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Protest activity in European countries

The analysis presented in the article is focused on the processes of the formation of social stratification as stemming from protest activity. It is aimed at finding out to what degree participation in protest actions is a factor in the structuring of social relationships and, in particular, the extent to which the basic forms of structuring which emerge on this basis are superimposed on the existing distances between social categories such as the intelligentsia, owners, workers and peasants. Based on data from the European Social Survey of 2002-2010, the author endeavours to discover the degree to which the more general regularities come to the fore here and to what extent the protests are determined by contextual factors resulting from the specific features of countries, such as, for example, the level of their political system’s democratisation, the threat of unemployment or the influx of ethnic minorities. The indicators of participation in protest taken into account include the participation in legal street demonstrations declared by the respondents, their signing of petitions and boycotting of specific goods and products, as well as their carrying of visible signs of opposition such as stickers or banners intended to promote the values they support. The analysis presented in the article leads to the conclusion that it was Scandinavian societies which had the relatively highest indicators of participation in protest between 2002 and 2010. The values for the indicators were lower for societies representing the traditional Western democracies, such as Britain or France, while the Mediterranean and post-communist societies were characterised by the lowest of all. In all these countries, it is high-level executives and specialists who display the highest indicators for participation in protests, followed by lower-rank white collar staff, owners, workers and farmers. Taking part in democracy is thus not equivalent to more egalitarian social relationships.

Key words: protests, contestation policy, social stratification, democracy.