

# Tonality and Atonality: A Systemic Aspect of Patchwork Capitalism

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## Abstract

*The text analyzes elements of patchwork capitalism in Central and Eastern Europe, framing them through Weber's ideal type concept. It adopts an essayistic style, using a metaphor taken from aesthetic – tonality and atonality – to discuss various arenas and fields of interaction. This metaphor describes the “tonal” and “atonal” games of interest at play within system, with particular emphasis on local, microsystemic practices. Author argues that everyday participatory actions at the micro level may hold the seeds of macrosystemic change.*

**Keywords:** patchwork capitalism, fields of interaction, tonal and atonal games of interests, systemic autopoiesis, systemic change

**JEL Classification Codes:** H7, P16, P35, P47, Z18

In the extensive article *Patchwork Capitalism in Central and Eastern Europe – New Conceptualization*, published in issue 24 of the Warsaw Forum of Economic Sociology, Juliusz Gardawski and Ryszard Rapacki attempted to revise the model approach to the essence of post-communist capitalism in our part of the world. The effect achieved is intriguing, impressive and inspiring.

Given the vastness of the subject matter of the cited article, the aim of this test can only be fragmentary in the threads taken up and modest in the conclusions. However, it is possible, and even appropriate, to attempt to make the commentary on the

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unusual model proposed here as creative as its author can afford. Having therefore calculated intentions into forces, an attempt is made here to make a concise, essayistic reference to the patchwork model in a way that refers to its metaphorical, suggestive and apt name, which here will serve to consider patchwork as a kind of meta-board for fields of interaction and the games of interests played within them.

## 1. The Ideal Type of Patchwork – Atonality Reducing or Increasing Entropy?

The essence of the ideal type is, among other things, that although it does not precisely provide “all the details” and therefore does not constitute a kind of grasp of “all” knowledge in a given field, it nevertheless captures leading generalities that facilitate understanding of extensive material that eludes “exponential” structuring.

In the coherence of a true patchwork, which is a whole made of different pieces of material sewn together, what counts is the similarity of the raw material itself, but also the similarity of its structural texture (resulting from the method of production) and the play of combinations of colors and patterns that evoke aesthetic associations – it is to this last issue that I will refer here to direct the further statement.

The reference to the aesthetic metaphor is justified not only by the essayistic form of this statement, but also by the reading of Max Weber, who, in reference to the ideal type, drew attention, among other things, to the fact that “the obviousness of understanding can be rational (logical or mathematical) or can derive from an empathetic imitative experience (and have an emotional character, proper to the reception of works of art)” [Weber 2002: 6].

The aforementioned “feeling in” is not therefore just an addition or an alternative method to rational operations – for the mind trying to understand, it is a necessary preparation that allows to connect what cannot be connected in a purely rational way due to deficiencies in measurements, method failures, or problems with finding an appropriate research perspective. Here, in this spirit, only one aspect is subjected to (to the extent possible) “feeling in” consideration, out of many possible variants of the interpretation of modeling referring to the idea of “understanding sociology”. Using the references to art present in Weber’s ideal type construct, in the question formulated below, which is an incentive for further narration, reference is made to this simple fact that patchwork in its original form constitutes an aesthetically assessed whole sewn together from pieces of fabric. Therefore: since in art and in aesthetics that examine aspects of art, tonality and atonality of juxtapositions can

be considered and perceived as opposites, but at the same time their co-occurrence and the “games” of their relations *summa summarum* do not have to mean disharmony in the whole work – “only because” in the reception these juxtapositions may appear atypical or even strange – could *per analogiam*, the consequences and inconsistencies of capitalist-patchwork logics, processes and actions also be considered as ultimately “summing up” within the socio-political-economic “work”, which is modelled by the patchwork metaphor?

The question itself, although lengthy in its form, does not seem to be overly complicated in fact and ultimately boils down to the issue of whether what can be perceived as inconsistencies does not constitute only a surface symptom, covering up a specific “meta-logic of patchwork”, its “hidden structure”.

The answer is not easy, for the first reason alone, that regardless of the option adopted, regardless of the type of paradigm “applied”, it will always remain insufficiently closed and incomplete. It is all the more pointless to try to find it in a statement as short as this text is. A further reduction of the search field would be useful, and it seems that a chance of guaranteeing further argument is created here by referring to the simple observation that in nature we encounter many apparently disordered processes composed of multiple phenomena – let’s call them that, having in mind phenomena occurring in swarms, shoals, or herds. Perhaps, then, there are certain deeper regularities in the “hidden structure” of patchwork, which, over a long period of time or at least a longer duration, can generate tonal effects from atonal combinations – since the opposite situation is possible, when it happens that “too tonal” combinations of “forces and intentions” (i.e. available resources and formulated plans) over time slow down development and can lead to degenerative stagnation.

## 2. Tonality of Modernism, Atonality of Postmodernism and the Equal Distance of the Patchwork Model from Them

Generally speaking, tonality is associated much better. In the mainstream of social life supported by tonal aesthetics, ideologies of “coherent progress” are gaining popularity. We know from history that these ideas were accompanied (not only as an aesthetic setting, but also as a tool of legitimization and mobilization) by art valorized by its usefulness in practical application. Analogies are numerous here and by no means end with the most obvious examples, e.g. socialist realism or Nazi

Kunst. Generally speaking, tonality in art is common in the movement known as modernism, but at the same time modernism itself also consists of breaking patterns, breaking tones and improvisation – sometimes on a total scale, as expressed by modernist incarnations of totalitarianisms. However, it is not only modernism that can have a proverbial hiccup in its gargantuan combinations. This unpleasant affliction can also be experienced in the reception of postmodern combinations – sometimes atonal in relation to almost everything that was previously considered accepted and semantically stable – combinations that are openly anarchic or anarchic unknowingly, “unintentionally”. Or those that only experiment with atonality and/or use it in countless practical triangulations. The searches labeled as postmodern investigate ways of “crossing boundaries”, and they do so often in connection with the exploration of the possibilities of capturing individual aspects of the fluid relativity of the world available to us today. The patchwork model remains at a healthy distance from the flaws of modernism and postmodernism. It is located between tonality and atonality, i.e. between the modernist regular tempo and coherent measurement and the postmodernist sense of rhythms and orientation to numerous case studies. In addition to both generalized and detailed reasoning conducted on the basis of conclusions from many years of empirical analyses and theoretical studies, we will also find in its description an understanding of the essential elements of the spirit of change, the Hegelian *Zeitgeist*. In the case of the analysis referring to Max Weber, this is crucial in marking the features of the “pure” (ideal) type of some intriguing, growing, or common process or phenomenon in order to interpretively grasp its intentional meaning, as well as indicating the structure of this meaning [Weber 2002: 6–17]. If, however, “there is no adequacy from the point of view of meaning, then even in the case of the highest regularity of a given course (...), the probability of which we can calculate, we are dealing only with statistical probability that cannot be understood (or cannot be fully understood)” [Weber 2002: 11].

### **3. Can the Socio-Political-Economic Patchwork Be “Sewed Up” or Does It Simply Have to Be Experienced?**

The model approach to the domestic incarnation of capitalism does a great job of demonstrating the adequacy of the patchwork metaphor, also in relation to the fragmentary problem considered here, i.e. the tonality/atonality of the combinations of elements that make up the socio-political-economic patchwork. The prevalence of atonality is noticeable – as the authors write: “the occurrence of divergent institutional

«logic», divergent ways of coordination within a single national order (lack of correlation between the measures of the «input» and «output» side of the institutional architecture, i.e. the shape of the institution itself and the economic results achieved (...), mismatch between formal and informal institutions, etc.” [Gardawski, Rapacki 2021: 71].

The authors point to five model elements of the patchwork economy that remain in interaction:

- cultural legacy in the sphere of values, especially those values that shape attitudes towards formal institutions;
- “double breakdown” of institutional architecture, in which the instability of formal institutions meets with a routinized tendency to disregard formal norms whenever possible;
- a specific kaleidoscopic nature visible among the beneficiaries of marketization, who in a structural sense do not create such a solid background as is distinguished in studies on the development of Western European societies and economies, where the beneficiaries of pro-market changes were “driven” by the development of class identity, giving vitality to institutions created formally and having clearer informal (cultural) justifications;
- inconsistencies and incoherences in the understanding and practice of statehood – its foundations do not rest solidly, neither on the foundation of the majority formula in the cultural and social sense (e.g. class majority)<sup>1</sup>, nor on the foundation of the participatory formula in the cultural and political sense (e.g. in the form of *policy networks*);
- the takeover of a significant part of the economic space by international corporations, whose activity, apart from the differently weighted economic result, also brings the effect of reducing the room for maneuver for ideas, and even more

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<sup>1</sup> In practice, only its substitute, the majoritarian formula, works in the form of legitimizing party majorities created through ruthless rivalry and affective (and only partially ideological) polarization of elites and the electorate. Rocking the boat, if we refer to this metaphor, often overused in politics, does not accelerate or explain anything, both in the worldview and programmatic sense, it only deepens the state of entanglement in strategic actions, which, in order to gain the appropriate “torque”, would have to result from beliefs and actions that are more internalized (in society and elites) and reach deeper in the conceptual sense. However, it is not about the strategic “bold look of elites into the future with the support of the people who know their stuff”, because with such boldness complex projects of change are less often implemented lightly, while populist projects are more often implemented in such a climate. The point would be to support the difficult corrections in a stronger and conceptually deeper internalization of beliefs that take into account the needs related to discussing, designing, implementing and evaluating comprehensive political and public actions oriented towards a constantly revised (but not crossed out or extremized) concept of political economy. It would provide a guarantee for the implementation of long-term economic strategies, and at the same time it could not act as a dogma, so it would have to be agreed on an ongoing basis in a participatory, coherent and possibly free from polar affects way.

so strategic actions, which would be able to change the rules in already existing fields of interaction or create new fields of play, the parameters of which would encourage players to revise their previous logics of action.

Considering the properties of these components and the thickness of the stitches that bind them, can the patchwork be considered so solid that it is inseparable and therefore considered the only available one?

The authors, although they do not provide a final answer, because it is impossible in this complex issue, also point to the reproducibility and durability of the patchwork, which in fact seems to have no competition. It is hard to disagree with this, and in an attempt to address the question posed in the title of this fragment – about possible possibilities of correcting the patchwork, the following issue can be considered:

Since on a macro scale, the pluralism of players, the pluralism of logics of action and institutional weaknesses as well as institutional eclecticism interpenetrate each other and reinforce the patchwork character of orders, will the continuation of patchwork stitches also be supported by individual activities of citizens, inspired by experiences from their own contacts with micro-scale incarnations of large-scale phenomena and processes?

If this question is considered reasonable, then in working mode it would fit auxiliary issues referring to the analysis of networks (*policy networks*). Namely, one could consider the validity of questions about: (i) the relations between the strength of network stitches and the degree of specialization of connections between patchwork elements; (ii) the relations between causative power, hierarchies, markets, networks; (iii) real possibilities of overcoming the bonds bordering on looped, “atonal games” of interests – not harmonizing or not fully harmonizing with the formal assumptions of the system – dysfunctional systemically and/or dysfunctional for (some) actors of the system.

## 4. Summary: Patchwork as a Chessboard for Atonal Games of Interest

Taking part in the discussion, it is argued here that “atonal” interest games<sup>2</sup> are characteristic of patchwork and can take the following forms: (1) more structured,

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<sup>2</sup> The author’s model of interaction fields, containing, among others, the concept of tonal and atonal games of interests, is included in the study currently prepared by the team: Sroka, Pawlica, W. Ufel, *Interaction Fields in Co-Decision-Making in Public Matters – Analysis, Model Proposals and Recommendations*, in preparation.

i.e. network forms of interaction – in the sense given to the concept of network by the concept of *policy networks*<sup>3</sup> (e.g. social networks of support for specific political entities and/or activities, taking advantage of the attractiveness of the so-called political rent formula of the distribution network, or para-coalitions of power linking specific political circles, e.g. parties, with interest group organizations); (2) less structured atonal games of interests, with a more fluid, blurring resultant of the distribution of poles, which is typical for environments and situations that are “swarming” with vertical paired relations (patron-client) – with binary systems that, “flowing” with the current of life’s affairs, constantly and variably mesh with other similar binaries “flowing” with the current<sup>4</sup>, but at the same time they mutually mesh with each other in a way that is less permanent than policy networks, and at the same time kaleidoscopically variable, which makes situations less predictable in detail, although at the same time (like in a kaleidoscope) in general it is possible to predict the probable shapes of changes, which in reality less often provides a real possibility of planning reforms, and more often can help in realizing the inevitability of their erosion. Atonal games are strengthened when systemic institutionalization is weaker or is simply impossible for various reasons, while binding patterns of behavior, although niche, are strong. The most common negative effect is then the bypassing of formal institutions in the mode of “atonal” games of interests. In this way, dysfunctions occur on a smaller, sub-systemic or larger, system-wide scale, in which particular practical, affective, or possibly ideological orientations play active roles. Maintaining the adopted form, it is appropriate to end this signal text on this thread, which is an initial attempt to take a stance in the discussion on the intriguing patchwork model, the structural elements of which were indicated in an innovative, erudition and eloquence way by Juliusz Gardawski and Ryszard Rapacki.

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the types of policy networks, see: Sroka [2004: 115–117].

<sup>4</sup> For more on the subject of asymmetric patron-client dyads, see: Sroka, Pawlica, Ufel [2003].

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