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## CHAPTER I

### METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

#### **Main methodological and theoretical assumptions**

The theoretical and methodological perspectives proposed in our book to study the great change in Poland are based on the linguistically grounded analysis of autobiographical accounts of ordinary people. The method including a technique of gathering data, its meticulous analysis, and theory building finds its roots in interpretative sociology, sociolinguistic conversation analysis, grounded theory, and – last but not least, in biographical research. Using Herbert Blumer’s words it is: “[...] a down-to-earth approach to the scientific study of human group life and human conduct. Its empirical world is the natural world of such group life and conduct. It lodges its problems in this natural world, conducts its studies in it, and derives its interpretations from such naturalistic studies” (Blumer 1969: 47). According to the biographical approach, a biographical analysis serves to reconstruct collective processes through the experiences of individuals. Thus, theoretically and methodologically we have applied a bottom-up approach in order to grasp the mutual influence between individual experiences and the macro socio-cultural processes of collective change and transformation. Such a bottom-up approach could be adequately accomplished by the use of the data-collection and data-analysis method of the autobiographical narrative interview developed by Fritz Schütze, (Schütze 1983, 1995, 2008a, b, Riemann, Schütze 1991, Riemann 2006, Czyżewski, Piotrowski, Rokuszewska-Pawełek 1996, Kaźmierska 1999, Rokuszewska-Pawełek 2002, Kaźmierska 2012a, Waniek 2012, 2019).

As it has been pointed out in the *Introduction*, the main aim of our research focuses on the analysis of the experience of transformation of the Polish political and social system in an individual biographical perspective. We have already defined *transformation* as a process of social changes, for which the year 1989 has been symbolically set and accepted in the public discourse as the turning point for the political, social, and economic transition. Having in mind other studies

on this topic, mainly based on quantitative analysis, we decided to explore the bottom-up biographical perspective of ordinary people experiencing social reality before and after 1989. Thus, the main point of our interest focuses on the so-called 'ordinary man' or 'man on the street' to use Alfred Schütz's (1946) term. Based upon his own experience, the ordinary man is "the wide-awake, fully-functioning adult in the natural attitude." The 'man on the street' operates according to his (or her) set of naive relevances, for which 'recipe knowledge' is adequate. The ordinary person acting in the world is in a biographically-determined situation doing what he or she does according to the system of relevances, which enables him or her to select from the environment, and from the interactions with others, those elements which make sense for the purpose at hand. "The man on the street has a working knowledge of many fields which are not necessarily coherent with one another. His is a knowledge of recipes indicating how to bring forth in typical situations typical results by typical means. The recipes indicate procedures which can be trusted even though they are not clearly understood. By following the prescription as if it were a ritual, the desired result can be attained without questioning why the single procedural steps have to be taken and taken exactly in the sequence prescribed. This knowledge in all its vagueness is still sufficiently precise for the practical purpose at hand. In all matters not connected with such practical purposes of immediate concern, the man on the street accepts his sentiments and passions as guides. Under their influence, he establishes a set of convictions and unclarified views which he simply relies upon as long as they do not interfere with his pursuit of happiness" (Schütz 1970: 240). Adopting this perspective we did not interview well-known people whose voice is present in the public discourse.<sup>1</sup>

The research has been based on the methodology of the autobiographical narrative interview and followed by the conviction that narratives gave an empirical base for reconstructing not only the social and political images of the reality of individuals, but also enabled us to grasp analytically their social reality constructed by them as social actors (Berger, Luckmann 1991). Additionally, sociologists analyzing an interview get not only an opportunity to seize and reconstruct meaningful features and mechanisms of biographical experiences, but also to understand one's biographical entanglement. They also get a chance to see the narrator's biographical work undertaken in the span of their biography, that is, in a processual perspective. Since we should understand transformation as a long, time-spread, multi-aspect process of transition, the autobiographical narrative interview gave a chance to grasp this process both in an individual

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<sup>1</sup> Namely, we were not focused on, according to Schütz's concept, "the well-informed citizens" or "the experts" (1946).

and collective perspective. We used it as a tool enabling a description of the process of social change and transformation assuming after Fritz Schütze that social processes can be revealed, described and analyzed on the empirical basis of autobiographical narratives. Schütze argues that the interview format gives us an in-depth insight into “collective social processes in which biographical experiences and dynamics of identity development or impediments are prominent (e.g., social movements)” (Schütze 2008b: 6). Further, he adds that “social reality more basically consists of social processes and less importantly of stable social structures since they are products of social processes and changing permanently” and “analyzing individuals life histories [...] is a promising avenue to social reality” (Schütze 2008b: 2).

Since the method allows the showing of both past and present ways of interpretation of biographical experiences and social processes, we were able to analyze how and in what way they changed as a result of the transition. Showing this passage helps to understand the process of transformation from the perspective of ‘the man on the street’ and explain the real meaning of socio-historical circumstances influencing biographical choices and adaptive strategies in the new democratic reality.

Understanding *transformation* as a process, as we have already pointed out in the *Introduction*, requires reconstructing its dynamics, its natural history with its two perspectives of processuality: macro- and micro-social. The former allows us to look at the natural history of the transformation with its intrinsic logic and, above all, with the conviction that it has been going on for a long time before 1989 and that it also affects the present through the social consequences of the great change. Therefore, we have found it necessary to turn to sources of the process which can be traced to biographical experiences of the socio-historical epoch of socialism.<sup>2</sup> The micro perspective, on the other hand, allows us to capture how social processes shape biographical processes and how the transformation is interpreted from the perspective of individual experiences by people who at different stages of their life cycle have become subject to it.

## The research sample

Following these assumptions, in order to get access to different aspects of the process, we conducted 90 autobiographical narrative interviews with informants belonging to three age groups (30 interviews in each), that is, people born in the following years: 1960–1970, 1970–1980, 1980–1989.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See the following Part 2.

<sup>3</sup> All interviews were collected between 2014–2016 and transcribed. Additionally 20 of them were translated into English.

The criteria were obviously arbitrary. Their main framework was to gather the widest possible spectrum of biographical experiences "dispersed" in different social environments, by which, once again, we most generally understand the social strata and different social spaces, also identified in a geographical sense and the different phases of the life cycle. In other words, we did not want to focus our sample on, for example, certain professional, social groups or classes. We have decided to search for interviewees born in these decades, firstly in order to continue collecting life narratives to complement the existing collection of biographical materials.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, we have decided to check whether people born in three decades would be willing to see their biographical experiences as a generational experience, framed by systemic transformation. As a starting point to our way of thinking, not even assumptions, was the expectation that the different time of being socialized in educational institutions could be the crucial experience diversifying those groups. Thus belonging to the first decade studied, from the perspective of the informants – means that they experienced their whole socialization in educational institutions, as well as some part of their adult life in the People's Republic of Poland; the second decade comprises of those who started their education in the 1980s, but (particularly in the case of students) graduated after 1989 and gained professional experience in the 1990s; the last group consists of those people who could hardly have had any encounter with the People's Republic of Poland.

As a result, we have identified three groups differentiated by various ways of social rootedness of their biographical experiences. The educational criterion is to some extent conventional and arbitrary, but it enabled us to create a starting point for interpretative frames unveiling a diversity of experiences of the people within the study. Thus, the informants belonging to the first group were subjected to still ideologized education (e.g., history school books, compulsory Russian language course, etc.), and at the same time, they were brought up in the spirit of stability of occupational career, clear rules on the labor market. They faced 1989 with biographical baggage of experience of the socialist reality internalized in their childhood and adolescence. The second group is an in-between cohort, some people particularly at the level of secondary and higher education benefited from the transition in terms of unideologized curricula, but at the same time, they were still brought up in the expectation of stability on the labor market, which appeared to be more and more difficult. Although they entered their adulthood after the symbolic moment of transition, their memory and understanding of reality before this passage are still biographically

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<sup>4</sup> As we mentioned in the Foreword, the Department of Sociology of Culture disposes now of more than 200 narratives with people born in the following decades of the 20th century

grounded by individual experiences. The third group was socialized in a totally new reality (younger people from this group – born in 1987–1989 have also experienced the reform of the educational system in Poland), people from this group do not remember socialism and most of them have been mentally prepared for if not the instability of their occupational career, for sure readiness to be flexible and adapt to changing labor market rules. Sometimes they are called the ‘89 generation (similarly to Germany where this group is described as the *Mauerfallgeneration*). When planning the research we assumed that incorporating this cohort could help to capture a new, interesting image of the transition and this expectation was positively verified in the collected narratives. It should be added that the representatives of the first group were approximately 29 years old in 1989 (so generally they were either about to start an adult life or they had already been working for a couple of years), while those from the third group were about the same age at the time of research which gave additional generational context for comparison.

The autobiographical narrative interviews were recorded and transcribed in detail (i.e., considering paralinguistic phenomena).<sup>5</sup> They lasted from 1 to 3 hours. The 90 collected autobiographical interviews provided extensive and rich empirical data. All the transcriptions were anonymized – the narrators’ names were changed, as well as some details of their biography (e.g., names of appearing characters, places, sometimes institutions), yet the changes in the names of cities, towns or villages, social environments, study fields, et cetera were introduced in a way that reflects the real context of the interviewee biographical experience. We present some cases in the book.<sup>6</sup>

We did not consciously specify other criteria of choice since we wanted to concentrate on investigating and presenting the diversity of biographical experiences of the transformation. Thus we wanted to know and analyze the biographies of the mentioned cohorts concerning the diversity of their economic, social, or occupational status, their social and family background, education, place of living, et cetera. We assumed that this strategy – offered by grounded theory – of entering the research field without clearly defined assumptions would enable us to see the dynamic of social change related to 1989 not only in a much wider context, but also from the hierarchy of importance of an experiencing individual. The narratives concentrated on the whole biography of the informants, which enabled us to analyze the dynamic of the social, historical, and political processes inscribed in the biographies of the ordinary people. Following our interest in “the man on the street” we searched

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<sup>5</sup> For detailed transcription notation see: Appendix.

<sup>6</sup> The list of the interviews together with short characteristics of the interviewees can be found at the end of the book (see: Appendix).

for the interviewees in the periphery, and not in the centers understood here literally as the main centers of dynamic processes of social transformation seen in the framework of development and progress and catching up with the lag of civilization with Warsaw at the forefront. We conducted our research in Szczecin, Bydgoszcz, Poznań, or Gliwice, and for logistical reasons often in Łódź (admittedly until recently the second largest, but in many respects the peripheral city). We were also in the Lublin region, Podlasie, in the mountain villages of Lesser Poland or in the province of Central Poland. We also tried to reach representatives of different classes and environments, namely middle class members, as well as those who perhaps should belong to it, but the effects of transformation processes either forced their peripherality (e.g., in the professional dimension), or resulted in strategies that distance themselves from contemporary reality. Unfortunately, we did not manage to fully implement this assumption. Reaching people without education, unemployed, socially excluded turned out to be very difficult. An ex-post analysis of the reason for this failure can be concluded that the interviewee search in the biographical approach is usually carried out by building specific networks of relationships initiated by one's own contacts and developed using the snowball method. Entering new networks of relationships takes time and is a socially complex process. Our research sample was very extensive by the standards of biographical research. It is not easy to collect 90 narrative interviews over two years if we assume sample diversification and if we take into account that in order to find contrastive cases we must first transcribe a number of interviews, analyze them, and describe their content and basic formal features. Each interview consists of: searching for an interviewee, persuading him/her to participate in the study, setting a date, conducting an interview. These seemingly trivial activities take a lot of time. We do not regard these explanations as a naïve argument, but rather as a kind of self-criticism, because, as experienced researchers, we have not been able to overcome the difficulties that were foreseeable and that could probably be overcome. Additionally, when we managed to collect a number of interviews with less educated, lower-ranking people in the social structure, it happened at the end of the project and we did not have enough time to analyze the material systematically enough to be included in this book. Fortunately, one of the advantages of the biographical approach is the never-ending analytical potential of the collected material. So we will be able to use these cases for further work.

### **Research Objective**

Following that perspective, the research has been focused on the biographical experiences of the transformation and the reconstruction of this process in autobiographical accounts. We wanted to: (1) grasp and analyze

the dynamics of the transformation process in the perspective of a biography; (2) focus on the sociological analysis of the everyday-life experience and the biographical reconstruction of the transformation process before and after the year 1989: its basic features and mechanisms; (3) find out how various socio-biographical circumstances (education, occupation, social status, place of origin, political orientation and engagement, etc.) influenced the adaptive strategies while experiencing the transformation and how their interpretation changes over time; (4) compare and show the mutual relationship between the widespread, (usually) simplified schemes of interpretation and the evaluation of the process of the transformation in the public discourse and its diversity in biographical experiences; (5) get insight into collective phenomena and social processes in which biographical experiences appear prominent; (6) show the passage between social history before and after the year 1989 and portray the real significance of the social-historical impact on biographical choices and adaptive strategies in the new democratic reality; (7) reconstruct the variety of frames of interpretations, adaptive strategies, ways of narrating, as well as different relationships between biographical and collective ways of constructing social reality.

Thus a starting point for us was the perspective which William Thomas expressed when formulating the definition of a situation: “if people define situations as real they are real in their consequences” (1928: 584), which implies a variety of social worlds which should be interpreted from different (individual) perspectives. Therefore, we did not limit ourselves to the level of events. We searched for deeper socio-historical processes which the interviewees were not frequently fully aware of, which could constitute frames for their biographical experiences.

Relating both to events and their interpretations we were especially interested in getting answers to two basic questions: *what* informants incorporate into their biographical experiences and in *what way* they speak about them, thus *how* they interpret them (Helling 1990).

When referring to the first group of problems we posed the following questions: what events, collective phenomena, and individual experiences are mentioned in the collected autobiographies? Do the informants incorporate, as a background, the descriptions of everyday life situations and life routines (e.g., work, housekeeping, children upbringing, travel, living conditions, etc.) into their life story and/or do they allude in their biographical work to the collective-historical constellations of events, institutional structures and cultural patterns related to the experience of the transformation? Do they describe, in the case of the first and probably the second cohort, the time of the People’s Republic of Poland? Do they relate to the events of that time, especially those considered as the turning points in the Polish social history? To what extent

will their individual experiences be presented against the background of the time of socialism? Do they directly relate to important historical events in their life story connected both with the time of socialism and the transformation? Or, on the contrary, do those events appear only as very general, blurred frames of orientation? Briefly speaking, we looked for an answer to the question: to what extent are the individual events of everyday life and the biographical experiences of the narrators from each cohort presented as shaped by the socio-historical background in which their biographies are enrooted and does it differentiate their narration about the process of the transformation? In the case of the first group, did the narrators point to the moment of transition as being biographically important? And if so, in what biographical constellations (e.g., loss of work, permanent unemployment, new possibilities, opening of new educational challenges, etc.)? Did they generally place and interpret their life in the prism of the transition processes? As we will see in the following chapters it is very difficult to give clear answers. They rather require an analysis of sometimes quite complicated constellations of biographical experiences, attitudes, and social frames.

In the case of the second question of *how*, we were interested in the following issues: how various biographical circumstances (e.g., education, occupation, social status, political involvement, etc.) influenced the adaptive strategies when experiencing the process of the transformation and how are they interpreted in the narration? Are there any common (for the three mentioned groups) patterns of biographical narratives related to the interpretations of the transformation, auto presentation, giving meaning to certain activities, et cetera.? In what way did the experience of communism (in the case of the older narrators) influence their experience of the transformation? Did the narratives of the younger group differ significantly in the form and structure, the ways of self-presentation, implementing life strategies? How did the narrators deal with the problem of a lack of ready-made narrative schemes about this period? Or, to the contrary, did they find culturally grounded patterns of narratives about the transformation? How did the narrators from the older cohort present and rationalize, from their biographical perspectives, a possible nostalgia for socialism?

It is important to note that Schütze's method finds its roots in the research strategy of grounded theory, as developed by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (Glaser, Strauss 1967, Corbin, Strauss 1990, 1997), in which hypotheses emerge from the collected empirical data. The authors highlight that grounded theory, which unlike theories generated by means of logical deduction from a priori assumptions (Glaser, Strauss 1997: 3), is not based on a preconceived theoretical framework to test or verify the already established categories, concepts, and hypotheses (Glaser, Strauss 1967: 45).

To the contrary, the research process starts with open formulations of sensitizing concepts (Blumer 1954<sup>7</sup>) concerning the theme to be studied and emphasis is placed on the theoretical structuring to be followed by a constant comparative analysis of the collected data that then shapes further investigation and leads to the generation of initial categories and hypotheses. Isabelle Baszanger stresses: “In sharp contrast with other research approaches [...] grounded theory considers research to be a process in which empirical and theoretical work are linked in a constant reciprocal dialog” (Baszanger 1998: 254). It is also worth stressing that even “closed” research process is open to further confrontation with new empirical data. Emerged categories, hypotheses and theories can be thus “controlled, differentiated, backed up, or put in doubt” (Riemann, Schütze 1987: 64). This means that the “whole model is constantly being respecified, is becoming denser, and moving towards ‘theoretical saturation’ (to use the term of Glaser and Strauss again)” (Riemann, Schütze 1987: 64). That is why in Conclusions we do not formulate clear and undisputed propositions and outcomes, but rather systematically discuss our findings asking additional questions to be investigated.

### **Application of linguistically based analysis of autobiographical narrative interview**

In the autobiographical narrative interview an interviewee spontaneously (extempore) recollects in the presence of a hitherto unknown listener the sequences of events in the course of life and his or her attitude towards the narrated events and experiences. Thus, interviews begin with a single eliciting question designed to encourage the informants to tell the story of their life without prompts. Crucially, the narrators are told that they will not be interrupted, as the interviewer provides only limited, mostly non-verbal responses, and they may take as long as they wish to tell their story. The stimulus question is deliberately formulated in an open way and may be articulated in the following form: *Could you please tell me the story of your life starting with your earliest memories up to today?* Once the narration finishes

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<sup>7</sup> Blumer claims that: “A definitive concept refers precisely to what is common to a class of objects, by the aid of a clear definition in terms of attributes or fixed benchmarks [...] A sensitizing concept lacks such specification of attributes or benchmarks and consequently it does not enable the user to move directly to the instance and its relevant content. Instead, it gives the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances. Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look” (Blumer 1954: 7).

with a 'coda', such as "That was it" or "This is my life so far," the interview moves to the second stage. In this part, additional narration-eliciting questions are asked (i.e., questions that may explain ambiguities and vagueness, clarify incomprehension, or complete unfinished threads and plots). Finally, in the third stage, the researcher asks explicit questions on the issues relating to inner and outer perspectives on the research topic. Yet, these "outer" questions are asked only if the narrator does not refer to them spontaneously within the narration scheme (e.g., because he felt distanced towards them or because it seemed too complex in the off-the-cuff recapitulation of events). Thus we did not have a set of questions by the team that would be answered at the end of each interview, regardless of what it was about. Each narrative was a separate "author's" construction, which consisted of an interviewee story and questions asked by the researcher and sometimes mistakes made by him or her, for example, not asking a question that resulted from the story a researcher had just heard. These mistakes at work may happen also in the case of experienced researchers and they become a part of the research situation (see: Kaźmierska, Waniek 2020).

The research procedure<sup>8</sup> related to the analysis of the narrative starts with the single case analysis consisting of 3 steps:

(1) text sort analysis that aims at a description of the features of the on-going interaction in the interview situation and the communicative schemes of narration, description, and argumentation. It should be stressed that the scheme of narration is the most important point of reference in the analysis of the autobiographical narrative interview. Therefore, we should always ask what role they play towards narration.

(2) structural analysis (i.e., a formal sequential analysis enabling identification of specific modes of experiencing one's life: (a) different kinds of biographical action schemes, (b) institutional patterns of the life course (phenomena of life and family cycles, career patterns, etc.), (c) metamorphoses (unexpected and surprising development of creativity), and (d) biographical trajectories (extended processes of suffering and losing control over one's life).

Basic forms of biographical experiences and attitudes towards one's own life (Schütze 1981, 1983, 1984, 2008a, Prawda 1989, Kaźmierska 2016) are expressed in four structural processes. Accordingly, we deal with institutional expectation patterns, biographical action schemes, trajectories of suffering and biographical metamorphoses.

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<sup>8</sup> The detailed description of the procedures is presented by many English, Polish, and of course German texts well-disseminated in the context of Polish biographical research (e.g., Schütze 2004, 2008a, b, 2012, 2014, 2016). Therefore we just briefly recapitulate the main analytical steps.

Institutional expectation patterns (institutional life patterns) reveal a principle of the narrator's orientation towards normative institutional expectations. It refers to life organization and biographical attitudes in which individuals follow the scenarios written by their parents or significant others and the scripts set by the education system, career paths in various types of institutions, social worlds or their place in a given social system (Schütze 1981: 67–70). They are expected to adjust their identity to the requirements of institutional models assigned to them.

Biographical action plans are ways of experiencing events in life that have their source in the inner spontaneity of individuals and are connected with the intentional principle of action. This implies making autonomous long-term plans, independent implementation of one's desires, but sometimes also careful ways of getting out of biographical traps. They are associated with emotional and physical involvement, as well as vivid expectations and attitude towards the future. This comprises their consideration, often consultations with significant others or even experts, ratification, implementation, and eventually, evaluation both in terms of their impact on the personal identity and the entire biography.

Biographical metamorphoses are unexpected positive changes in the biography carriers' life. However, despite involving their creative development, individuals are not always able to handle them, at least initially. Thus, as in biographical action plans – the change has its source in the inner sphere of the spontaneity of an individual, similarly to the trajectory of suffering (described below) – it unexpectedly introduces disorder and a sense of self-alienation into the individual's life. The change is often associated with a sense of overpowering, an intriguing mystery, the impossibility of dealing with a surprising definition of oneself and inability to find categories to describe their experiences.

The trajectory of suffering means a systematic “erosion of social and biographical order” (Treichel, Schwelling 2003: 131); all these experiences in which people realise the fragility of the everyday world of existence and have a sense of losing control over their lives. The dynamic of the trajectory is associated with an acute sense of being subject to external overwhelming circumstances that condition the individual's ways of action and give him a sense of growing alienation from the world of life and himself. The suffering person (Betroffene) has the feeling of being trapped or facing the wall (cf., Riemann, Schütze 1991, Schütze 2012b). Being a structural process of growing disorder, the trajectory of suffering is usually paradoxically ordered – phased from the accumulation of trajectory potential through the inability to act intentionally and conditioned response to external circumstances, attempts to regain control over one's own life, giving a sense of precarious balance, to the total breakdown of self-orientation, to the theoretical and practical going through suffering and its acceptance (cf., Riemann, Schütze 1991, Schütze 2012 [1995]). Not all of these

stages and not always in this order appear in an individual course of suffering people. Not always events that would be sensitively inclined to be interpreted as a trajectory are experienced in this way and vice versa: sometimes seemingly "normal," trivial biographical episodes or their sequences are treated by the biographer as an overpowering fate. This is because of individual and subjective experience of suffering, which in the narrative interview is given not so much by its content, but primarily in the characteristic activities of linguistic representation (cf., Schütze 2012: 172–173), which very often express "complicated, difficult, subtle socio-biographical experiences only quite indirectly, symptomatically and incompletely, since the latter might be ambivalent, cognitively or emotionally, painful, shameful, or simply incomprehensible" (Schütze 2008a: 171).

However, it must be remembered that, firstly, all process structures do not appear in all life histories, and, secondly, that in each biography they create various configurations (specific for a given case). They may not only follow one another, but also compete with one another, mutually reinforce, weaken, accelerate, delay, or even annihilate one another; finally, they can have a dominant, stabilizing, or recessive character. These combinations of biographical processes and their repositioning in the framework of social, cultural, and political processes allow us to indicate both unique features of a given life history and typical (i.e., common to many cases) properties of a particular process and thus enable us to reconstruct an overall organization of the narrator's biography.<sup>9</sup>

(3) analytical abstraction, on the one hand, allows one to find essentially unique and distinctive for the case features, mechanism, and (configurations of) processes; and, on the other, to identify those that can be traced within other cases. In other words, we take into account both: "self-historical *Gestalt*" of the case and its general, common, theoretically remarkable features.

What is crucial for our project is that the analytical abstraction also deals with mutual feedback of biographical processes proper and other collective phenomena and social processes included in the interview. For instance, it allows one to see the relationship between the rapid introduction of the capitalist economy and individual experiences of disorder caused by everyday experiences.

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<sup>9</sup> Structural analysis also focuses on identifying background constructions which deal with chaotic pieces of biographical experience and argumentative commentaries (Schütze 2004). The narrator inserts a background construction (i.e., chronologically earlier experiences) into the main storyline of his/her narrative presentation as some sort of elaborate self-correction device. This may happen when the course of events is very dense and complicated that it cannot be recapitulated simultaneously or when the course of events is too painful, too devastating, or too shameful that the narrator doesn't want to go back to them at all costs. In the latter, we deal with the fading-out phenomena. There are also other phenomena like code and split code, theoretical self-commentaries. If needed they are explained in the following chapters.

In the autobiographical narrative interview method the researchers rely on the informant's accounts, his or her own presentation of the flux of events and their interpretation; nonetheless, very restricted ways of data collection and narrative constraints (naturally occurring obligations to condense, to go into detail, to close the narrative form), as well as carefully worked out rules and stages of data analysis enable "quality" control (Schütze 2008a, Kallmeyer, Schütze 1977).

After a couple of single cases analyzed, comparative analysis proceeds according to the principle of minimal and maximal contrast. The elaborated hypotheses and theories are open to modifications and supplementing up to the point when any new single case does not change the architecture and decisive content of the theoretical model anymore, that is, the theoretical saturation is reached (Schütze 2008b: 72). After collecting and scrutinizing a sufficient number of cases with their diverse variables the build-up of a theoretical model can be carried out.

The final move in the sequence of research steps is building a theoretical model. In our research we tried to get an insight into the informants' experience of the socio-cultural changes, orientation horizons, pivotal reference groups, frames of reference in the terminology of Alfred Schütz (1990), assessment criteria, and opportunity structures, as well as social worlds arenas of the discourse they are involved in (Clarke 1991, Strauss 1978, 1982, 1984). Basic strategies for constructing theoretical models within methodological and theoretical perspective according to Schütze and Riemann enable one to reflect on the following thematic blocks: models on structural processes of one's life course, rational models on attitudes of the biographical incumbent towards their life course, models on development, or changes of social worlds, social *milieus*, or social movements (Riemann, Schütze 1987: 65). What we focused on were ways of describing and understanding the reality of everyday life, as well as ways of accounting for (modes of argumentation) certain experiences in one's life story.

On the basis of the meticulous analysis, we show several dimensions in which the perspective of biographical experiences is interrelated with collective phenomena and social processes triggered by transformation. One of the most general formative frameworks for storytelling experiences are the differently shaped structures of opportunity. As the collected narratives show, their change does not always mean a change in the interpretation of both biographical experiences and social processes. Moreover, the same opportunity structures for some open new potentials, whereas for others become a biographical trap. In the following chapters, which show our analysis, we argue that it does not depend solely (and sometimes to some extent does not depend at all) on the attitudes of individuals, but a complex constellation of

personal experiences and socially designed processes. In other words, a mere change in the opportunity structures does not guarantee a certain change in the biographical processes.

Summing up: a careful and in-depth study of autobiographical narrative interviews gathered in cohorts born in the 1960's, 1970's, and the 1980's basically verified binary and schematic images and allowed the capturing of paradoxes, tensions, ambivalences, and biographical traps, which often resulted from a more or less conscious inability to deal with the expectations which people had to face while dealing with rapid and comprehensive changes new after 1989.

### Single case analysis

In the following book's chapters, we present the results of our research, based largely on the analysis of individual narrative cases and contrast comparison. Less often we start with a presentation of a problem that is analytically abstracted from the empirical material and illustrated by narrations.<sup>10</sup> The implementation of such a strategy is the result of two circumstances. The first can be called contextual, the second analytical. Let us start with the first one. The adoption of such a broad selection criteria, aimed at the diversity of biographical experiences rooted in different parts of Poland, different social environments, professional groups, et cetera, resulted in an incredibly rich and diverse collection of narrations. It is therefore difficult to speak of a theoretical saturation which is the effect of comparative analysis proceeded according to the principle of minimal and maximal contrast. The elaborated hypotheses and theories are open to modifications and supplementing up to the point when any new single case does not change the architecture and decisive content of the theoretical model anymore, that is, the theoretical saturation is reached. (Schütze nd: 4). We correctly assumed that the planned 90 autobiographical interviews would provide an extensive and rich database, yet they appeared to be so diverse that it was difficult to reach theoretical saturation (Glaser, Strauss 1967; Corbin, Strauss 2008: 263). Even more surprising was the fact that we approached the theoretical saturation of the youngest group of informants born in the 1980s, where it seemed to be the most difficult to find common analytical dimensions in the face of (post)modern dispersed social patterns. This does not mean, however, that it is impossible to find in the collected narratives common ways of experiencing and culturally rooted, shared ways of coping with the process of transformation. On the contrary, certain common

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, *Chapter VI. The life of things from the perspective of the Polish systemic transformation* by Renata Dopierała.

analytical dimensions can be found. In order to show them, we choose (moving to the analytical dimension) to a large extent the presentation of single case analysis.

The applied mode of methodological conduct is based on the abductive logic of research introduced and elaborated by Charles Pierce (1965). This type of reasoning consists of continual moving between inductive and deductive thinking and constant verification of the emerging theory with new data. Schütze explains that the researcher adhering to the abductive logic of reasoning must freely step back and forth among different stages of the analytical process (see also Apitzsch, Inowlocky 2000: 66). He writes:

Abductive inquiry within qualitative biography research aims at the exploration of hitherto unknown or at least unnoticed mechanisms of social and biographical processes by careful analysis of single cases. It works at the explication of these mechanisms, their analytical connection, and their systematic integration within a theoretical model on the basis of contrastive comparisons of single-case analyses' outcomes. Moreover, it attempts to understand and explain the working principles and systematic interplays of structural processes operating within the unfolding of newly approached single cases – the single cases analyzed on the preliminary base of theoretical models generated beforehand. They, in turn, undergo the processes of differentiation and specification in the course of their application on additional single cases (Schütze, nd: 2).

We mainly applied the strategy of *portrait chapters* presentation that is the final stage of the contrastive comparison. Their task is to present and discuss the exemplary cases (the “cornerstones”) made by the analysis to illustrate the basic biographical and social processes. According to such perspective, “an individual case is studied and considered to have the characteristics of a social logic or a symbolic collective process that affects thousands or even millions of people at the same time” (Bertaux [2010] 2012: 311). While sharing the first part of the quoted sentence, we hesitate about the second part, which is a very categorical and objective statement. In our research, we rather followed the approach of Howard Becker, who writes that even if a single case study does not necessarily lead to decisive results (Becker 1966: xvii) it shows biographical experiences and social processes in a context that is difficult to grasp using other research methods.

In this part, we present two chapters exploring the maladjustment of transformation discourses (in different ways) to the biographical experiences of social actors. This gap often results from imposing the ready-made rationalizations and macro-analyses on the micro-experiences of an individual's level.

In *Winners and losers of the process of transformation as an etic category versus an emic biographical perspective*, Kaja Kaźmierska discusses the categorization of

winners and losers as not only simplifying the description of social reality, but also difficult to be easily biographically justified, since the *etic* categorization is not relevant to the *emic* perspective.

Piotr Filipkowski, in *Narrative agency and structural chaos. A biographical-narrative case study*, presents a case study where a life path turns out to be an unintended, dynamic journey between different professions, social worlds, and structural positions. This creates a complicated and ambiguous biographical model, which arranges itself neither in the socio-economic advancement of the "winner" nor in the degradation of the "lost" transformation.

The core frame of both texts is the methodological approach to the narratives. The author intends to show the power of the analysis applied in this book, related to exploring these aspects of biographical experiences that are very difficult to be grasped by other analytical approaches.