politics.

The first observation concerning the interest of Polish political scientists in terms of the political nature of phenomena concerns the identification of a field that is probably one of the most exploited by researchers. It can be defined as broadly understood culture, art, artistic activity, the symbolic sphere, and it will be dominant in the references below. This problem field is explicated in two ways. The first aspect is to theorise, using the concept of “the political” (and politicisation), the relationship between these phenomena and politics, the mechanisms, the subjects, as well as the phenomenon itself, and its possible configurations. The second aspect is empirical and applicative in character. It directly indicates the political character of a given phenomenon, analysing it and the accompanying circumstances. Both aspects are characterised by dissociation from naturalism and the use of the tools of qualitative analysis.

However, besides the aforementioned domains of social life, other issues are also present, although they are not as widely represented. Among them, we will find a number of phenomena concerning the condition of contemporary societies: new challenges arising from technological development, the foundations of the transforming socio-political order; but also fields of knowledge that, due to their nature, are strongly linked to the social condition, including at the level of myths and symbols, and largely influence it, history being a perfect case in point. From this claim, or even conviction, grows an entire strand of folk, social history that aims to redefine traditional values in this respect.

If we look at theoretical issues, we can see interesting attempts to conceptualise the various levels of broadly understood culture, art and the symbolic sphere, their various fields, forms, actors, and conditions. In this respect, we encounter very dynamic approaches, where “the political” is to allow the presentation of boundary mechanisms that allow for applications in a wider spectrum of situations. And it is on the basis of “the political” that the entire conglomerate of events at the boundary between “the political” and “the non-political” is explicated. This process is characterised by an anti-formalist approach, meaning that it does not absolutise individual factors, but explains the entanglements within which politicisation takes place, or a given phenomenon acquires this element. At the same time, it remains within its proper social domain (e.g., culture, art, the symbolic sphere). The questions that are asked concern the qualifying (favourable or unfavourable) circumstances, the boundary conditions that lead to such a state. The conclusions reached in these studies make it possible

to illustrate, but also to create models for the analysis of these phenomena, concretised theoretical proposals for considering, or even extracting their political character (cf. Karwat, 2018; Minkner, 2007; 2012; Golinowski, Pierzchalski, 2011).

In addition to the above, a whole repertoire of empirical efforts in relation to the aforementioned domains of social life demands attention. Let us attempt, in a nutshell, to review them through the prism of the three planes of identification that are the result of the recourse to "the political" as a category explaining the mechanisms occurring on the border between what is political and what is non-political. Of course, their separability is of a working, descriptive nature; they appear as aspects in conducted research rather than separate exemplifications. In fact, it is often their joint consideration that guarantees research complementarity.

The first plane seems to expose the notion of "the political", which makes it possible to name the context of entanglement of particular phenomena and focus on their various conditions. The syndromic nature of political phenomena is clearly discernible here. For example, artistic activity can be reflected in the political sphere: in behaviours or activities of various kinds. It can also set the course of a political debate (cf. Młyńczyk, 2018; Minkner, 2012), but also produce political repercussions. The filter of "the political" also makes it possible to capture a whole range of institutional, systemic (e.g., economic) conditions whose political entanglement leads to the identification of political influence on the outcome of such institutions' actions, or the fostering of certain beliefs. A prime example of such entanglement is cultural institutions (cf. Lorenz, 2012; Ozimek, 2015; Minkner, 2012; Młyńczyk, 2018). The various domains of social activity also reflect, through their politicisation, something that can be tentatively called the currently prevailing political climate, such as taking an attitude or being drawn in by political polarisation or expressing the mood of the general public or a particular social group, regardless of whether this happens intentionally, for example as an appreciation of certain beliefs, or unintentionally (cf. Ozimek, 2016; Rubisz, 2014; Minkner, 2012). A prominent example of this is memory and history (cf. Rubisz, 2014). Furthermore, science, already mentioned in the context of the subjective level, is also subject to ideological entanglement, which is worth looking at through the prism of the title category (cf. Ozimek-Hanslik, 2023a). Descending to the individual level in this respect, it is also possible to explicate the action of specific actors in the social sphere and interpret it in relation to the political sphere (cf. Ozimek, 2016).

The next plane presents the examination of "the political" in a way that no longer recognises only the flows and entanglements at the boundary between the political sphere and what lies beyond it. By capturing "the political" beyond the phenomena of the sphere, it explores the spaces in which we observe political relations, activities once reserved for the sphere of politics, new political forms,

but also new issues, hitherto absent from the social domain, but nowadays significantly shaping it. Undoubtedly, such new carriers of “the political” in the sense of new social issues, simultaneously politically significant, have given rise to not only new political problems, but also new research problems. While they have not always been completely new, their significance has increased, or they are being revisited. These include, for example, regulations concerning corporeality, reproduction, broadly understood sexuality, issues brought about by posthumanism, history and commemoration, identity. Over time, these create spaces in which particular social groups make efforts to secure their vital interests (cf. Minkner, 2017a; Ozimek, 2014; Ozimek-Hanslik, 2022; Rubisz, 2014). The symbolic sphere has also acquired an element of “the political” that allows for the identification of statements with such a trait. This applies, for example, to visibility or a city space where declarations, political beliefs, attitudes to a currently socially momentous issue may be manifested, becoming, in a sense, a metaphor for politics (cf. Mikołajczyk, 2018; 2019). In this context, we explicate political articulations whose emanations are present in various spaces, such as art, as a form of political participation. It is in these spaces that political debate or political conflict can take place (cf. Mikołajczyk, 2018; 2019; Lorenc, 2012; Młyńczyk, 2018; Ozimek, 2016). It is not without significance that language has acquired a momentous role in politics, causing political phenomena to be also considered from a semiotic angle (Golinowski, Pierzchalski, 2011). Furthermore, many politically relevant activities, activism had their origins and expression in various phenomena, for example from the field of artistic activity. Inspiring political activity, for instance social movements, or even political mobilisation, is also an important issue in the context of the political (cf. Pierzchalski, 2011). Moreover, the issue of these very spaces, the conditions of their functioning, the power relations inscribed in them, is also a cognitively fertile topic, for example the city space (cf. Mikołajczyk, 2019) or the internet space. The rationale for addressing it is, among other things, the development of new technologies and a form of governance (cf. Minkner, 2017b).

The final plane seems to expose to the highest degree the critical element (to some extent it is also evident in the others) that is present in the processes of cognition reaching for the concept of “the political”. It is most fully realised in cooperation with the dialectical approach. The ranges of problems whose exploration is supported by “the political” include the unmasking of the political character of content functioning as neutral or as seemingly uninvolved, the perception of relations of power that does not have a formal or institutionalised form, but is expressed, for example, in a cultural formation, or the domination of certain norms. The concept of “the political” in this respect allows for the identification of various strategies for neutralising social phenomena, resolving social problems, ways of presenting them, as well as consolidating the shape of political solutions affecting the functioning of society (cf. Ozimek, 2014). This

consolidation and reproduction of the shape of the system, social norms, economic attitudes, historical narratives, stereotypes, etc. is part of the process of pursuing and securing the interests of dominant groups, and "the political" in the cognitive sense allows for the vivisection of these processes (cf. Minkner, 2012; 2017c; Ozimek-Hanslik, 2022; Rubisz, 2014; Mikołajczyk, 2018). What is subsequently revealed is the relations of power, the ideological-ness of "rational" knowledge of phenomena and patterns explaining reality, as well as the disarming of the foundations of current processes as inevitable with a historical character, while it is possible to indicate their political provenance and the arbitrary decisions that influenced them (cf. Golinowski, 2011; 2015). Finally, this identification of "the political" and ideological foundations of social reality makes it possible to identify actions that undermine them and thus pursue socio-political change. These can take place, for example, within the framework of artistic activity (cf. Pierzchalski, 2011). Vigilance with regard to interpretation is also instilled on this plane. Looking through the prism of "the political" can often correct the vector of understanding a given phenomenon and result in important knowledge about, for instance, the mentality of given social groups, but also how they see reality, and thus lead to a more comprehensive interpretation of the actions they take (cf. Minkner, 2017c; Ozimek-Hanslik, 2022).

Analyses of these issues performed by means of the concept of "the political" not only allow this conglomerate of problems to be adequately described and put into a frame of political sciences, but, through this, produce relevant benefits for knowledge in the area of political sciences. Let us briefly examine at least a few groups of problems where "the political" can be used to find a solution (or to get close to doing so), at both theoretical and empirical levels.

Firstly, "the political" sheds light on the indispensability of contacts, their nature, the direction between what is political and what is non-political, or at least what we perceive as such. Importantly, what is revealed against the backdrop of the concept of "the political" is the anachronism of considering these relations as static and the necessity of considering the whole chain of relations of these spheres as dynamic, changeable in many respects. This dynamism itself is already an important issue for political sciences, which also means focusing on the internal mechanisms of the mentioned spheres.

Secondly, "the political" makes it possible to grasp the deployment of political interests, the forms in which they are pursued and secured, which already at a general level excludes focusing on some single central phenomenon as a core – as has often been the case in relation to power – but introduces important pluralism into this agenda. This ranges from language to inherently non-political institutions. A further obvious implication is the recognition of new categories of political actors and social domains that are endowed with this feature. In addition, it also supports vigilance about the sources of knowledge of political phenomena, which will be discussed further below.

Thirdly, through “the political”, it is possible to reconstruct political processes more effectively by identifying their political conditions, origins and far-reaching political repercussions. This results in capturing not only the part of these processes falling within the institutionalised sphere of politics, but also the preceding or subsequent processes in the social sphere, among phenomena endowed with the quality of “the political”. In practice, this means not only specific benefits in terms of understanding the causes and consequences of political phenomena, but also support for the fulfilment of the predictive function of political sciences. In this context, we, as researchers, definitely increase our chances of answering more exhaustively such questions as, for example, where political change came from, what its origins were.

Fourthly, “the political” is also a tool for analysing and describing social groups vis-à-vis politics, their positioning and political aspirations, forms of political activation and satisfactory participation, representation, or de-favouring in the public and political spheres, as well as the nature of the entire social structure, the reflection of its shape in relations in various fields of social life. In view of this, we do not treat politics as a self-contained phenomenon, detached from society, but bond it with its social foundations. Additionally, this makes the researcher sensitive to the multiplicity of non-identical perspectives of different social groups. After all, it is such perspectives that determine perceptions of the meaning of particular events, processes, actors, etc.

Fifthly, the cognitive potential of “the political” finally leads to the broadening, updating and criticism of the spectrum of sources of knowledge about society and political phenomena. This obviously affects the understanding and interpretation of messages about political phenomena, as well as political phenomena and political actions themselves. It is of great importance above all in relation to the classical sources in political sciences. This means that by looking through the prism of the political at sources that are atypical or even those that are seemingly completely unrelated to politics, we get closer to the subject of political sciences than by insisting on the usual paths of inquiry. In his conference speeches, Bohdan Kaczmarek very aptly points out that a traditional study of a political party through its programme cannot yield positive results at present (among others, because of the not insignificant increase in the importance of marketing efforts), therefore, we should turn to the ethnographic method, which may yield some knowledge of such an object of cognition. In the longer term, it is an encouragement to reach for methods from the field of social sciences, which will be subordinated to our cognitive goals, and which may not have been obvious leads so far.

Summarising the considerations in this section, it can be stated that the concept of “the political” and its empirical applications have given researchers effective tools for almost emancipatory cognitive explorations. They allow for the study of political phenomena where they are, rather than where we would like

them to be (Kaczmarek, 2017, p. 84), enriching researchers with sensitivity to the subtleties, instabilities, and non-obviousness of social reality. As a result, it is possible to study what is realistically political, rather than focus on politicking (or the media aspect of politics) (Karwat, 2016, p. 136), with an adjustment for intentionality, of course. Observations of the efforts of political scientists lead to the conclusion that a unique demand for tools allowing researchers to venture into less obvious territories has emerged. Thus, taking into account inquiries initiated on the basis of the conscious use of the concept of "the political", it seems that this category has been a positive response to such efforts. There is no doubt, therefore, that "the political" has resulted, above all, in a broadening of the exploration spectrum, allowing for a fuller explanation and a more holistic interpretation. In this sense, the paths blazed so far in this direction have proved to be cognitively methodologically, identity-wise creative, and as practical as possible in terms of extracting the object of cognition.

Conclusions

It seems that the reflection on "the political" in its explanatory aspect is, on the one hand, a response to the shortcomings of the still dominant cratocentric perspective, enhancing the value of the sociocentric perspective (Gulczyński, 2009; Kaczmarek, 2017, p. 84 et seq.; cf. Karwat, 2018). It is no longer the processes of governance, institutions of power, etc. that organise the knowledge and inquiry of political sciences. Their role has been taken over by political phenomena that immanently lead researchers towards a broader social plane. On the other hand, "the political" brings about new political problems that become new objects of study for political sciences. In this sense, the concept of the political provides political sciences with a regular update, making researchers' efforts and political science knowledge more relevant to the socio-political reality, encouraging also methodological exploration.

The objective of this article is to present the explanatory qualities of the concept of "the political" in relation to research in the field of political sciences. In the course of the deliberations, I have argued for a number of observations in this regard. At this point, however, it is worth highlighting two qualities that the analysis of this body of research brings to the fore. The category of "the political" as some unique heuristics is reflected first of all in the problem of self-reflection and critical analysis of phenomena. For "the political" has contributed and continues to contribute to the process of building the self-awareness of political scientists, at the same time providing a motivation for cognitive efforts that reach under and beyond the shell of the phenomena in which "the political" is natural. These critical inclinations are not infrequently an element of a remedy

for ossified research practices or perceptions of various phenomena, burdened by naturalistic tendencies and unconscious assumptions.

This optimistic conclusion requires a comment. Despite the extensive discussion, it seems that the issue of the political nature of phenomena has been assimilated mainly by theorists. Undoubtedly, publications as a material outcome of the debate in the theoretical and political circles function as an important part of political science achievements, also in the context of contributions to the consolidation of the discipline and its identity, yet it more often than not becomes only a point of reference within political science works, which is not equivalent to the frequency of applications of the concepts developed in political theory, or reflections on the subject. It should be noted that works that treat “the political” of phenomena in a particularly elaborate way and develop the theoretical and methodological foundations on the basis of the concept of “the political” are usually written by political theorists or researchers showing theoretical inclinations. Therefore, the reflection common to both the subjective and objective levels is that there is a need for further reworking of “the political” at the empirical level by not only theorists, but also that part of our discipline that can be called empirical political sciences, in order to ultimately strengthen the flow between the two. This will be of unquestionable benefit to the discipline as a whole, in view of the not inconsiderable explanatory potential of the concept of “the political”.

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