

*Kaja Kaźmierska*

## PART 4

### **BIOGRAPHICAL RESOURCES: FAMILY AND SOCIAL NETWORKS**

In the previous part we were concerned with various aspects of opportunity structures which opened new ways of managing one's own biography, but could also become a biographical trap, we were mainly moving in the sphere of work and related education. In this part, we want to focus on biographical resources. They can be defined by taking two perspectives. The first one refers to the objective, etic categories, while the second to subjective, emic interpretations. Regarding the first perspective, biographical resources will be created by the socially inherited and developed in the course of life resources, which, if used by the individual, can be described using known concepts such as family, social, or cultural capital. "A resource is everything which is at the disposal of an individual or a group; it is transformed into capital only when there is demand for specific resources on a given market (labor, marriage, political, etc.); in other words, when the principles and rules of social life allow this resource to be used to good advantage" (Giza-Poleszczuk, Marody, Rychard 2000: 28). The quote above is not only an example of the application of an external perspective, but also may raise doubts as to the scope of the meaning of opportunity structures and biographical resources. In fact, setting clear boundaries where one ends and the other begins is difficult and sometimes even impossible, especially in the perspective of the biographical approach. One can imagine a situation whereby regarding one biography as an opportunity structure, in another it will be described as a biographical resource. On the other hand, within a given biography, it is difficult to clearly define the transition between opportunity structures and biographical resources. It is, as the entire biography, fluid in the sense of processuality of experiences and events. If you consider biographical resources and opportunity structures as etic categories, it could be simplified that the former are more rooted in *Gemeinschaft* and the latter in *Gesellschaft* (Tönnies 1964). Following this lead, one could say that a family can be both a biographical resource and an opportunity structure. Therefore, treating this distinction as an analytical description of what the biographical *Gestalt* involves, we attempt to distinguish between opportunity structures and biographical resources.

In further considerations, we will be interested in the second – emic perspective, when the individual, through giving meaning to experience, interprets it as a significant biographical resource. Of course, one should immediately remark that the very concept of biographical resources does not belong to the language of the narrators. None of our interviewees used it. Its provenance is therefore etic. We rather want to show the ways of presenting one's biography in relation to its specific dimensions, which were recognized by the narrators as particularly important for shaping their lives in the dimension of *Gestalt*, sometimes arduously built. Though, the importance of these experiences can be reconstructed both based on direct declarations and the way of including specific themes into the narration. Regarding declarations, it is about the respondents' direct references in the first part of the interview (i.e., spontaneous narrative), for example, to the role of the family of origin and the family they have started, making direct declarations as to its significance in their own biography. The second very common circumstance is the reconstruction of meanings and interpretations based on narrative analysis. In many cases (this is a general remark which also applies to other research projects), the narrators speak "indirectly," they do not explicitly refer to issues of interest to the researcher, but the analysis shows that their story embodies the essence of *these* matters.<sup>1</sup>

It should also be noted that biographical resources do not necessarily have to have a positive aspect, organizing the biography. It can also happen that they are a source of suffering and require intensive biographical work.

Therefore, using categories which are well-known and rather belong to the etic order, we will try to point to those areas which can be considered as biographical resources. The starting point is not particularly original – the two most important areas are family and social bonds.

## The family

Let us start with the doubt expressed in the last sentence: recognizing a family as a biographical resource is not an original statement, after all, the family is the basic reference point, a space for the initial creation of social bonds, and in the case of the Polish society (though not only) is invariably recognized as the most important value. Yet, following the consistent trail of generating categories from the research material, we must state that the sphere of the family,

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in our project, we never asked about the transformation. Additionally, the word practically does not appear in narrations. However, it is difficult to analyze the collected material differently than in the context of the biographical experience of the transformation and the relationship between the collective and individually experienced social process.

next to work, was one of the basic frameworks structuring the biographical stories of our interlocutors. Obviously, this statement can be taken for granted too. However, taking into account the rules of constructing a narration when the storyteller is subjected to narrative constraints (Schütze 1984, 2008), he or she chooses a line of narrative about his life. After all, it is impossible to tell everything, one always chooses a theme around which the story is built. It can, therefore, be assumed that the family will not necessarily form one of the main threads of the narrative, the interlocutor may as well concentrate on other aspects of his or her biography.<sup>2</sup> If we take this into account, the statement that in most of the narratives we collected the family motif appeared in their main plot, and even if, in the background, the narrators clearly indicated that the family constitutes one of the basic biographical resources.

Interestingly, also among the youngest group – people born in the 1980s, the family of origin and family relationships were usually in the main part of the spontaneous narration, presented as biographically significant and this had already been evident in many case studies included in previous parts of this book. At the same time, many of our interlocutors born in this decade have not started their own families, some lived in informal relationships, they rather did not have children.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the narrations clearly show the tension between references to family bonds, often treated as a kind of permanent (even if emotionally not easy) biographical point of reference, and contemporary trends along with their socio-cultural context. What is most important here are one's individual aspirations, pursuing a career, including education, supported by the experience of uncertainty as to the possibilities of development and managing one's life. These processes are reinforced by the expectations towards the standard of living and the desire to control it, understood as the possibility of accurately planning its various aspects. This was shown in the texts presented in the previous section. Thus, on the one hand, the collected narrations fit within the frame of modernity as described by sociologists (Marody 2014) including the characteristics of family changes (e.g., Szlendak 2010, Slany 2013, Kwak 2015, Sikorska 2019). On the other, (a bit to our surprise since we were guided by this modern diagnosis) family relationships turned out to be particularly important, although what this *importance* means, we will try to show in this part of the book.

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<sup>2</sup> Also in our collection of interviews we had examples of narrations focused solely, for example, on the sphere of work. However, which was surprising to some extent, family relations and placing biographical experiences in a variously constructed frame of family references was a feature of the vast majority of life stories. On the following pages, we will characterize these frames.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, against such patterns, one can find contrasting cases, for example, families with children or many children, belonging to the same social class. However, all studies show that the dominant pattern is the one we are describing.

Naturally, the family theme has already appeared in publications devoted to the transformation process. Researchers agreed that in a situation of radical and hardly predictable systemic change, the only certain (though not always equally effective) social capital was the family (Mach 2011). Yet, the change of the system did not necessarily force a change in the attitude towards the family as a basic social resource – on the contrary, one can look at the process of coping with the transformation as another element of activating family capital. For example, Anna Giza-Poleszczuk, referring to the theory of rational choice, showed that during the PPR (Polish People's Republic) the family became

a strategic instrument of reproduction. Both, the problem of providing economic security in the moments of crisis and stabilizing conflicts (suppressing differences of interest) were to be sorted out by 'home-made' solutions. This fact is at the root of the 'familialism' of Polish society, in its demographic and normative dimension [...] The strategic role of marriage and the family has been sanctified in specific norms: the norm of church marriage, as well as the condemnation of single mothers and homosexual relationships. The exceptionally high (compared to western European countries) proportion of indications for 'having children' as a condition for a successful marriage testifies to the re-'functionalization' of the family for the needs of reproduction (Giza-Poleszczuk 2007: 305).<sup>4</sup>

The diagnosis presented by the author concerned mainly the period of socialism and the transfer of this pattern to the period of transformation. If we contrast this with current data, a trend change is clearly visible. A feature of modern marriages is the postponement of parenthood. Before the birth of the first child, the couple works on life and professional stability. This is especially true for women, who want to strengthen their position on the labor market and gain experience so that after giving birth to a child they can easily return to professional activity. The dynamics of changes is illustrated in Table 1, showing

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<sup>4</sup> In this context, it is worth recalling the considerations of Stefan Nowak, who in 1979 used the concept of a sociological vacuum to characterize Polish society. "Between the level of primary groups and the level of the national community, there exists – from the point of view of identifying people and their emotional involvement – a kind of sociological vacuum. If we wanted to sketch a gigantic 'sociogram' based on human feelings of group bond and identification, then the social structure of our country understood in this way would appear as a 'federation' of primary groups, families, and groups based on friendship, united in a national community with very weak other types of bonds than the bonds at these two levels" (Nowak 1979: 160). This diagnosis of Polish society then (and probably largely still the contemporary one) showed the fundamental importance of the family (considering the lack of other possibilities) as the most important (most active) space for building social relations.

both the average increase in the age of giving birth to a child for selected years and the age of giving birth to the first child and subsequent ones.

Table 1. The median age of mothers depending on the child order in 1980–2015

Year	Total	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
1980	25,1	22,9	25,7	28,2	30,3	32,1
1985	26,1	23,3	26,5	28,5	30,9	32,5
1990	25,8	22,7	26,2	29,5	31,5	33,0
1995	25,8	22,8	26,3	29,8	32,2	33,7
2000	26,1	23,7	27,1	30,0	32,6	34,1
2005	27,4	25,4	28,7	31,3	33,3	34,7
2010	28,6	26,6	30,1	32,5	33,9	35,3
2015	29,7	27,6	30,9	33,1	34,3	35,3

Source: P. Szukalski, „Podwyższanie się wieku matek w Polsce – ujęcie przestrzenne,” *Demografia i Gerontologia Społeczna – Biuletyn Informacyjny* 2017, nr 3, p. 2, <http://dSPACE.uni.Lódź.pl> (accessed: 11.04.2019).

Another significant change is the growing recognition of marriage as a relationship vulnerable to impermanence. As can be seen from the numbers in the table below: if at the transformation threshold for 255,000 marriages 42,000 ended in divorce, which is about 16.5%, in 2017 it was almost 34% of couples who divorced, that is, 65,000 out of 192,000 new relationships. It is worth noting that during this time the number of marriages significantly decreased – by 25%.

The data of the Central Statistical Office indicate that after the intensive increase in the number of divorces adjudicated in Poland recorded until the middle of the previous decade, this trend has clearly slowed down and has remained relatively stable in recent years. This means that for the past thirteen years, courts in Poland have ruled about 65,000 divorces per year (from 61.3 thousand in 2010 to 71.9 thousand in 2006). On the other hand, after 2008, the number of concluded marriages significantly decreased. Although the downward trend in this respect has slowed down in recent years, the current number of marriages concluded annually remains one of the lowest in history. [...] The indicator expressing the ratio of marriages concluded to marriage terminated as a result of divorce, after an initial radical decline at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, increased slightly in 2007–2008 and then began to decline again. In 2013 it reached its lowest level. [...] This means that in recent years, approximately one out of three marriages ends in a divorce.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Komunikat z badań CBOS nr 7/2019: *Stosunek Polaków do rozwodów*, [https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2019/K\\_007\\_19.PDF](https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2019/K_007_19.PDF), p. 1 (accessed: 17.05.2019).

Table 2. Demographic data based on Statistics Poland report

Specification	1990	2000	2010	2015	2016	2017
Marriages in thousands per 1000 persons...	255,4 6,7	211,2 5,5	228,3 5,9	188,8 4,9	193,5 5,0	192,6 5,0
Divorces in thousands per 1000 persons...	42,5 1,1	42,8 1,1	61,3 1,6	67,3 1,8	63,5 1,7	65,3 1,7
Natural increase in thousands per 1000 persons...	157,4 4,1	10,3 0,3	34,8 0,9	-25,6 -0,7	- 5,8 -0,2	-0,9 -0,0
Live births in thousands per 1000 persons...	547,7 14,3	378,3 9,9	413,3 10,7	369,3 9,6	382,3 9,9	402,0 10,5
Deaths total in thousands per 1000 persons...	390,3 10,2	368,0 9,6	378,5 9,8	394,9 10,3	388,0 10,1	402,9 10,9

Source: Raport GUS *Ludność. Stan i struktura oraz ruch naturalny w przekroju terytorialnym w 2018 r. Stan w dniu 30 VI*. s. 9 <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/ludnosc/ludnosc/ludnosc-stand-i-struktura-oraz-ruch-naturalny-w-przekroju-terytorialnym-w-2018-r-stand-w-dniu-30-vi,6,24.html> (accessed: 8.04.2019)

Despite this clear change sometimes diagnosed as a family crisis (e.g., Taranowicz, Grotowska ed. 2015), various studies show that family relationships remain a significant frame of reference also as part of everyday routines. For example, according to the Center for Public Opinion Research findings: “Face-to-face meetings with family are invariably important for Poles. Three-quarters of respondents who have parents (75%) meet with them at least once a week. Two-thirds of grandparents (67%) see their grandchildren at least once every seven days, and 64% of parents will often meet with their adult children who live separately. Personal contacts with in-laws, siblings, and grandparents are also quite frequent.”<sup>6</sup> Additionally, research shows that these habits do not change. “The vast majority of Poles maintain personal contacts with close people also without any special occasion – on weekdays (80%) and Saturdays and Sundays (78%), and over two-thirds (67%) spend long weekends, holidays, or vacations with their family.”<sup>7</sup> In another of her publications, Giza-Poleszczuk shows that intergenerational flows primarily include material benefits (from parents to children) and other tangible benefits (from parents to children and from grandchildren to grandparents) (Giza-Poleszczuk 2000: 129). Parents support their children materially and help with looking after their grandchildren.

<sup>6</sup> Komunikat CBOS nr 107/2013 *Więzi rodzinne*, [https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2013/K\\_107\\_13.PDF](https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2013/K_107_13.PDF), para 2, (accessed: 6.05.2019).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.: 7.



In turn, grandchildren, but also children, support grandparents/parents in situations requiring care and in dealing with institutionalized activities, for example, handling official matters. “According to the ‘SHARE: 50+ in Europe’ study, Polish grandparents devoted three hours a week to looking after their grandchildren more than grandparents in other European countries, spending about 9 hours a week on average with each grandchild.”<sup>8</sup> According to the findings of the Center for Public Opinion Research in 2012, 72% of adult Poles feel that they owe something to their grandparents. “The respondents’ gratitude most often resulted from the acknowledgement of the role that the grandparents played in raising and looking after them (65%) and for giving them love (64%). Over half owed them knowledge of family history (57%), showing moral principles (57%) and religious faith (54%).”<sup>9</sup>

Depending on the adopted interpretative perspective, this situation can be presented as the implementation of a well-rooted cultural pattern of ‘familialism’ of Polish society and thus the role of grandparents in the family<sup>10</sup> can be perceived as an element of intergenerational relations in an extended family (not necessarily living together). Or the continuation (albeit in a different systemic framework) of deinstitutionalization of the biography, when the family is forced to take up activities which in modern societies are taken over by institutions (e.g., taking care of children or the elderly).

This handful of data is intended not to systematically describe social phenomena and processes affecting the image of the modern family in our society (there are many studies on this subject), but to illustrate certain trends. Against their background, we want to show the effects of our analyses. They refer to these dimensions of the relation of an individual (narrator) – family, which are difficult to grasp in other types of research and by adopting the dominant perspectives of sociological reflection in this trend. In short, we want to show how family relationships “work” in the biographical experience, when they become a biographical resource and how they are shaped within macro-social processes. In the narrations collected, the family appears in relation to biographical resources as a topic, reference frame, value system, expected pattern, and the experience of intergenerational relations.

In this part of the book, we present three texts in which the family (in different constellations) constitutes the reference frame. However, the reader will

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<sup>8</sup> Research by: KANTAR. TNS *Najbardziej oddani dziadkowie w Europie*, <http://www.tnsglobal.pl/coslychac/2017/01/20/najbardziej-oddani-dziadkowie-w-europie/> (accessed: 8.05.2019).

<sup>9</sup> Komunikat z badań CBOS nr 8/2012 *Rola dziadków w naszym życiu*, [https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2012/K\\_008\\_12.PDF](https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2012/K_008_12.PDF), p. 4 (accessed: 8.05.2019).

<sup>10</sup> Let us note that the motif of relations told with grandparents is consistently present in the case studies shown so far and will be visible later in the book.

easily realize that the family thread has appeared virtually in all the case studies in the previous chapters and many of the analytical dimensions that we would like to discuss concerning the family have already appeared too. Additionally, a methodological remark can be made – in biographical studies it is difficult to abstract some threads without showing their context. It can be said that this is an advantage of this approach – we see a given phenomenon or social process throughout the whole *Gestalt*. Since, as we have stated, the family is a significant biographical resource for almost all the narrators, it is not surprising that references to it had to be found in previous texts. To some extent, the weakness of this method, especially at the level of presenting the results of the analyses, is, therefore, the difficulty in an orderly presentation of threads without avoiding repetition. Therefore, we urge the reader to refer to the considerations presented here to almost all the texts contained in the volume. At this point, we want to highlight a few issues which we consider to be particularly significant. Firstly, they often appeared in the accounts, and secondly, they drew our attention in the course of analyses precisely due to this importance.<sup>11</sup>

### The role of grandparents

When examining the role of grandparents, most often the “assistance” dimension comes to the fore – support in the process of raising grandchildren. Małgorzata Sikorska (2019: 111) based on her research distinguished three forms of help – childcare and organizational support, financial assistance, emotional support giving a sense of security associated with the belief that grandparents’ help can always be counted on. Of course, this type of relationship also appeared in our research. In the narratives, it was easy to reconstruct this assistance model primarily referring to grandmothers, as Sikorska emphasizes. However, what came to the fore in the accounts of our interlocutors is the acknowledgement of grandparents (not only grandmothers) as significant Others, performing primarily a formative role, building ideas about the world, as well as emotional relationships and intimate bonds. While Sikorska’s research refers to contemporary parents who use the help of their parents,<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, in the theoretical and methodological approach applied here, the researchers should follow the material. However, in the course of the analysis, they have their etic categories, some recognition of the field. It does not always coincide with the perspective of the narrator. Hence the comment that our attention was attracted by the accounts which seemed to differ significantly from the stereotypical images of contemporary relations and social ties.

<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, the author emphasizes that the respondents used the term ‘grandparents’ much more often than ‘my/our parents’, which she claims was due to



in the collected narrations most often they concerned the relationship of grandchildren (narrators) – grandparents. Of course, in the accounts, we see images of grandmothers and grandfathers fulfilling an assisting role, but this itself is not important for the narrators. What is of much greater importance is the type of bond built then, which in many cases has been of a formative character and the figure of grandparents was part of the family landscape. The following fragment of an interview illustrates this very well – the narrator (born in 1984) talks about deceased grandparents and then the interviewer asks:

I: When did they die?

N: In 1995. Both

I: Oh. And what did they do?

N: Well, they were *grandparents*<sup>13</sup>

I: I see.

N: You mean you want to know what I know about what they did before?

I: Yeah.

N: Grandpa was...

The above dialogue between the interviewer and the narrator perfectly illustrates the differently adopted perspectives. Responding to the question spontaneously, the narrator refers to her granddaughter's experiences at that time – grandparents were grandparents – as an eleven-year-old she had built the relationship with them through the prism of family ties. Moving from the level of biographical experience to the level of *knowledge* – the story told she fully answers the question. This analytical distinction made by the narrator herself perfectly shows the difference between *what* and *how* in the biographical experience. For an eleven-year-old girl, the *quality* of the relationship comes to the fore. Who the grandparents were, *what* they did was secondary knowledge passed on in the family stories (perhaps also by the grandparents talking about their past). It is included at some point in her own biography and begins to be equally important. However, in the process of reconstructing biographical experiences, it fulfils a different role.

In the case studies presented in individual chapters, the figures of grandmothers and grandfathers appear as significant Others, particularly in the narration of Paweł, Hanna, or Agnieszka. Below is an excerpt from an interview

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the fact that “contacts with their parents were most often mediated in the relationship grandmother/grandfather – grandchild” (Sikorska 2019: 111).

<sup>13</sup> In italics – K.K.

with Róża. The analysis included in Chapter II only briefly mentions the role of the grandmother while the narrator talks about her as an important person.

Before I went to school my life was quite, quite normal, just like any other child's. [...] My problem in my school years was that I was an only child. I had always, always envied my neighbors, friends, classmates, that they had brothers or sisters. They had somebody to come back to, unfortunately, I was all by myself, alone. But, I wasn't a typical only child, who was simply an egoist. I was simply always inviting lots of friends, I was incredibly open. And my home was always vibrant, although they weren't my brothers or sisters, but my acquaintances, my friends. I didn't know my grandfathers, I was very close to my grandma, who, when I attended, err, primary school because back then there was no junior high school, was trusted with all my secrets, my first loves, this kind of thing, as she was always at hand. [...] My mum was working at the post office in the telecommunication department. It was a very busy place then, so she works shifts all holidays, so I couldn't plan, for example, with my parents as a rule, because my mum had this kind of job that she had to go to work. When my grandma passed away it happened that I spent some Christmases with my dad only. So Christmas Eve supper, incredibly ceremonial, with a lot of people. No, quite the opposite, just the two of us, so I have some bitter thoughts remembering it. [...] It was simply, just one child, you know, with dad, when, when grandma died, my mum had this kind of job.

And I associate a sorrowful memory from 1991 when the Youth Days took place in Częstochowa during John Paul II's visit to Poland, and I went to that event then, my grandma was very sick then. When I came back from this rally and my grandma died one day later. [...] As I said, I was so sorrowful, my grandma, I mean she knew about many things my mum doesn't know even today, so grandma just knew and she was trusted with my, I mean, all secrets. And when I speak about grandma tears always fill my eyes, cause she was very close to me. And when she wasn't even 70, so I reckoned it was quite young for a grandma, she could have lived a longer life. But, she died in 1991, I gave birth to Monika in 1994.

We quoted two passages. The first comes from the main narration. As can be seen, the grandma is presented in a multidimensional constellation. It is not just about the help in raising children – taking care of them in the absence of a working mother. The figure of grandma becomes a kind of substitute for extended family relationships – to some extent a symbol of the family as such. The image of two people (father and daughter) at the Christmas table is very symbolic. Of course, not literally, but Róża feels that the basic conditions which constitute a social group – in this case the family – have been broken. According to the classic sociological definition, a social group is formed by at least three people – at the table, there are only two. This experience, somewhat mediated by the figure of the grandmother, results in her efforts to build social ties – in the quoted passage they are peer ties, in the entire account of Róża this is a constant

focus on building social relationships in her environment and the decision to have a large family – the narrator has four children. Another important dimension of the relationship with her grandmother is building trust, which, as shown in Chapter II, has become one of her basic biographical strategies.

The other quoted fragment comes from the stage of answering the interviewer's questions. This is the first question after the coda and it concerns the work of the narrator's father. While answering it, Róża smoothly moves on to describing her children and the religiosity of the whole family. There is then an association with the death of her grandmother. This fragment shows a deep emotional relationship with the grandma, which is expressed from two perspectives: then – recalling the memories of the event in Częstochowa is associated with the experience of her grandmother's death, and contemporary – Róża was 16 years old then, as it turns out that soon (at 19) will become a mother. Commenting on her grandmother's death, she takes into account the subsequent events in her life and places the grandmother in the macrostructural dimension showing demographic dependencies (And when she wasn't even 70, so I reckoned it was quite young for a grandma,) and the level of micro-intergenerational relations and the appearance of the next generation – the great-granddaughter.

### Intergenerational relations

As we wrote in introductory remarks, one of our assumptions was that biographical experience of transformation would differ due to belonging to different generations. Thus we searched for our interviewees among people born in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Yet, when distinguishing these groups we preferred to speak about cohorts, rather than generations. At the same time, we wondered if the generational perspective and Mannheim's concept of generation could be applied in the analysis. However, combining the concept of a generation with the method, or rather the biographical approach appeared to be a natural direction of research. Karl Mannheim (1952) defined a generation not only as related to the biological rhythm, but mainly as a similarity of social location, which builds the structures of opportunity to create a specific bond among members belonging to a given community. We will come back to this issue in the concluding remarks at the end of the book. Now it is enough to mention that in Polish sociology, or even more broadly speaking social sciences, the generational perspective had been hardly assumed.<sup>14</sup> Most frequently,

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<sup>14</sup> We would also like to stress that we distance ourselves from the currently fashionable use of generation category to describe subsequent social groups, for example, those entering the labor market (X, Y, Z generation) and the common-sense attribution of certain social or even psychological dispositions to them. Such an interpretation (a reflection on social reality, often related to the field of management) is completely alien to us.

generational research was focused on the Second World War experiences, mainly Holocaust studies (e.g., Rosenthal 1998 [2011], Inowlocki 1993) and was composed of members of family groups by the kinship denoting (grand)parent-child relationship (Pilcher 1994). In the field of biographical research, the generation aspect has recently become important when analyzing migration processes. Although our empirical material is focused on different biographical experiences,<sup>15</sup> when speaking about intergenerational relationships in the collected narratives we can find some common formal features. The researchers analyzing migration and applying the biographical approach use “the concept of transmission between generations: a concept that covers a wide range of micro-processes of communication efforts. Inasmuch as such efforts are explicitly oriented to help one’s child to shape his or her life path, they may be referred to as ‘generational work’” (Inowlocki 1993, 2013). As to the children, very often they might not respond directly to what is offered to them by their parents. However, in the long run, it may turn out that they did in fact pick up something of what was passed on to them by their parents, however integrating it into something of their own making, which serves them as a valuable resource. Such a process might be called “transmission en équivalence” (Bertaux/Bertaux-Wiame 1988). Therefore the cultural gap between generations in migrant families does not necessarily imply a break of the *transmission* (Apitzsch, Bertaux, Delcroix, Inowlocki, 2014).

To repeat once more the quotation which comments the situation of migrant families in the first, second and sometimes the third generation, yet the very idea that there is a certain potential that is being passed on, contested, problematized or activated in the next generation seems to us very credible. We could see it for instance in the presented case of Weronika and as a contrastive comparison Paweł’s narrative where relationships between parents and children (narrators) framed by the same social time and ideology are differently interpreted from the present perspective by both interviewees. In our material, in many places, we can see this, at times subtle interpretation “game” connected with the difference of perspectives, sometimes difficulties in their reciprocity.

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<sup>15</sup> It does not mean that one of the dimensions of the transformation experience, or even better, one of its consequences may not be migration. To the contrary, we know that especially after Poland’s accession to the EU permanent or temporary migration became the biographical experience of thousands of Poles. Some of us conducted research in this field using biographical perspective in the international project: EUROIDENTITIES: The Evolution of European Identity: Using biographical processes to study the development of European identity’, European Commission Framework 7 (Każmierska, Piotrowski, Waniek 2011, 2012).

## Family stories

In our opinion, the third important dimension for biographical resources, the source of which is the family, are the stories about its history. It can be said that their richness in our material is confirmed by the quantitative data. For example, research conducted by the Center for Public Opinion Research in 2018 shows a clear increase in interest in this aspect of family life. "Exploring family history is more interesting and exciting than general history because it concerns ourselves. Behind its discovery are all sorts of motivations ranging from pragmatic (focused on tangible or intangible benefits associated with, for example, social status) through the need for rooting and a sense of continuity, sometimes also giving meaning or value to one's own life by linking it to the achievements of past generations and mere cognitive curiosity. Of course, there may be other reasons for this. However, what seems important, learning about history – not only about your own family (although this is often the starting point for wider interests) – allows one to feel a certain continuity. This can be talked about in its individual dimension as an element of determining one's own identity, but also at the community level, which we are part of by gaining historical awareness. In the study, we wanted to verify the interest in and knowledge of family history, as well as how the memory of the past is expressed" (Roguska, Felisiak 2018: 1). As the research shows 44% declare that they have knowledge going back two generations, while 27% know what happened during their parents' life, and 9% do not even have this orientation. Almost twice as many (15%) respondents knew the fate of their great grandparents, and another 4% of the previous generations (Roguska, Felisiak 2018: 4). The authors of the report conclude: "Considering the last twenty or even thirty years, one can notice an increase in Poles' interest in the history of their own families and, above all, an increase in their knowledge in this area. This is favored by the unflagging discussions about the history of Poland and Poles, and the visible renaissance of creative productions in recent years addressed to a wide audience, including films dedicated to historical issues. Knowledge of the history of one's family is also favored by the changes in the social structure associated with the increase in the level of education of Polish society. The socio-economic status, based largely on education, significantly determines the interest and knowledge of the family history. At the same time, knowledge of the roots and family history dating a few generations back can be a status factor itself. Perhaps the most spectacular change in terms of scale which has taken place over the last few decades concerns the knowledge of the fate of grandparents or older ancestors. While at the end of the 1980s less than a third of adult Poles had such knowledge, and at the end of the 1990s – two-fifths, now it is almost two-thirds" (Roguska, Felisiak 2018: 15–16).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Komunikat z badań CBOS nr 114/2018 *Historie rodzinne* [https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2018/K\\_114\\_18.PDF](https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2018/K_114_18.PDF)

In our narrations, of course, not everyone has elaborated on the history of their parents or grandparents. Nevertheless, it was clear that for the narrators, family history is important. In many cases, they presented it in the main part of the spontaneous narrative. There were cases, as for example, Leszek presented in Chapter III, where the story about the vicissitudes of various family members constituted the structural axis for making one's biography meaningful and it was not a simple answer to who I am or where I come from, but as Piotr Filipkowski writes:

The most important message the narrator conveys here is not really about the grandfather's involvement (as it will turn out later, he was not his biological grandfather, but his mother's stepfather) in the defensive war of 1939, but his ability to disentangle himself from dangerous and too risky stories. History – this big one, written with a capital letter – gets people entangled in historical circumstances. The narrator will choose those characters from the family saga who were able to transform History into individual small stories – and to disentangle themselves efficiently, somehow take command of one's fate – even if the spectrum of agency was very narrow in the given circumstances.

In many of the collected narratives, family stories are a resource which can easily be triggered. We became convinced of this by asking questions about parents or grandparents when they did not appear in the main part of the spontaneous narration. In fact, this question when asked in the second phase of the interview would always resonate with extensive family stories, sometimes dating back to the history of the war of the generation of grandparents or parents.

## Social bonds

A lot is said today about the specificity of post-modernity, the characteristics of which are built in contrast to modern society. Issues related to the relationship of an individual with others come to the fore. What is emphasized is individualization, a departure from the thus-far patterns of action and planning one's own biography, assuming its fluidity. A lot is also said in this context about the transformation and crisis of social bonds, sometimes presenting the image of life as a "collection" rather than a "collectivity"<sup>17</sup> of elements. As Zygmunt Bauman writes "In our times, the world has been fragmented into loosely

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<sup>17</sup> I use these terms metaphorically in relation to their basic meaning in sociology when a collection of people is considered to be a situation in which there are no relations between the gathered, as opposed to a collectivity which is the result of a social bond.



related elements, and our individual lives are reduced to random sequences of carelessly related episodes. Few of us – if anyone – can avoid participating in more than one community of ‘ideas and principles’, real or would-be, coherent or fleeting” (Bauman 2007: 15). It can be assumed that this way of experiencing one’s biography and identity work will be translated into a narrative form, especially for those representing the young generation. Of course, young people are unlikely to make overall life assessments, like older people. Therefore, it is difficult to assume that in the collected narratives a pattern of interpreting the biography clearly emerges, in line with extreme individualization, and above all with the “fragmentation” of biographical experiences. Of course, its shape depends, at least this is the internal conviction, on the particular choices of individuals sometimes escaping social expectations. However, it is difficult to agree with the following view:

It does not seem that assembling fragments into a full, coherent whole called ‘identity’ is the main concern of our contemporaries. [...] Maybe this is not their worry at all? A *coherent*, strongly riveted, and well-constructed identity could prove to be a burden, coercion, and restriction of the freedom of choice. It could foretell the inability to open the door when opportunity knocks on it (Bauman 2007: 51).

The collected life stories, also, and maybe especially among the people born in the 1980s show that it is quite different. Contemporary fragmentation of biography does not, in fact, invalidate the pursuit of a sense of continuity. Fragmentation does not translate into a biographical story in the sense that usually, the narration of a young person is not just a cluster of diffused biographical episodes. This is due to the fact that it usually serves the role of organizing experiences, giving them biographical sense, activating a flashback through a story (Bruner 1987: 11–13). Paradoxically, an individualistic conviction of one’s uniqueness and freedom in constructing one’s own self can even promote coherence.

The most important thing, however, is to recognize your own identity as unique, having its own overall form (*Gestalt*), which matters, and is valuable in itself and deserves to be developed. This includes key issues such as: supporting one’s personal identity through one’s own coordinated and persistent actions (e.g., gaining clarity about the enormous difficulties in one’s past) on the one hand, and a huge thematic potential and basic thematic threads on the other, and incorporating both of these aspects into a main biographical form or biographical wholeness, as well as subsequently following the threads still filling the missing parts and linking this general biographical shape or overall form (*Gestalt*) (Schütze 2008a: 160).

Building bonds plays a significant role in this process. Again, we must refer to the not very original statement that bonds form the foundations in the process of building social order in both the macro- and micro-social dimension. On the other hand, as Mirosława Marody writes: “The categorical nature of the above statement seems to collide with the widespread description of modernity, exposing the image of an autonomous individual, making their own choices and constructing their biography in the world on their own, the most characteristic feature of which is the breakdown of bonds” (Marody 2014: 252). Well, we also admit being surprised as researchers of the modern-day who follow the diagnosis indicated by Marody, that in the collected narratives we have an incredible amount of references to bonds and the need to build relationships. Of course, these experiences are varied, there is certainly a turning point between the 1980s generation and the other decades. As we will show in Chapter XVI, the issue of building relationships also regarding the relation of locality is diverse and complicated. Nevertheless, the most important thing is that it is difficult to look for cases of *homo clausus* in the collected material. The narrators suffer more because of the I-without-we (Elias 2008) rather than rhetorically elaborate on it as a biographical success. Those who find it difficult to build relationships or who today perceive their crisis often build nostalgic descriptions of relationships.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, if, in the collected narratives, one was to look for the symptoms of the present-day related to the transformation of social bonds manifesting in the we-I relationship, they do exist insofar as they are problematized and become the object of biographical work.

We use the concept of biographical work firstly after Anselm Strauss, who was the first one to introduce this concept into interpretive analyses and then after Fritz Schütze, who developed this concept by extending it to the overall process of organizing biographical experiences. Biographical work means making an effort to interpret life in relation to one's own identity, self-images, behaviors, activities undertaken or not, et cetera. “Contradictions and dissonances of experience are specific even to the serene course of life and require undertaking ‘internal’ work to achieve a sense of *seamless* identity continuity” (Strauss 1993: 99). This process takes place through narrative recollection, reflecting symbolic ‘deep’ meanings revealing the self historical *Gestalts* of life; analytical comparisons of alternative ways of understanding; imagining one's own future which harmoniously or contrastingly fits into the past; reflective decision making and evaluation of possible results. Biographical work is above all an internal activity of the mind and emotional psyche, and this internal activity is essentially based on an internal conversation with significant

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<sup>18</sup> For example, the story of the yard as a quasi-community plays such a role. See Chapter XV.

Others and oneself. In life situations of a biographical crisis, biographical work can become a clear and central pattern of cognitive and emotional life-organizing action. In trouble-free situations in life it can be just a fleeting reflection or a memory related to focusing on other activities, and it can even be subconscious (Schütze 2012: 149). The process of working on one's own biography is therefore only seemingly working *on* or *with* oneself, but it involves working with relationships which we build towards others. So, this is essentially a question about the type, quality, and strength of the bonds which connect us and the answer to the question sprayed on the wall of one of the tenement houses in Łódź: *Are we here together or everyone separately?*

This part of the book contains four texts devoted to the outlined issues. Chapter XIII entitled *A trap of systemic changes – Pola's biographical drift* – by Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas and Małgorzata Potoczna, combines the perspective of opportunity structures and biographical resources. The authors show the biographical consequences resulting from the closure of the former and the absence of the latter. In Chapter XIV *Narratives rooted in family milieu. Case studies of Agnieszka and Paweł focused on the family thread as the biographical resource and main story-line* Joanna Wygnańska presents two case studies where for the narrators family remains the most important biographical resource in respect of both the family of origin and the family formed by them.

Chapter XV by Jacek Burski and Joanna Wygnańska entitled *A biographical experience of the yard as a symbolic biographical resource* is a kind of case study, but this time not based on a single case analysis, but on a particular issue. The backyard is shown here as one of the elements organizing the biographical experience and constituting a physical and symbolic space of transition between family relations and the network of peer and extended social relations.

Chapter XVI *(Re)creating bonds in the local environment – a contrastive comparison of two life strategies* by Kaja Kaźmierska presents two cases where biographical experiences are rooted in *milieu*. The first one is based on trust, the need to build bonds in every context, and the place of such rooting is the local community through which the individual deals with reality. The second case describes a kind of “secondary” rootedness in *milieu* based on biographical work after conscious uprooting.