

EDITORIAL

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SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSITION IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE AFTER 1989

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Abstract: This volume of *Studia Historiae Oeconomicae* is devoted to the socio-economic transition of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe after 1989. The collapse of the communist regimes initiated a multidimensional process encompassing economic liberalisation, the democratisation of political life, institutional restructuring, and the region's integration into the global economy and European structures. The volume comprises eight articles examining the origins, course, and consequences of this transition, including both synthetic analyses and case studies. The authors employ a range of theoretical perspectives and research methods, with particular emphasis on comparative analysis. A substantial part of the volume is devoted to three methodological articles addressing the theory of sustainable development and contemporary tools for analysing economic phenomena, alongside two book reviews and a posthumous tribute to Professor Witold Szulc, the first long-serving Secretary of *Studia Historiae Oeconomicae*. Taken as a whole, the volume offers a multifaceted examination of the socio-economic transition in Central and Eastern Europe, presenting it as a complex and enduring research subject whose understanding requires the integration of historical, economic, and institutional perspectives.

Keywords: transition; Central and Eastern Europe; centrally planned economy; sustainable development theory; investment risk; adaptive sentiment model

The fall of the communist regimes across a number of Central and Eastern European countries in the autumn of 1989 marked the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the region's socio-economic transition. From a historical perspective, this transformation constituted a unique and

groundbreaking multidimensional process, encompassing not only economic liberalisation but also the democratisation of political life, institutional reform, and the integration of the region's countries into the global economy and European structures.

This process was characterised by the adoption of different paths of transition from centrally planned to market-based economies, as well as by varying rates of change across individual countries. Regardless of the model adopted, however, the transformation brought about profound economic, social, and political consequences that continue to shape life in the region and its position on the political and economic map of Europe and the wider world.

Its complexity, considerable territorial diversity, and both its short- and long-term effects make the socio-economic transformation of Central and Eastern Europe an exceptionally compelling subject of research for scholars of economic history and the social sciences, particularly economics. The papers included in this volume of *Studia Historiae Oeconomicae* examine this phenomenon from a range of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches, with particular emphasis on comparative analysis.

The latest volume of *SHO* comprises eight papers devoted to the origins, various phases, and different dimensions of the socio-economic transition in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989, three methodological articles published in the *Materials and Methods* section, two reviews, and a posthumous tribute to the journal's first long-serving Secretary, Professor Witold Szulc.

The academic section of the volume opens with an article by E.C. Njoku and J.S. Sidhu (2026), entitled '*From Central Planning to Market Economies: Post-1989 Transformation in Central and Eastern Europe*'. Drawing on Institutional Change Theory (ICT) (Marangos, 2005) and a qualitative comparative-historical approach, the authors examine the transformation process across Central and Eastern Europe, focusing primarily on Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Ukraine. The central argument of the article is that the post-1989 transformation was not merely a process of economic and political reform but a complex historical and institutional phenomenon, the course of which was shaped by local social and political conditions, the quality of institutions, and international factors. As a result, the transformation produced markedly different outcomes. While some countries have established competitive market economies and successfully integrated into international structures and the glo-

bal economy, others continue to grapple with institutional weaknesses, dependence on foreign capital, governance challenges, and adverse demographic trends. The authors conclude that the continued development of post-transition countries requires moving beyond the mechanical replication of external models in favour of solutions tailored to local conditions. Such an approach, they argue, would promote a balance between economic efficiency, institutional resilience, and social justice.

The analysis presented in the article by E.C. Njoku and J.S. Sidhu is further developed in three subsequent contributions by Ł. Dwilewicz, W. Morawski, and I. Shandra; R. Masyk; and D. Bębnowski. Together, these articles examine various dimensions and stages of the transformation process, from diagnosing the crisis of the centrally planned economy, through the initial attempts at reform, to the institutional conditions underpinning the transition to a market economy.

The article *'The Starting Point of the Transformation: In a Circle of Shortages, Rationing and Privileges. Polish and Ukrainian Experiences and the Debates about Central Planning and Social Equality'* (Dwilewicz, Morawski, and Shandra, 2026) examines the mechanisms underlying the emergence of social inequalities in a centrally planned economy, using the examples of post-1945 Poland and Soviet Ukraine. The authors challenge the view that real socialism ensured genuine social equality, demonstrating instead that an economy of scarcity generated its own system of inequality based on unequal access to scarce goods and privileges. As a consequence, the actual level of inequality was significantly higher than official income data suggested. Drawing on a comparative analysis, the authors argue that the greater degree of social pluralism in Poland created more favourable conditions for political transition. By contrast, the stronger authoritarianism and greater dependence of society on the state in Soviet Ukraine resulted in a far more challenging starting point for economic reforms following independence.

In his article *'The Transformation of Ukraine's Economic System at the Turn of the 1980s and 1990s: From Centralised Planning to Free Market Relations'*, R. Masyk (2026) examines the reform of Ukraine's economic system, using the republics of the former USSR—and Russia in particular—as points of reference for his analysis. The author argues that the principal cause of the reforms' failure was the unwillingness of the communist elites to dismantle the centrally planned economy in any meaningful way. According to the author, the superficial reforms introduced during the *perestroika* period, together with the policies pursued

by the Ukrainian authorities following independence, not only delayed the transition but also facilitated the emergence of an oligarchic class and the entrenchment of dysfunctional links between politics and business. He further emphasises the importance of structural factors, particularly Ukraine's dependence on the post-Soviet economy and imports of energy resources. The article concludes that the limited effectiveness of the transition was determined primarily by the quality of institutions and political elites. Despite the implementation of more far-reaching reforms after 1994, the transformation process remained incomplete owing to persistent institutional weaknesses, the dominance of oligarchic interests, and high social costs, including declining living standards and the deteriorating economic situation of the majority of the population.

The article by D. Bębnowski (2026) examines changes in property institutions in Poland and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) between 1980 and 1990 through the lens of the author's concept of Slowing Down Transition (SDT). On this basis, the author argues that the transition from a centrally planned to a market economy was not abrupt but was preceded by an intermediate phase during which the communist elites deliberately delayed reforms in an effort to preserve the existing institutional order and safeguard their political and economic interests. The SDT concept, which describes the period between the crisis of the socialist economy and the actual systemic transition, constitutes a valuable analytical framework for understanding the influence of political elites' strategies and institutional arrangements on the course and pace of change. The author's comparative analysis of changes in property law and the phenomenon of SDT in Poland and the GDR demonstrates that, by 1990, Poland had gained a clear advantage over the GDR in terms of the pace and depth of socio-economic transformation. While strong manifestations of SDT were still evident in the GDR—particularly during the operation of the first Trust Agency (UrTHA) in 1990—Poland had already begun implementing a programme of far-reaching economic liberalisation. In the GDR, it was only German reunification and the adoption of the West German legal system that brought this intermediate phase to an end and paved the way for a rapid transition to a market economy.

As in the articles discussed above, the comparative method serves as the principal research tool in two further contributions. The first examines the functioning and development of large-panel housing estates in selected countries of Central and Eastern Europe towards the end of the socialist era (Błazejczyk-Majka et al., 2026), while the second analyses the im-

pact of the expansion of higher education on regional economic disparities in Poland and Romania between 2000 and 2023 (Murgescu and Deaconu, 2026). In the article by L. Błażejczyk-Majka and co-authors, the comparative method is employed to identify similarities and differences between countries and to explain their historical and institutional determinants. By contrast, the study by B. Murgescu and S.-M. Deaconu adopts a more analytical and quantitative comparative approach, enabling an assessment of the effects of higher education expansion on regional disparities and economic development. In both cases, however, the comparative method makes it possible to move beyond the analysis of individual countries and demonstrates that the shared experience of a centrally planned economy and subsequent transition produced divergent outcomes depending on institutional and socio-economic conditions.

In the article '*Prefabricated Housing Estates in Central and Eastern European Countries on the Verge of Systemic and Political Transition*' (Błażejczyk-Majka et al., 2026), the authors analyse the organisation of housing systems, models of ownership and management, the extent of the use of prefabrication technology, and the role of large-panel construction in meeting housing needs in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Estonia, and Ukraine (then a republic of the former USSR) prior to the political transition of 1989–1990. The central argument of the article is that, although all the countries examined pursued the common objective of providing universal and affordable housing in accordance with the ideology of real socialism, they differed significantly in each of these respects. The most developed and diverse housing system operated in Czechoslovakia; state ownership predominated in the Soviet republics; housing cooperatives played a significant role in Poland; while in Bulgaria, private ownership of flats prevailed alongside relatively underdeveloped housing management institutions. The authors argue that the diversity of these models was one of the key factors shaping the course of the transformation and marketisation of housing systems after 1990. They further suggest that this diversity provides a valuable foundation for future research on urban change and housing policy in Central and Eastern Europe.

The article '*Higher Education and Regional Economic Inequality in Poland and Romania, 2000–2023*' (Murgescu and Deaconu, 2026) examines the impact of higher education expansion on regional economic disparities in Poland and Romania between 2000 and 2023. The primary aim of the study, which employs advanced statistical methods, is to determine whether an increase in the proportion of the population with higher ed-

ucation promotes regional convergence, thereby reducing disparities in levels of development, or whether it contributes to widening existing inequalities. The findings indicate a positive relationship between the level of higher education and GDP per capita, with the strength of this correlation being greatest between 2000 and 2008 before gradually weakening in the aftermath of the global financial crisis.

At the same time, in both countries examined, the expansion of higher education did not lead to a reduction in regional inequalities but, in many cases, contributed to their widening. These findings support the theory of cumulative causation, according to which more developed regions make more effective use of human capital, investment, and labour resources, thereby reinforcing their developmental advantage. The authors argue that the expansion of higher education alone is insufficient to reduce regional inequalities and must be accompanied by appropriate labour market policies and investment. Their comparative analysis further demonstrates that Poland has made more effective use of the potential of higher education owing to its more developed economy and a greater share of knowledge-based sectors, whereas in Romania the impact of higher education has been constrained by persistent structural barriers.

Alongside the comparative studies discussed above, which focus on the period immediately preceding the collapse of the centrally planned economy and the initial phase of the transition, the subsequent articles by Piotr Franaszek (2026) and by Dariusz Grala and Grzegorz Paluszak (2026) examine two distinct case studies of the transformation of Polish heavy industry, tracing developments through to the present day. Although both articles engage with the concept of sustainable development, they do so from different research perspectives. Piotr Franaszek's article examines the historical process of restructuring a steelworks under market economy conditions, whereas the article by Dariusz Grala and Grzegorz Paluszak analyses the contemporary evolution of corporate management through the prism of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles.

The subject of Piotr Franaszek's article (2026) is the T. Sendzimir Steelworks in Kraków during the period of political transition following 1989. The author presents the modernisation of the enterprise as a multidimensional process encompassing changes in ownership and organisational structures, technological modernisation, the reduction of negative environmental impacts, and the revitalisation of post-industrial sites. Sustainable development serves primarily as an interpretative framework through which the effects of this transformation are assessed not only in

economic terms but also from social and environmental perspectives. The study demonstrates that, despite the considerable social costs of restructuring, the transformation contributed to a lasting improvement in environmental quality and laid the foundation for the enterprise to operate more sustainably.

In turn, the article by Dariusz Grala and Grzegorz Paluszak (2026) examines the current stage of the transformation of Poland's heavy industry, using KGHM Polska Miedź S.A. as a case study. In contrast to Piotr Franaszek's historical perspective, the study adopts an empirical approach and draws on an extensive theoretical framework in the field of sustainable development, including stakeholder theory, institutional theory, legitimacy theory, ecological modernisation theory, and the Triple Bottom Line concept. The authors focus on the implementation of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles as a response to the historical environmental and social costs of industrial activity. They conclude that ESG is not merely a reporting framework but a strategic instrument for the long-term transformation of an enterprise, integrating economic, social, and environmental objectives while strengthening its competitiveness and institutional resilience.

Both articles share the view that the transformation of heavy industry is a long-term process that cannot be assessed solely in terms of economic efficiency. Both the restructuring of the T. Sendzimir Steelworks and the evolution of KGHM demonstrate that the sustainable modernisation of industrial enterprises requires the simultaneous consideration of technological, environmental, social, and institutional dimensions, together with the integration of environmental and social considerations into long-term development strategies.

Anna Paczos's (2026) article, *'Sustainable Development from an Interdisciplinary Perspective: A Review of Scientific Theories and Implications for the Meetings Industry'*, complements the contributions by Piotr Franaszek and by Dariusz Grala and Grzegorz Paluszak. In this article, the author provides a systematic review of theories of sustainable development and their applicability to the analysis of organisations, with particular emphasis on the meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) sector. Building on this review, she proposes an original interpretative model for the MICE sector that combines the concept of sustainable development with the notion of *legacy*, understood as the lasting, planned impact of an event extending beyond its immediate duration. This concept constitutes the central element of the article. Paczos argues that event organisation

should be designed in accordance with the principle of *sustainability by design*, taking into account environmental, social, and economic dimensions, as well as stakeholder relationships. In conclusion, the author calls for further research on sustainable development that more closely integrates insights from environmental, organisational, and institutional theories with analyses of practices in specific sectors of the economy, where tensions between efficiency, responsibility, and the creation of long-term value are particularly pronounced.

Alongside Anna Paczos's article, the *Materials and Methods* section contains Gulnar Kozgambayeva, Magdalena Lachowicz, and Ramazan Abildos's (2026) article, '*Poverty: Everyday Life of Women and Family Values in Conditions of Deportation. Polish Mothers in Kazakhstan (1930s and 1940s)*'. The study combines comparative-historical, microhistorical, and everyday-life approaches with the analysis and synthesis of archival records, published memoirs, oral-history interviews, personal recollections, and testimonies of deported Polish women and their descendants. On this basis, the authors reconstruct the experiences of Polish women forcibly resettled to Kazakhstan under Soviet deportation policies and examine the transformation of motherhood under conditions of hunger, forced labour, political repression, and social marginalisation. Particular attention is paid to women's roles as providers, protectors, and custodians of family cohesion, cultural continuity, and Polish national identity. The article demonstrates that mothers were often compelled to undertake extreme physical labour, resist forced Sovietisation, and make painful decisions, including placing their children in orphanages to protect them from starvation. Poverty is interpreted not only as material deprivation but also as a psychological and intergenerational experience transmitted through trauma, stigmatisation, disrupted family relations, and inherited social exclusion. In conclusion, the authors call for further research on the gendered and intergenerational dimensions of Soviet deportations, combining oral history, trauma studies, and the analysis of changing social roles.

The volume concludes with two reviews. The first, written by Katarzyna Jędraszczyk, *From Periphery to Partnership: Ukraine's Socio-Economic Transformation* (2026), edited by Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast, Sławomir Kamosiński, and Konrad Walerski (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, pp. 236). The second one, prepared by Jakub Szumski, discusses *Breach in the System? Polish Diaspora Firms in the People's Republic of Poland* (2025), edited by Jerzy Kochanowski and Lars Fredrik Stöcker (Warsaw: Scholar Publishing House, pp. 245).

Tadeusz Janicki, b. in 1964 in Krotoszyn, associate professor, habilitated doctor of humanities, head of the Department of Economic History of the Faculty of History of the Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań and President of the Polish Association of Economic History. Editor-in-Chief of the academic journal *Studia Historiae Oeconomicae*. Author of many works on the socio-economic history of Poland and Germany in the 19th and 20th centuries, with particular emphasis on the history of the country-side, agriculture and agricultural policy, the Nazi occupation of Polish lands, the political thought of the Polish peasant movement and the regional history of Wielkopolska. organizer, together with Professor Dariusz Gwiazdowicz from the Poznań University of Life Sciences, of the session at the international congress of historical Sciences entitled: 'Man and nature: Between destruction and creation', which took place as part of the 23rd International Congress of Historical Sciences in Poznań 2022 and Co-organizer (together with P. Franaszek, C. Leszczyńska, and D. Bębnowski) of the session entitled "Equalities and Sustainability Challenges in Transition Economies in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989" at the World Economic History Congress (WEHC) in Lund, Sweden, 2025.

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