

## Introduction of Plenary Session. History and Method of the ‘The Polish Peasant in Europe and America’

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## *Introduction of Plenary Session. History and Method of the 'The Polish Peasant in Europe and America'*

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I want to indicate that the international conference 'The Polish Peasant in Europe and America 1918-1920. W.I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki's Research: Development and Future Perspectives for Sociology' (Salerno, 30-31 October 2019) has been important, and the following publications will be also important, for improving understanding of the contemporary study of migration from the humanistic perspective. Humanistic sociology was the perspective that Florian Znaniecki propagated with his analysis of culture and values and cultural change and also it was the perspective of William Thomas with his analysis of the definition of the situation of many unprivileged persons and social groups.

Florian Znaniecki (1882-1958) and William I. Thomas (1863-1947) influence very much on the study of migration. The book, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918-1920/1976), was one of the most influential monographs showing how to analyze the immigrant communities from sociological perspective. The research included personal documents as the source of empirical data. The two researchers analyzed personal life-records (letters sent to family members, to newspapers, documents of associations, autobiographies, life histories). The personal documents gave insight to the subjective point of view but also in the cultural context of living milieu. The personal documents were not used in such an extensive way before the *Polish Peasants* book was published. The research having the scientific goals was also the tool for social diagnosis of the problems that immigrants had in their everyday life. The analysis of the data at hand revealed that attitudes and actions are shaped by direct surrounding and also the past experiences in diverse cultural contexts of living. Znaniecki and Thomas also indicated that one's

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actions and personalities, social attitudes, and situations influence each other.

Moreover, they have shown also the connection of immigration with social change. The immigration is viewed from humanistic perspective, not only numbers and independent variables are considered. Developing biography and personality are two sides of the same coin. An individual, according to Znaniecki, is always engrossed in a culture. However, the individual could be innovative in shaping his life course. However, it could happen only in culture. Humans are not mechanisms determined by the culture but they take the values to consider to decide about the course of action. The interactions are not only going on in the mind during the decision but also in real life when two or more different value systems are at the stock of knowledge of an individual. The sociological orientation of Florian Znaniecki is connecting the interactive level with a cultural one.

Crucial to the analysis of life histories was concentration on the processual aspects of phenomena (e.g., the process of adjustment and social organization, the process of changing family forms, etc.). The authors have shown that humanistic sociology takes seriously the processes in their research agenda. The definition of situations and giving subjective meaning to the objects happens in the course of time in any human activity. Moreover, *The Polish Peasant* influenced also other substantive areas of sociology as rural sociology, urban sociology, and sociology of nation and sociology of migration. We should mention also about the influence on the development of biographical methods in sociological and pedagogical research.

The reception of Chicago School and later symbolic interactionist sociology, in many countries, is connected with the mentioned works of Znaniecki and Thomas. The interest in the subjective, situational, cultural, and personal approach to the study of the individual immersed in communities become more and more popular.