

*Jacek Burski, Joanna Wygnańska*

## CHAPTER XV

### **A BIOGRAPHICAL EXPERIENCE OF THE YARD AS A SYMBOLIC BIOGRAPHICAL RESOURCE**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter deals with the reconstruction of the biographical significance of the yard experience, in relation to which our interviewees interpreted the social change in Poland. What is important, this thread, present in their narrations, is treated by us as a symbolic biographical resource which was used by narrators to make their own biographies meaningful. In other words, they perceived it as an important factor for the formation of their biographical identity linking the subsequent phases of their autobiographical story.

For us, the biographical experience of the yard is a central analytical concept illustrating the sociocultural changes into which the experiences of the narrators' adolescence (growing-up) and adulthood are inscribed. Thus, we are interested in their reflections on the topic of the yard both in their personal experience and in the comparative perspective applied to their autobiographical stories. In this way, it becomes possible to juxtapose different phases of the biographical experience of our narrators, ordered according to three time frames: in relation to the Polish People's Republic (PPR) period, the transformation time, and the post-transformation reality.

Additionally, the yard experience is expressed and presented by our interlocutors in the phase of a spontaneous narration regarding their life history. Biographical accounts of the yard appeared when describing the time of childhood as a formative experience, having a big impact on who our narrators have become. However, in subsequent phases of the conversation with the researcher – if the topic of the yard appeared – it was treated by the narrators as a passage enabling the comparison of ways of raising children or the conditions of growing up in relation to the two time perspectives: the childhood of our interlocutors and the present day.

Therefore, this is not a biographical thread induced by the researcher in the additional questions phase, but rather it emerges directly from the

narration of the interlocutors. Fritz Schütze (2008a: 173) notes that: “The communicative scheme of extempore narration is the most elementary means to focus on, to present, and to understand the flow of events making up the smaller and greater change of one’s (everyday and biographical) life, and these changes are very deeply connected with – sometimes more and sometimes less decisive – historical changes of one’s social surroundings.” He also points out that there are also two other basic communication schemes inscribed in a spontaneous narration and used by individuals to reconstruct and interpret their biographical experiences: description and argumentation. The first one “is built into the unfolding of the scheme of narration in order to deal with (i.e., to focus and to clarify) social frames of involvements of the narrator and other *dramatis personae* within biographically and socially pivotal events.” The other communication scheme – argumentation – relates to explaining the course of events in the individual’s biographical experience, seeking explanations for biographical decisions and choices made (Schütze 2008a: 173).

The biographical experience of the yard, which is the main subject of our research, is thus an important interpretative framework for the experiences of our interlocutors. Both in the sense of showing the socio-historical contexts which their biographical experience is linked with, as well as in relation to the development of their biographical identity. Additionally, our aim of this text is to show how our interlocutors, using the biographical experience of the yard (in the spontaneous narrative phase), interpret and reconstruct the changes taking place in Poland in relation to the three time frames indicated above (the PPR period, the transformation time, and the post-transformation reality). In this way, we try to see to what extent the use of the yard thread allows our interlocutors “to reach authenticity of the expression of life historical experiences and thus to start and to realize biographical work” (Schütze 2008a: 173).

We also assumed that the starting point for our reflections should be the reference to the role played by the yard community experience in the socialization processes of an individual. The undertaking of such a research thread resulted from the research intention to refer to biographical processes ordering individual phases of the biographies of the narrators. It also allowed us to attempt to reconstruct the social processes in which these biographies were/are entangled (Każmierska, Schütze 2013). Within the biographical narrations collected in our project, the story of the yard was very often included by our narrators in their childhood experience and in the phase of their biography in which they are parents themselves. Starting from this observation, we also treat the analytical concept of the yard as a *contrast set* (Schütze 2008a) showing the differences in the way of experiencing the yard community, both at different stages of life and among different generations.

We would like to set our reflections in a scientific-cultural frame and indicate approaches which treat the yard as a permanent element of collective and individual memory, both in the spatial and symbolic dimension. Referring first to the scientific perspective, it is worth mentioning that as it was said before we understand the biographical experience of the yard as one of the spaces of the socialization process of an individual. Relating to the concept of upbringing activities and their types presented by Aleksander Kamiński,<sup>1</sup> it can be seen that the undertaken topic of the importance of the yard community experience in the biographies of our interlocutors falls into the “team education” category marked by the collective experience. The author indicates here the mutual influence of peers or members of social groups on each other, escaping institutional control and going beyond the space of parental upbringing actions (Kamiński 1976: 11). In this view, one can attribute the yard community as belonging to the sphere of unintentional socialization<sup>2</sup> rather than intentional upbringing (educational institutions and the family).

The subject of the biographical experience of yard which is of our interest thus falls within the conceptual area of socialization and upbringing, which are primarily the concern of pedagogy and sociology.<sup>3</sup> In the first case, we should point to family pedagogy and educational pedagogy as those subdisciplines of

---

<sup>1</sup> Kamiński lists three types of upbringing: the first, based on the direct individual relationship of the pupil and the educator. The second is “team education” as indicated in the text. The third one concerns the environmental educational process, and the researcher connects it to the essence of social pedagogy.

<sup>2</sup> In his considerations regarding the sociology of education, Jan Szczepański (1970) also mentions the unintentional influences in the sense of their impact on the process of socialization of an individual. This means all the unintentional social activities forming an individual. Such unintentional influences of the environment can also be described as “spontaneous socialization.” The yard community can thus be considered as the space of impact of socialization understood in this way.

<sup>3</sup> Additionally, a study of family life, its changes and processuality in the Polish context (including the upbringing category) can also be found in contemporary anthropology. It is worth recalling, among others, a publication of Agata Stanisł (2013). The author described in it the lives of 100 Polish families, trying to show similarities and differences between them. Its objective was also to capture the everyday life experience of these families and growing up in them, which seems close to our research approach. Thus, the research study presented in the book aimed at a certain reconstruction or deconstruction of the available theoretical models regarding research on family and kinship through reflecting on the diversity of Polish families and their ways of dealing with everyday life. The author did not do a biographical analysis of cases, but her attempt to record the experience of everyday life of Polish families seems to us worth recalling in order to indicate other sociological studies of the family from the position of examining the individuals that create it and their experiences.

pedagogical sciences in which the topic of the aforementioned unintentional socialization associated with our experience of peer and neighborly yard community is explored. Additionally, we would like to point out that the analytical perspective presented in this text is also part of the sociology of education,<sup>4</sup> family sociology,<sup>5</sup> and childhood sociology. Wielisława Warzywoda-Kruszyńska (2015: 10) after Doris Bühler-Niederberger and Robert van Krieken (2009: 188) notes that current research on children and childhood includes three trends in the sociology of childhood:

(1) the structural approach, also referred to as the generational approach, concerns childhood and adulthood as segments of macro-structure, constituted by the inequality between them; (2) the historical and social constructivist approaches analyze discourses about and actions toward children; (3) the ethnographic approach focuses on interactions and communication in different groups of children.

Childhood is understood here as a socially and individually constructed experience. The analyses attempted in this chapter fall within the above-mentioned comparative perspective affecting the experience of childhood and adulthood. However, due to the biographical approach we present, our reflections combine the interpretation of macro-structural changes forming the biographical experience of childhood and adolescence of our narrators with contemporary optics of their children's experiences through the reconstruction of social processes and the associated biographical processes. Thus, by studying

---

<sup>4</sup> Looking at the history of Polish sociology of education, one should mention, among others, the classic works of Florian Znaniecki (*Sociology of Education* 1928, 1930) and Józef Chałasiński (*Family and School and Wider Social Groups*, 1929). The post-Second World War texts worth mentioning are: *An Outline of Sociology of Education* (1974) by Stanisław Kowalski and *Typical Educational Environments of Contemporary Poland* (1976) by Włodzimierz Winclawski.

<sup>5</sup> Małgorzata Sikorska (2019: 40), notes that: "researchers of family life point to the transition from the structural-functional paradigm and modernist family theory (Bernardes 1997) to a paradigm that can be collectively described as a *postmodern model* (Szlendak 2010) or *new studies on the family*." The author refers here to a change in family research practices that, from an approach analyzing what a family is or what *being a family* is, are now focusing more on the perspective of *doing family*. In this perspective, it is important for researchers to get to know the family in relation to practices (e.g., parenting), a sense of belonging, emotions of individuals, as well as the assumption that "the family (or in fact its members) has an impact on reality, on social processes" (Szlendak 2010: 50). The family is therefore understood here as a process, and researchers focus on "analyzing interactions within the family" and "analyzing everyday life" of family life (Szlendak 2010: 51).

the biographical experience of the yard, we try to show this sphere of childhood and adolescence experience of our interlocutors, which becomes an illustration, a reflection of many important socio-cultural changes taking place in Poland. The thread of the biographical experience of the yard in the interviewees' narrations is therefore related to issues such as socialization, the importance of peer relationships, a sense of community, and the relationship between freedom and control.

Additionally, in our reflections we also reach for the concept of *communitas* (Turner 2005, 2010) considering the yard as a community based on building bonds (peer and neighborly) despite the external barriers and social distances through which individuals can experience socialization. We also refer to the concept of liminality (Turner 2005, 2010, van Gennep 2006), which we link with the process of growing up and entering adulthood of the narrators. In this way, our analytical approach also falls within the perspective of analyses touching on the problem of "emerging adulthood" (Arnett 2004, 2007). At the same time, the narrations we discuss concern people born in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, whose adolescence and adulthood process was embedded in a completely different frame of socio-historical changes than the analyses of "*emerging adulthood*" characteristic of experiences of contemporary post-industrial societies.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, in our considerations, the yard is of metaphorical character capturing a peculiar space of freedom deprived of (full) control of parents, teachers, or adults in general. A space where peer groups play a key role. They constitute – as Mirosława Marody (Marody 2015: 179) says after Florian Znaniecki:

the main environment for shaping those competences that form the foundations for harmonious social coexistence and effective interaction with others. It is in peer groups that an individual shapes one's self-esteem, learns how to negotiate, resolve conflicts, loyalty, and maybe even above all that one should take into account the views of others. It is also in peer groups that an individual has the opportunity to acquire this knowledge, which s/he is not able to get from adults, regarding, for example, sexual practices, informal institutional rules, socially incorrect forms of behavior, et cetera.

And indeed, for the narrators whose life histories we briefly discuss below, this is the role of the yard. A significant change – which they regret – is taking place in the generation of their children, when the yard understood in such a way

---

<sup>6</sup> This thread was described in an interesting way by Anna Lipska and Wanda Zagórska (2011), in their text comparing the development stage extending between adolescence and early adulthood in relation to the concepts of 'emerging adulthood' and the liminal phase.

ceases to exist, peer meetings are mainly mediated by social media, and games and activities take place “online.”

While pointing to publications, research, and cultural activities describing the yard in a spatial, symbolic, and material sense, we would like, among others, to recall the considerations of Maja Brzozowska-Brywczyńska (2019) regarding the study of play space. The researcher, making a comparative analysis of modern and old forms and places of play, states: “Thinking about childhood, we often look at it through the filter of our own memories, recalling nostalgic images of yards with carpet hangers in the background, hopscotch drawn with chalk on the asphalt and other not necessarily childish places of implementing the wildest play scenarios.” In opposition to such evoked memories, on the one hand, she places the modern “safe” yards, educational, creative toys, and activities designed to provide children with creative entertainment. On the other, she indicates current games of children seeking alternative solutions, stimulating the imagination, occasionally similar to the yard community experience, going beyond the limits of the modern times (associated with strong control processes and the phenomenon of “design” thinking about childhood). We also refer to the threads cited by the author in this text, showing the importance of the biographical resource of the yard experience for shaping a comparative perspective in the biographical experience of our narrators. In this way, we also try to reconstruct their interpretation of the contemporary experience of childhood and adolescence by placing their reflections in the frame of the experiences related to the presence and absence of the yard community.

Another publication that is also worth paying attention to is the book *Dzicy z naszej ulicy* (2005) (“Savages from our Street”) by Barbara Fatyga in which the author attempts to explore the youth culture in Poland. The theoretical and research perspective forming the frame of her analysis is mainly derived from cultural anthropology. Despite many meticulous references to sociological optics, the researcher remains, however, in the field of anthropological considerations, and thus this publication primarily addresses the problem of the anthropology of youth culture. However, what constitutes an important part of this book are the cultural experiences of the leaders and active members of youth organizations. In this part of the analyses, the author recalls the experience of the yard community and peer bonds which are close to our research reflections. In the cases described by Fatyga, however, they play a significantly different role than in the biographical experiences reconstructed by us. The author points to yard games which connected the future activists of youth organizations organizing protests, the first rebellious behaviors of the future leaders of such activities. The yard is not, therefore, one of the key topics of this study and the biographical experience of the yard as a symbolic biographical resource is not analyzed. However, due to the author’s case study



touching upon the experience of adolescence, which is of interest to us, it is also worth paying attention to the anthropological perspective of the research on the cultural experiences of young people proposed by the author.

Another contemporary academic study showing the memory of a yard in Poland is, inter alia, the publication *Cmentarz, park, podwórko. Poznańskie przestrzenie pamięci* (2018) ("Cemetery, park, yard. Poznań spaces of memory") by Małgorzata Fabiszak and Anna W. Brzezińska. The book is the result of several years of research conducted by the authors within the NCN OPUS research grant. The scholars touch upon the problems of memory and forgetfulness in urban space, making it a laboratory for conducting an ethnographic study of places (in the symbolic, historical, collective, and individual sense).

The memory of the Polish yard is also the subject of many cultural and commemorative initiatives. An important example is the photo exhibition *Memory of your yard* prepared in Hrubieszów by the Digital Archive of Local Tradition and exhibited in the City Library (2019). In *Tygodnik Zamojski* there was a note that:

The exhibition captures in photographs and memories moments spent in Hrubieszów yards; moments of carefree fun, swimming in Huczwa, relaxing in numerous home gardens, long queues for ice cream or playing kiczka! Whether it is Wygon, Pogórze, Ludna Street or Kilińskiego Street, the memories are dominated by the theme of children's free play outside from morning to evening and the atmosphere of a city full of greenery, where time was spent in a wide circle of family or neighbors, often singing, playing, talking.

The project coordinator, Katarzyna Suchecka in one of the interviews given about the exhibition comments: "Almost everyone has a yard where they grew up. We were curious about how children, young people would spend their time then."<sup>7</sup>

Another initiative worth mentioning is the "Łódź yard – tradition and modernity"<sup>8</sup> a project implemented in 2019 by the Museum of the City of Łódź. In addition to themed walks, outdoor cinema, workshops, and meetings in the space of Łódź yards, the event was accompanied by a permanent exhibition entitled "At a common yard – a melting pot of cultures and religions in Łódź" presented in the basement of Izrael Poznański's Palace. The idea of the project was to show the yards of Łódź as a space of material and symbolic heritage of Łódź, combining memories of the older Łódź residents with a modern

---

<sup>7</sup> After: <http://www.tygodnikzamojski.pl/artykul/95875/hrubieszow-bdquoopamiec-twojego-podworkardquo-czyli.html>. Retrieved November 17, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> The project was co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage from the Culture Promotion Fund.

perspective in which many of the presented places had been forgotten. The yards of Łódź were treated as places marked by a rich past, full of traces of the history of many generations next to each other. One of the effects of the implemented project is the plan to create a repository of memories of the inhabitants of Łódź, which will be connected with the memory of the old life in the Łódź yard, at the meeting point of cultures and tenement houses.

Finally, the reporting activity of Filip Springer could also be referred to, who by photographing yards, tries to apply a filter of past memories onto these frames. At the same time, the author is interested in the current vision of Polish yards and their – still important – role of creating a community of neighborly experiences. Springer comments: “It took me some time to understand what was there in yards that was attracting me. It was not about the space, although it was photographically attractive in its neglect and severity. With meticulous inquisitiveness, however, I sought places on the backstage of the city, which build a community.”<sup>9</sup>

However, with regard to the conclusions contained in the chapter, it should be emphasized that the subject of our research approach is not an institutional outlook, dealing with the impact (potential or real) of a family or school on the formation of an individual. The subject of our reflections is rather the individual perspective, and more precisely the biographical experience of adolescence, which can only be considered to be part of a broader upbringing mechanism to some extent. As we have already mentioned, the yard is interesting for us as a significant symbolic and material space embedded in the experience of the socialization process of individuals and the development of their biographical identity.

In addition, the methodological approach organizing our analyses is founded on the methodological and analytical perspective of Fritz Schütze, which gives us a chance to go beyond the narrow subdisciplinary framework. Therefore, in this chapter following the methods of reconstruction and interpretation and the theme of the yard in the biographies of our narrators, we attempt to present individual biographical experiences in relation to the collective mechanisms of impact of social change. In other words, the biographical analysis makes it possible to trace these threads and phenomena in relation to pre-transformation and post-transformation social reality.

### **Justification of the analytical perspective**

What convinced us to engage in the biographical story of the yard in a more detailed way is primarily the emic character of the indicated category. On the one hand, it involves the spontaneous introduction of this thread into the

---

<sup>9</sup> After: <https://radio.lublin.pl/news/pamiec-twojego-podworka-fotografie-ktore-przypominaja-hrubieszow-sprzed-lat>. Retrieved November 18, 2019.



narration by the interlocutors -- on the other, it is associated with the meaning we assign to it in the analysis of the interviews. The yard connects the world of childhood and adolescence in the biographical memory of the narrators, establishing a reference point in the process of ordering their biography. At the same time, it is captured in the perspective of their biographical "now," allowing us to follow the clues which constitute the image of social change perceived by the interlocutors (in the context of, *inter alia*, changes in the upbringing patterns, ways of spending free time by children and young people or the impact of technology on these social practices).

In this chapter, however, we would like to focus on understanding the yard not only in the aforementioned areas, but also as an important biographical resource of our narrators. In this way, we will try to indicate, on the one hand, how the memory of the yard is reconstructed by our interlocutors in their biographies and what semantic resources are assigned to this analytical category in relation to the transformation process in Poland. On the other hand, we are interested in reconstructing how our interlocutors perceive the changes taking place in their social and cultural environment. At the same time, aiming at creating more general categories related to the social change described in the perspective of the whole book, the topic of the yard is analyzed as a biographical resource in this chapter, also used by the interlocutors to assign meaning to certain processes and phenomena, which go beyond the narrators' experience of everyday life.

It should be stressed that this chapter is somewhat different from other parts of the book based on case studies. In this chapter, we focus on reflections of three chosen narrations. We do not undertake an analysis of the entire life story of the narrators, but follow the trail of one of the threads, which allows us to make a comparison between the selected cases. This line is the recurring theme of the yard. Thus, limiting, in a sense, the scope of analytical activities, we try to reconstruct the mechanisms of social change, which is the subject of the book. In other words, in this perspective, the yard is a kind of metaphor for the social change taking place and – at the same time – one of the keys to understanding the world in which our interlocutors functioned and are still functioning.

The selection of cases which we discuss in this chapter is connected to our attempt to reconstruct the biographical resource of the yard experience in order to show the importance of this resource to make their biographies meaningful. In the pool of 90 autobiographical and narrative interviews we collected in the project, we often came across the story of the yard, in a communal sense, as a formative factor for the biographical identity of our narrators, or in relation to socio-cultural changes associated with the transformational and post-transformation reality. However, we decided to choose such autobiographical

stories in which the biographical resource of the yard experience is in our opinion one of the key elements connecting the whole biographical experience of the narrators. We also tried to ensure that the interviews selected for analysis show different dimensions of the interlocutors making their own biographies meaningful by recalling the yard experience. In this way, from among the many narrations gathered in the research project in which the symbolic biographical resource of our interest appeared, we selected three cases to be considered here. Therefore, applying these two criteria: the year of birth of our interlocutors and the search for those biographies in which the theme of the yard was key to building their narration, we decided to take a closer look at three autobiographical stories: Marian (1962), Adam (1972) and Izabela (1979). The last of the biographies, although date-wise still falls in the 1970s category, was classified by us as a life history bearing many features characteristic of the narrations of people born in the 1980s. Among other things, one of the distinguishing traits for this category is the lack of direct references to the PPR period, with focus on experiencing transformation, typical of these narrations (in the case of Izabela especially in the context of the consumption of mass culture of that period, for example, by watching the first satellite television channels). An equally important feature of the narrations collected among the interlocutors born in the indicated decade is the experience of educational and professional career, as in the interview with Izabela, concentrated in terms of cognitive structures on the belief that it is necessary to build capital based on good education. Characteristic for the interviewed people from the 1980s is also the lack of children. However, this does not prevent them from making comparisons relating to changes in parenting styles (how children were raised during the childhood of the narrators, and how it is done now).

Let us move on here to the presentation of short biographical portraits of each of the interviewees and the key analytical conclusions, with particular regard to the theme of the yard.

### **Marian's case**

Marian was born in 1962 in one of the cities of the Silesian agglomeration. His father was an engineer. Together with his parents and sister, Marian lived in a block of flats in the vicinity of tenement houses. The narrator spent his childhood in the town of origin, occasionally leaving during the holiday season to a village near Kraków where the mother's family lived. Later, he began studying at the technical university in Kraków. Then, remaining in this city, he undertook various studies to finally graduate in Forestry. The very period of studying, in his case, lasted almost 10 years, and shortly afterwards (and after the start of his first job) he was drafted into the army. Having done his

military service, Marian became involved in the organization of one of the first centers of alternative education in Silesia. After a few years, he left this place and went to work at the Education Office. During his studies, he also met his wife. Currently, he is also the father of an adult daughter. The marriage itself broke up, however, and the narrator is in a steady relationship with his new partner.

In his story, Marian devotes a lot of space to recall the period of childhood and youth. In these fragments of his biography, the important threads are primarily the experiences related to building relationships with peers. The narrator also shows his struggles with education (transition from being an extremely talented student to a student with problems) and in an interesting way describes his fascination with popular culture, especially music, which had an impact on the formation of his biographical identity. In the second part of his main narration, he also focuses on reconstructing his work experience. More broadly, he talks about his role in running one of the centers of alternative education. Interestingly, private issues play a secondary role in this narration, which is most evident in the part of the interview based on asking additional questions by the researcher, when the narrator has problems remembering his daughter's age.

Marian presents a nostalgic attitude to his childhood. In his story, one can notice that state institutions played an important role in shaping the biographical experience of the narrator. Although Marian does not use the term "welfare state" when referring to his biographical experience within the PPR timeframe, he points to the features of this period relating to such characteristics:

N: I suppose we didn't have any problems then, those ones which could affect, err, people in that system. Or, in other words, we lived somewhat more or less like, like the majority, maybe a little above the average of that, that system. Well, I mean safely, safely. There was enough for everything – holidays, EHF, that is Employee Holiday Fund, (speaks faster) to the seaside, a camp or camps, well, to live not to die (laughs). It is from this perspective that it is now judged that it was a paradise, really. Yes, yes, it seems strange, not that it was communism, but the child does not live in politics, right? The child lives in a completely different world and perceives it differently. For a child, freedom is not important, what counts is "Jacek and Agatka," which will be broadcast at twenty past seven.

I: (laughs)

N: Or "Reksio,"<sup>10</sup> later more modern times came.

---

<sup>10</sup> Marian is referring here to popular cartoons for children broadcast on television. "Jacek and Agatka" was one of the first so-called, good night, or evening programs for children. The time of issue of "Jacek and Agatka" (1962–1973) overlapped with Marian's childhood. "Reksio" was an animated series produced from 1967 until 1990. Both titles (among dozens of other productions) were broadcast as part of the children's evening

The quote above is worth comparing with the next one, in which the narrator emphasizes the issue of safety, characteristic of his childhood in the PPR:

N: I lived in those days, absolutely safely. What/ which is what I probably couldn't give to my children. What is very difficult for many parents now – such a sense of security, total security. Absolute peace, absolute security.

At this point we would like to return to the topic of the perception of social distance. In this context, childhood was very important for Marian. In his story, it is in these references that we find the image of a neighborly society in which the economic, cultural, and social differences did not lead to the breakdown of bonds within this community. Therefore, they were not of a dysfunctional character. On the contrary, they were a natural and indisputable feature of the local community in which our narrator grew up. In one fragment Marian recalls:

N: Well, I had/ for me this, this, this smoking was a bit exotic, and for them, it was an everyday reality, because they were from those a bit neglected environments. I remember such such, maybe not pathological, but such impoverished environments. For me, it was so [...] exotic, right? Smoking such/ such a different world a little bit. Then I would come back to my sort of orderly, safe, well-off world, and, and, and here, they are a bit different, so Silesian, real – someone is working somewhere, someone is not working, someone is drinking, big families, right? Erm, but I really liked it, their life like that, right? [...] Erm, but then there were no such differences, neither, neither I nor them. Only now am I evaluating it like that. No, no, no, we didn't notice these differences, right? We did not notice that they exist.

The quote above also includes an important theme of the peer community, which becomes an introduction to the description of the yard from the perspective of a young boy. Importantly, the yard category is introduced by Marian in a spontaneous way (it is not triggered, for example, by the researcher's questions) and is an important element of the main story in the interview. Again, we can observe the way the narrator highlights the social differences between his family and the families of his friends:

N: [...] because it is also important, the environment in which I grew up, in the yard, and back then people lived in the yard, not like these days, when you don't live in the yard. So you lived in the yard, a fantastic yard, a dream. (speaks more slowly) So first, there was a new block.

---

program on TVP channel 1 (broadcasting time varied, but the program always appeared before the main news bulletin around 7 p.m.) from the 1950s until 2013 when it was decided to transfer (with a short broadcasting period on TVP Kultura in 2013–2014) to the TVP ABC platform addressed directly to children and young people.

I: Mm

N: Where I lived, old tenement houses were bordering the area, so there were the old tenement houses, and those ones from those flats were poorer. I mean it seemed so to us, in those one-hundred-and-twenty-meter flats, right?

I: (laughs)

N: Poverty, and we in these super modern fifty-meter cages, right? But, they also saw it that way. They also preferred our cage flats than in their humongous, neglected ones, because these are old tenement houses. Although at that time they were not so badly neglected, erm, tenement houses.

It is worth noting here that while peer groups were just “existing” at the time and, paraphrasing the words of Berger and Luckmann: “we had to deal with friends whom fate gave us” (1983), they are now rather “intentional” in the sense that it is the parents who sooner decide “who with,” “what for,” but also “where” their child will develop their social competences. Here, it is clearly seen that the yard is a place beyond social class where individuals from various environments<sup>11</sup> come together (especially children and teenagers, although as shown by the example of Marian not only).

However, the importance of the yard community is manifested in Marian’s interview not only in the context of the reconstruction of his experience from his youth. The narrator emphasizes that the bonds built at that time lasted until the period of studies and even longer. Two aspects related to the interlocutor’s functioning within his peer group played a specific role here. First of all, the time spent among friends extended beyond the joint stay at school, which Marian refers to in the passage cited above. Secondly, the holiday trips mentioned by the narrator also deepened the bonds. As a result, Marian’s biographical experience was dominated by a strong sense of community and security. In this context, it was the yard that played an extremely important role in shaping this experience. Marian comments on this period of his biographical experience as follows:

N: I gained a lot from trips with young/ with my older friends. We could then go to the seaside or to other places as a group. I was probably twelve years old when I went alone with this group of my older eighteen-, nineteen-year-olds. We went somewhere for two weeks, right? Of course, all forbidden stories would happen there.

---

<sup>11</sup> Similar traces of overcoming social barriers can be found in the literature referring also to the pre-war period. We can mention here many examples from memoir literature and diaries, for example, two: memoirs of Hanna Świda-Ziemba (2018) or books for young people by Kornel Makuszyński. This, in turn, would validate the thesis about the yard as a place of breaking social barriers appearing in various historical contexts (also those characterized by a much sharper social distance than the PPR).

I: (laughs)

N: We were returning green (laughs), from there, most often from the seaside, well stoned, knackered, but we came back. My parents were happy that we came back and they knew of course what was going on there because they were not stupid, were they? So, but, but it's ok, isn't it? Apparently, it has to be this way, no? Such an initiation. We have never talked about this topic, because of course, "how was it?" "cool, we went swimming in the sea, eating, and it was great, right?" Nothing more was said than that.

I: (laughs)

N: So as not to give them a headache. And so we could just go, safely.

Again, one can see how important the question of security and control was to the interlocutor, or rather the lack of the latter on the part of the parents. Marian refers to a kind of "social contract" concluded between him and his parents, which is contained in a short question "how was it" on a vacation trip with friends and an equally short answer. There is also a story of parallel life in the peer group, which the narrator also mentions at other times in the interview. Marian's experience is therefore marked by a double feature. On the one hand, being a talented student, he realizes institutional patterns of expectations on the part of the school and parents. Thus operating within the Turnerian structure created by educational institutions and the family, but at the same time entering the *communitas* of the yard, where as a member of a peer community he experiences the freedom of action resulting from the trust which his parents had placed in him. Here, it is worth recalling the account of the functioning of the "club," founded by the narrator with colleagues. The narrator relates this stage of his biography:

N: We had a basement and our club was in the basement. Well, that's exactly how it was. Erm, I mean in our block in the drying room. There was such a drying room, they had it there for some time, but the neighbors kicked us out because we were so loud.

N: However, the basement from a friend in this tenement house was ideally suited. There were basements there, God, like apartments. Ceilings, bricks, we made a club there, gee! We spent all the summers there, completely stinky. The summer would just pass by being in the club and and and zero suntan, just gray, green,

I: (laughs)

N: Stinking with cigarettes, cheap wine, we would go out from there. There were/ we would spend our lives, err, playing cards, various nice games for, for, for small money, because there was no big money. Although then it was big, right? Losing a pack of cigarettes meant something. There we indulged in those negative sides – dance parties, fan-fantasy. Just our world, right? Well, you entered there you



could see. [...] This now, I don't think these people have it anymore. Well, from time to time the police would come, but once they came, it was no joke, when they came in two, it got crowded there, right?

The above-quoted fragment of the narration shows that also in everyday life Marian and his colleagues were looking for "their place" – a space free from parental supervision. Interestingly, the phrase "our club was in the basement" is a word-for-word quote from one of the best-known Polish songs *Autobiografia* by Perfect. The song itself was released in 1982, but the text is a symbolic description of the experiences of the 1950s and 1960's generations.<sup>12</sup> Although Marian does not speak directly about this song, he makes it clear to the researcher that he notices the quote. He does this by making sure in the next sentence: "Well, but that's exactly how it was," thus authenticating his account. In a broader perspective, we can emphasize that this is another fragment in which music (and popular culture in general) – directly and indirectly – creates the background for Marian's biographical fate. Strong peer relationships built during adolescence survived despite the passing of time or the narrator's relocation during his studies:

N: Then there was time [...] What was going on then? Secondary school, well secondary school, it was really such an important period in my life. The other one was very important too, but this/ this was also important. [...] Anyway, it is important because even, for example, my friends from elementary school call me not so long ago, because there is a sad situation because a friend died

I: I see.

N: Something, he got sick, from elementary school, and they call me: "Marian"/ they found me on the internet, "Krzysiu is dead, right?" Well then obviously, we go to the funeral, let's see who else will come, right?" After all, all these years, this half a century has passed, there was no contact, and, and you go to this funeral just to a friend, right? Of course, we're always with all our friends who were in elementary school, secondary school, and so on, on first name terms, there is no such thing that I'm a big cheese here and they drink vodka somewhere, right? Jasio is Jasio and Jasio is always Jasio for me and I am for Jasio Marian, right? For us, it is a common experience and I see no reason for it to be different at all.

The recalled anecdote confirms the phenomenon of the extraordinary durability of peer relationships in Marian's biographical experience. Thus, one can see in the discussed biography how the yard makes an important biographical resource for shaping the biographical identity of the narrator.

---

<sup>12</sup> The authors (born in the 1980s and not feeling the generational meaning of the quote) thank Katarzyna Waniek for the remark about the significance of this fragment.

Fritz Schütze (2008a: 163) emphasizes that “There is a very deep relationship between the identity development of an individual and her or his narrative renderings of life historical experiences.” This means that by recalling his own past, the narrator, referring in his autobiographical story to “certain phases and episodes of life or in narrating the life history as a whole, the narrating individual conveys a basic order and identity structure to her or his life that is lived and experienced up to now” [...] (Schütze 2008a: 163). Additionally, in the narrative presentation of one’s own life, telling particular fragments of a biographical experience: “reminds the informant of the argumental potential regarding the fundamentals of her or his life. The quite steadily occurring summarizing and evaluation sub-segments of the narrative units, which are piling up during the course of storytelling, are feeding into the recollection of the basic elements and tendencies of the argumentative potential for relating to one’s own biographical identity during the life course” (Schütze 2014: 243).

From this perspective, we can see that in the case of Marian’s autobiographical story we are dealing with an account of a person who was shaped primarily by the constellation of events in which he found himself during adolescence and school times. What made a significant impact on this layer of his biographical experience was the frame of reference, which the narrator reaches for from the biographical perspective of “now” (the interview recording time). On the one hand, it is created by the narrator’s relationship with his parents, based on a kind of relation between a sense of control and freedom. On the other, its important element is the space of the yard, understood here as a place of hanging out, spending time, and experiencing everyday life. Secondly, the yard is understood in a symbolic sense as a community of experiences which Marian recalls in relation to his individual experiences, as well as in the sense of the experiences of the group in which he grew up. Such arrangement of past references is most fully expressed in the fragment of Marian’s already mentioned narration regarding his emphasis on the durability of yard bonds. Therefore, this line of argumentation proves that the narrator gives these episodes from his biographical experience an important role in the process of shaping his identity. In other words, how Marian perceives himself today and how he reconstructs his biographical identity is strongly marked by the experiences he underwent while growing up. That is why he devotes so much space in his narration to return to the subject of the yard, showing it in relation to many experiences encompassed in its frame.

Summing up the importance of the theme of the yard in Marian’s narration, it should be emphasized that it performs two basic functions. First, it allows the narrator to give a specific dimension to the memories of his childhood and, more broadly, to the social system in which he grew up. Marian, referring to the experiences woven into the biographical experience of the yard, first of all,

emphasizes the issue of security, which is understood here in terms of economic security (social trust) and in the sense of trust on the parents-children line. On the other hand, in the narration of the interlocutor, the yard is a community similar to the idea of Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft* (1988). Based on direct contact, not very hierarchical, to some extent beyond what was happening around (here it is worth noting Marian's comment, which emphasizes not paying attention to politics). Following this, we can see that the yard is a liminal space, which by "exclusion from the world" facilitates the transition from childhood to adulthood, a space giving the opportunity to practice the rites of passage (van Gennep 2006, Turner 2005, 2010). Young people, being on the threshold of adulthood, train within its space in responsibility, become independent, build relationships with others, enter into conflicts, and solve them. As Turner shows: "Important liminal situations are an opportunity for society to manifest self-awareness, and actually to ensure that its members, in the interval between attribution to specific positions, can achieve, despite all limitations, an approximate global view of the place of man in space and his attitude to other visible and invisible entities" (Turner 2005: 202). Seemingly trivial, frivolous experiences often associated only with playing and having fun, sometimes laziness, not being serious, and in a kind of "equating with others" are, however, of great importance for entering adulthood and returning to the structure. They become a kind of training of social competences used in later stages of life. Moreover, the yard community resembles Turner's *communitas* suspending the operation of the social structure and combining "low status, holiness, homogeneity, and brotherhood. [...] *communitas* is a basic bond proper to people" (Turner 2010: 220). When describing the next cases, we will see it more clearly, but also here we can risk an assumption that the yard *communitas* characteristic of the pre-computer and pre-internet era gave a greater chance to develop and practice values such as egalitarianism or community spirit in real social life. In the era of the growing importance of networks and virtual contacts, the heritage of the yard experience is thus becoming a less available commodity.

In the case of Marian, we can observe a repeating pattern based on the search for this type of community in subsequent social worlds. In a broader biographical plan, devoting a large part of his account to the reconstruction of the yard experience can, therefore, be understood as the introduction of a certain ideal of a community based on mutual deep emotional commitment, help and support in difficult situations, which the narrator later tried to recreate. Both during his studies when he was involved in the opposition<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Marian took part in students' strikes in the 1980s, although he did not play any significant role in them. However, it is worth noting the reason for his disappointment with the strike – Marian was displeased with the situation in which it turned out that

or the hippy subculture, as well as afterwards, when he implemented anti-pedagogical ideas by working towards the organization of alternative education centers, Marian recreated the experience of that yard community in which being together came to the fore.

### Adam's case

Adam's case was selected for analysis although the theme of the yard is not one of the key topics of the interlocutor's biography. It is focused around two basic issues: work in a psychiatric hospital and family life – especially raising children. In relation to the second sphere, there are references to the yard community, which in our opinion plays the role of a biographical resource in Adam's narration. Before proceeding to a detailed analysis of this thread, we will briefly characterize the biography of our interlocutor.

Adam was born in 1974 in a small village in central Poland. He comes from a large family (he has six brothers). He lives near his native village and has good contact with his family home. He works as a nurse in a psychiatric hospital. He is married and has two children. Adam builds his autobiographical narration based on the history of going through the subsequent important moments of life, starting from education (attending secondary school), through military service to employment in the hospital. It is worth adding that one of the so-called turning points is the change of relations with the employer (i.e., the psychiatric hospital in which Adam works) from a full-time job to the so-called contract, that is, a civil law agreement, financially more favorable for the employer (does not have to pay health and pension benefits) and to a certain extent, for the employee (the net pay received is higher due to the lack of premium).<sup>14</sup> In the narration, subsequent transitions function as a source of serious tensions, thereby building trajectory potentials (Waniek 2016, Burski 2019), which Adam controls with greater or lesser difficulty in the course of his biography. It seems that one could risk making the assumption that in Adam's biographical experience one can see the impoverished ethos, which is a good summary of the slogan "one must survive."

---

some people (leaders of the movement) get better food than the rest. In his eyes, it was a form of betrayal of the community which all (theoretically) were part of. Looking from the perspective of the entire biography of Marian and how he emphasized some of its elements (the importance of non-hierarchical communities), we treat this story as evidence of the key importance of the *communitas* experience for understanding his narrative.

<sup>14</sup> More about this mechanism of marketization of healthcare in Chapter XI by Jacek Burski.

Undertaking work in a psychiatric hospital – a key decision shaping the main biographical experience of the interlocutor, is connected with a situation in which Adam is on the edge of a biographical trajectory. Having done his military service, he faces a difficult career path. Here, one of his friends comes to the aid and claims that in the area where Adam lives, one of the few certain jobs is the psychiatric hospital, in which it is easy to get to the position of a nurse. The narrator decides to make this move and works there until today, although there were some difficult situations at the beginning. Twice in a fairly short period of time, the interlocutor was beaten by patients (in the second case Adam won the case in a civil court case against the perpetrator). Those situations were so traumatic that the narrator considered quitting his job. Ultimately, he did not make such a decision, and after a few years achieved a good professional position (e.g., he switched to the aforementioned so-called contract, which significantly increased his earnings). However, this is not just a story of success.

An important element of Adam's narration is the description of changes which are associated with the systemic transformation. The biographical experience of that time is told through the eyes of a member of a large family. In such an autobiographical story, the narrator reconstructs, among others, the mechanisms of a certain circulation of material goods within his family, recalling the story of how he and his brothers shared clothes, toys, et cetera. In this frame, the narrator also describes the differences between the village and the city in the sphere of consumption. However, when introducing stories into the narration, for example, about building relationships with peers, the indicated diversity is no longer perceived by the narrator as significant, and it can even be said that it does not play any role in Adam's relations with peers.

From the perspective of the issues raised in this chapter, it should be emphasized that this is another interview in which the narrator reconstructs the image of the yard community. However, before we proceed to its analysis, we would like to focus on the topic related to the yard and its role in the interview with Adam. What we mean is the comparative perspective, which Adam introduces in his narration, and whose key function is the reference to the contemporary context, to the lives of the narrator's children who are growing up in a similar or the same geographical space, but within rules which are completely different from those experienced in the past by the narrator. Despite the unobvious relationship which connects the theme of the yard directly with the theme of the interlocutor's children, it should be noted that in Adam's narration, when describing both fragments of his biographical experience he uses a mechanism common to both of these stories to reconstruct the social change that he observes and which he is part of. In Adam's narration, one can see the use of a *contrast set*, which is an important cognitive figure used for describing the social framework in which

individual biographical experience is intertwined (Schütze 2008a: 183). Therefore, the contrast set introduced by Adam, showing his biographical experience of childhood and adolescence (including the yard community) and the experience of his children growing up allows the narrator to trace not only the social framework forming these experiences, but also gives him the opportunity to interpret the occurring socio-cultural changes. Also, the contrast set functioning in Adam's narration, understood as a "collection of social categorization" (Schütze 2008a: 183) allows him to combine many phases of his biographical experience and, as we will show later, to conduct biographical work, which in the case of Adam (due to trajectory markers present in his biography) is particularly important.

We will begin our analysis of Adam's case with a quote describing the narrator's struggle with the need to explain the rationing of goods during the PPR, which is the result of severe market shortages. The consequence of this rationing was that the so-called cards for the purchase of designated goods, primarily for food, but also other consumer products. The symbol of those times, in this case – cards for cigarettes, are found in modern times by Adam's daughter, in an old suitcase hidden in the attic in the narrator's house:

N: This was in the '70s, the beginning of the '80s. I remember cards as if it were today.

I: Mm

N: For food. Even now, even in the attic, erm, we were looking for something there and there was some suitcase of my late grandparents, and we found the cards. My child, ten years old at the moment, "dad, what is this?" I say: "Well kiddo, this is a food card."

I: (laughs)

N: No, I mean, for food. "But tell me! It is written cigarettes here," right? Well, she is aware that, she does, even more so 'cause I smoked before, I have not smoked for a year, she knew that my father would go to the store, bought cigarettes and had no card, he had money, right? And, and would buy. Okay, so I started there/ slowly, I explained it slowly, and okay.

Like Marian, Adam also refers to economic issues, although in his case it is not about guaranteeing security, but rather about ensuring a certain standard of living or in other words protecting his children from the difficult conditions of growing up which the narrator experienced in the past. We learn from other parts of the interview that, especially during the transformation, Adam's family had to face poverty and deprivation. This was partly related to the number of children, which resulted in not being able to send the sons to university. Adam also shares his reflection on what his children have access to and what level



of consumption he and his wife can provide them with, comparing it to the conditions prevailing during his youth:

N: The kids also don't feel that, for example, I will go somewhere and that I won't, because I don't have, erm, I have to teach them that not everything, but there is no such thing. Although, maybe one also (sighs) compensates for it. For sure, even certainly, we even talked with my wife, I say, even to the kids, right? I say – you have whatever you want. Holidays, you go wherever you like or that. During the week: we go to the swimming pool, we even go to Uniejów, a whim, we get in the car, we go. I say, at your age, I say, I didn't have such things, because I say, I would come back from school, drop my school bag, I would go to the field to collect potatoes or beetroots, right?

I: Mm

N: Yes, in the case of autumn now, well, right? I say wow, what attractions you have. I somehow did not, one had to treat himself to some attractions, I say, erm. Attractions. The attraction was simply that one rested and went on holiday for two weeks, if one earned for it a year in advance, right. Then one could go for two weeks: whether to the mountains, or to the seaside, or to Masuria, or, or/ but I say, it was such a condition at home that you would earn for it yourself, somewhere, well, then you will go, otherwise there was no other option, because the parents could not afford/ parents could not afford to treat me to a trip. Well, because the costs, this was associated with costs. But I say, there is no, no such thing.

An interesting thread in the context of the above interview may also be the question of what Adam considers “you have what you want,” which is a slogan expressing the achievement of the desired status. One may wonder if this is a trace of class distinction, or perhaps upward mobility, which Adam, as one of the farmer's six sons, ultimately experiences. Its last dimension is a significant increase in earnings resulting from the change in the form of employment. Even if we remember that this is not a situation of obtaining a higher education degree or vertical promotion (ultimately, it is difficult to compare his and his parents class position), then focusing on the possibility of satisfying the needs of children (as well as providing them with extra classes, which we will demonstrate in the next quote) can be considered one of the characteristics of the middle class. Here, Adam's narration captures the changes in the economic, social, and cultural sense. They are expressed through the compensation of deficiencies which the narrator had been facing (related to growing up in the PPR, in a large and poor family) to his children. The comparative perspective introduced into the autobiographical story allows us, on the one hand, to interpret his experience of growing up and his children's through the prism of his aspirations to achieve a stable material situation. On the other, in a much broader dimension, this comparison shows the social and cultural conditions

in which Adam's biographical experience is intertwined. Both in the sense of the reconstruction of the time of his growing up and the story of the conditions in which his children are growing up. In this way, in the biography, the narrator recreates the social processes associated also with the post-transformational reality. A confirmation of this interpretation is a quote about the issue of control over children and the changes within, which the narrator points out:

N: And even kids in the countryside, if they are there, I know they are safe, because there are grandparents there, this is a fenced farm, there is no way that they can get out onto the main street, but there is also – I have to see them, I have to know where they are.

I: Mm

N: There was no such thing. There was no such thing when I was, I mean. Parents were just/ it was just so free and easy, as we used to say

I: Mm

N: And I think/ And the second thing is even these meetings / I go to the countryside now, I pass through these so-called strategic points, as we called them – there is nobody. I don't know where it has all gone. But, as for me, it is the same at home – if it is forbidden to go outside, the weather is what it is or I do not want to go out then my daughter asks: "Dad, can I turn on the computer?"

I: Mm

N: And it is on this principle. I say, we didn't have computers.

I: (laughs)

N: There were no laptops, no tablets, no mobile phones, but people could just get together, so I say, the whole village was there. And it was from 5 to 18 years practically. Well, in secondary school we met many times, right? Actually to secondary school, it was already/ from my circles just a few people, a handful were coming. Also, probably because of the circumstances, because one was brought up, one grew up in a rural environment, it was also, not everyone went to this.

I: Mm

N: Most were going to vocational schools, popular at that time. Later this was replaced by these vocational technical schools, although it is reportedly coming back. These vocational schools are reportedly coming back. Erm, and, but I say no, there was no division.

I: Mm

N: We were one group, one such one, and at the moment I think there are already divisions (pause 2s). You can't see, you just can't see those, these youngsters, you can't see those kids like that. Somehow also everyone in their own backyard. I say,

most of them also just don't want to, either sitting in the, and through Facebook or, or messenger. Why should they go out, why should they go outside and ride a bicycle when they could just sit quietly in front of the computer, right?

In the longer fragment of the interview quoted above, the narrator shows the differences between his generation and the generation of his children. Through a comparative perspective, he reconstructs the previously mentioned social and cultural conditions of his biographical experience of growing up and then of being a parent, relating this to the experiences of his children. He starts with the most important change – increased control means security, but also provides peace in an emotional sense. In this context, it is more about Adam than his children. At the same time, perhaps without even seeing similar motives in other parents, the interlocutor notes the differences in the village itself, which, in his opinion, looks deserted when it comes to the presence of children and young people. He looks for an explanation of this situation, attributed to the perspective of modernity, in the emergence of new technologies which change the way peers contact one another, replacing direct meetings with technologically mediated conversations and games. He stresses that in his and his peers' case, being together and communicating face-to-face was a key value. At this point, we can refer to the conclusions of Mirosława Marody and claim after the researcher that:

We are dealing today with such changes in the family and patterns of bringing up children which lead to a decrease in the child's contact with the immediate social environment. This is due to both the increase of working women, the reduction in the number of children in the family and the parents' aspirations, especially in the middle and upper classes, to protect children from the undesired contact. An additional factor strengthening this tendency is the development of new technologies, which, according to many researchers, are conducive to the social isolation of the child. All this results in limiting the child's access to situations which allow them to practice, in the natural, social environment, such skills which facilitate networking and effective cooperation within wider social groups (Marody 2015: 174–175).

We would like to round up the comparative thread between the experiences of Adam's growing up and the growing up of his children by referring to a quote in which the narrator talks about the role of social media in modern times (an important element of criticism he directs against modern times) and raises the topic of the multitude of extra-curricular activities which his daughter is currently attending. We can also investigate the role of the peer group, but in a different function than it was in his case. In this view, it is rather characterized by the potential impact on the child of the narrator who could influence him to agree to set up an online account or a profile:

N: I do not know what will happen next, although I can say, she does not have a Facebook account set up yet, she has no other similar ones, whatever you call them. Erm, she doesn't ask for it. She does not have it yet, she's not at this stage, I suppose, to be interested in this Facebook, these messengers and so on.

I: Mm

N: Maybe there is no such interest in school yet. I suppose that if a girlfriend had it, or a male friend or something, it would be: "I want it, dad, set it up." There is no such thing. And, and during the school term, it is more or less from half an hour to an hour, but it is two or three times a week, there is no way for more, for, for, because there are lessons, there are additional classes, well, there are also many lessons, well. You also have to sit down, and you just have to work on your lessons.

I: Well, and these extra classes, what is it?

N: I mean, she attends additional English and-and-and once a week the Youth Club/ a Culture Center operates here in W., there is an art and music section, it depends, what is offered, for an hour, and English additionally, once a week.

Summing up the analysis of Adam's case, one analytically significant issue should be noted. The biographical experience of growing up and the dual perspective imposed by Adam on that time in his biography through references to his children's experiences is related to the narrator's undertaking of biographical work. The experience of poverty in childhood, and then difficulties in getting a job and finding oneself in the chosen occupation in the following stages of his biographical adulthood impressed Adam's biography with trajectory markers. Therefore, we assume that through the comparative perspective introduced by the narrator, he tries to reconstruct his difficult experiences in a positive way. In this way, by reflecting on his childhood and the experience of being a father, he shows the potentials and mechanisms of development of his biographical identity. What is important in biographical work is "the insight that one's own identity is something unique with its own overall *Gestalt*, which matters and is essentially valuable and worthwhile to develop" (Schütze 2008a: 160). Moreover, "biographical work consists of narrative recollection; reflection of symbolic, 'deeper' meanings revealing self historical *Gestalts* of life" (Schütze 2008a: 160).

Being aware of our analytical assumptions made in this chapter, and thus not undertaking the analysis of the entire life histories of our narrators, we try to point to some important analytical figures for the organization of their autobiographical stories, whose impact resonates in the quoted fragments of their biographies. That is why in the case of Adam, we consider it extremely important to show a broader context for the comparative perspective he introduces, which we read in relation to the entirety of his autobiographical story. It can, therefore, be concluded that by placing his own biographical experiences in

the optics of his children's experiences, Adam attempts a reconciliation with his own biography. He entwines it not only with the socio-historical context of the times which this biographical experience belongs to, but also works through the difficulty of his past biographical experiences by a reflective assessment of his and his children's possibilities. In this way, the narrator discovers threads important for the formation of his current beliefs and attitudes and verifies his positive experience of being a father.

What is also important, as in the other histories recalled in the text, the biographical experience of the yard appears in Adam's spontaneous narration. It is woven into the communication scheme of description and thus, through the story about the experience of the yard constructed in such a way, the narrator focuses on explaining the social framework in which his biography is entangled. Thanks to this, in Adam's autobiographical account we can see a broader macro-structural perspective of the social changes which have taken place in Poland. Additionally, this narration, through the contrast set introduced by the narrator and the description of his biographical experience of the yard, allowed us to interpret the importance of the yard story for the formation of his current biographical identity.

Compared to Marian, in the interview with Adam the role of the yard is, however, much more limited and plays, as we have said, a contextual role in the thread of comparing the narrator's situation with his children's. The dominant value in Adam's account is a sense of community and being together, which Adam juxtaposes with the much more isolated and controlled childhood of his children. In this way, similarly to Marian's case, we can see the functioning of the idea of *communitas* (Turner 2005, 2010), but this thread is much more limited than in Marian's narration. However, we can notice some similarities between the Silesian neighborhood and a village from central Poland. In both cases, the emerging peer group is of a collective nature. It brings people together despite the presence of various social distinctions. As in the case of Marian, one can see the effort which the interlocutor makes to convince the researcher about the lack of divisions among families living next to each other, which he had experienced in his youth. Nevertheless, in the case of Adam's account, the introduced contrast set, which converges his biographical experience of childhood, growing up and being a father, plays a much more significant role, also in relation to the theme of the yard community.

Another issue worth considering is the influence of class lifestyles (Gdula, Sadura 2012) and social upward mobility, which impact Adam in this context. It would not be great mobility in the structural sense, but clear in the context of consumption. Moreover, it would also be a sign of social change in consumption related to the education of his children, which should be treated as one of the derivatives of the transformation. In this case, it would be the privatization

of healthcare<sup>15</sup>, thanks to which Adam can significantly increase his income without vertical promotion understood here as a promotion to a higher position in the hospital in which he works. Finally, it is also worth adding that in his narration Adam is rooted in *milieu* (Piotrowski 2016). This means that by reporting subsequent stages of his life he places these experiences into the perspective of the local community in which he grew up and in which he is still functioning. In other words, the local context is, as we could see in the cited fragments of Adam's autobiographical account, an important reference point organizing his biographical experience of everyday life in the village and then in a small town in central Poland.

### Izabela's case

Izabela was born in 1979 in a small town in northeast Poland. The narrator's father was in the military, which had an impact on the interlocutor's biographical experience, although it should be emphasized that in this analysis we do not focus on the thread of her father's involvement in the activities of the PPR system. The layer of Izabela's narration which is important for our considerations is rather the issue of her growing up in the space of military estates. In her childhood, the narrator (together with her parents and younger sister) changed her place of residence several times due to the specificity of her father's profession. Living in a military unit, even though it meant staying in a kind of closed space, consisting of families of similar status and inhabited by soldiers, in Izabela's story is mainly related in connection with everyday life entwined with the experience of the community. The theme of the yard functioning within this community is an important resource of sense in the biographical memory of the interlocutor. Importantly, due to frequent moving house, Izabela's parents did not have their own flat or house for a long time, which is why the grandparents played a significant role in the narrator's biographical experience. For a long time, their home was an anchor place for Izabela's family, being also a permanent point in her biographical story. To outline the narrator's biographical portrait, it is important to add that she is currently living in one of the cities in northern Poland. Professionally, she is performing academic and artistic work.

Concerning the issues which are of our interest in this chapter, the parts of the interview of key importance seem to be those in which Izabela relates the time of her childhood spent in one of the small towns on the Polish coast. Referring to this place, she evokes the yard community in her narration. This account is similar to Adam's, who spoke about the space of the entire village

---

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter XI by Jacek Burski.



as an area where he and his peers would spend time and have fun. Izabela also does not focus on merely reconstructing her biographical experience of growing up in a military settlement, but describes and shows more broadly her functioning in a small town.

Before proceeding to the description of specific fragments of Izabela's autobiographical account with reference to her experience of the yard, we would like to point out several features and threads of the interview important for setting the narrator's life episodes in a broader perspective. An important role in this narration is played by references to mass culture – mostly, the stories of the first contact with satellite TV and music channels in the early 1990s. These fragments of the interview show the functioning of globalization mechanisms, understood by us as the emergence and access to the content dominant in popular culture at that time. In this context, we observe the similarity between the experiences of Izabela and Marian, for whom Western music (especially rock music) played an important role in the process of socialization and when bonding with peers. In a sense, it has also become one of the important resources for the formation of the interlocutor's identity. In the case of Izabela, it is rather the sheer fascination with the possibility of following a new content that plays a significant role, which the narrator comments on in her biography. Moreover, as in Marian's case, an important point in Izabela's narration is also the issue of consumption and the appearance of goods in her biographical experience, to which she previously had no direct access. The narrator relates this time of her biography as follows:

N: Although I remember, for example, since we are talking about the transformation of that period, the first cable TV when cable TV appeared. Or when the Kukuruku wafers appeared, I remember. And I remember how a Kukuruku wafer was a great, erm, always such a special day when you bought it. There were also such stickers inside, which were collected in a special, special notebook. I remember the first Barbie doll that was given to us by my aunt's boyfriend, who used to go abroad. I remember tracksuits from the GDR, well, let's say some of the first manifestations. But, it was nothing compared to the first time we got connected to cable TV.

I: Mm

N: And German programs appeared. Jesus, how we would/ it was terribly funny when you now, that is, terribly strange when looked at in retrospect. But, it was so that we would sit with the whole family and stare blankly at the TV screen. They spoke German, but it didn't bother us, because what was happening on this screen was amazing. I mean, I don't know, some colorful game shows, some unbelievable prizes for us, some trips abroad, I don't know. Until now, I remember what some of the game shows were called. Then, of course, we got bored after some time. But, this first craze was amazing. And of course, I remember MTV, these were

the times of MTV when, when everybody was watching. But, it was still the good MTV, it was British, classic, which at that time on cable TV, erm, could be watched on cable TV.

The reconstruction of the consumer experience of the transformation made by Izabela brings associations connected with the concept of generation, though not in the classical sociological sense. However, we can use less sharp generational references (characteristic of other social sciences, for example, anthropology or media sciences), focusing, *inter alia*, on the consumption of cultural texts. Magdalena Nowicka-Franczak in one of her texts refers to Don Tapscott's reflection on the generational impact of a particular medium:

That's why the new media researcher Don Tapscott distinguishes generations according to the main medium they use. In America, for the first post-war generation (baby boomers) which includes people born in 1946–1964, the invention forming their perception of the world was television. Generation X (born in 1965–1976 in the USA, in the case of Poland it would be 1970–1980) is of multimedia character, but it does not give primacy to any of the media. In turn, generation Y (born in 1977–1997, in Poland – after 1980) is, in other words, the generation of networks, who works, has fun, and loves on the Internet (Nowicka 2012).

Bearing in mind the limitations associated with applying concepts and definitions from other social contexts, it may be interesting to use the logic of the most important medium as proposed in the quotation. In the context of the interview with Izabela and in a certain opposition to Nowicka-Franczak's proposal, television would be a characteristic medium for people growing up in the late 1980s and early 1990s, especially at the time when commercial channels appeared, whether as part of the so-called satellite TV, digital TV, or later cable TV.

The quoted passage shows that the biographical experience of that time reconstructed by Izabela is full of symbolic references. At this point, we would like to refer to the concept of biographical vectors already mentioned in the first chapter (Piotrowski 2016: 240), understood as “local interpretative attitudes used for presenting episodes or stages of experience.” Applying this concept to the analysis of biographical experiences of World War II has resulted, *inter alia*, in the elaboration of analytical categories of “rooting in history” and “rooting in *milieu*.” The first one means presenting and interpreting one's own experiences in relation to “social and historical macro-processes” – the latter one, as we have shown in the example of the interview with Adam, refers to relating one's biography on a “microscale of the direct living environment” (Piotrowski 2016: 240–241). Using the category of “rooting,” we would like to propose

the concept of “rooting in popular culture” characteristic of the interview with Izabela, but whose traces also appear in other narrations collected in the corpus (including Marian’s presented in this chapter). It is understood by us as referring in the biographical narration to the phenomena of popular culture and making one’s biographical experience meaningful through such references. In the case of Izabela’s biography, we are specifically talking about rooting in consumer culture understood as the incorporation of external (in this case foreign) patterns or the creation of new consumption models which were previously unavailable. These patterns are related by the narrator as designates of change, and we treat their creation as one of the characteristics of the transformation process we are putting under scrutiny.

The broad introduction above, which goes beyond merely the reconstruction of the yard category in Izabela’s narration, also serves to indicate how she relates her biographical experience of the time of transformation. Due to the specificity of the analysis undertaken in this chapter, we are not trying to reconstruct the entire history of Izabela’s life. Rather, we remain at the level of her biographical experience of childhood and adolescence and notice that from the biographical perspective of ‘now’ her autobiographical account of that time is built around references to popular culture and based on reporting new consumption patterns. As for the theme of the yard community, in the case of Izabela’s narration, it emerges in her account of growing up in the aforementioned small coastal town. The narrator describes this time of her biographical experience embedded in the perspective of the turn of the 1980s and 1990s as follows:

N: U. (seaside town) it was an amazing place. That is cursed by adults, adored by children. Why was it at that time/ now it is probably a very developed tourist town, I think that it is quite alive in the summer. Erm, however, at that time it was really somewhere between nowhere and goodbye. There was a military unit, sea on one side. On the other side there was a lake. And we lived on a narrow isthmus surrounded by forests. And in addition, small private businesses connected to holidaymakers’ accommodations. And there was nothing more there. But, it was an amazing paradise. We really had, erm, to the sea from our blocks, there were dunes across the street, behind the dunes was the beach.

I: Wow (smiling)

N: We lived like that.

In a later part of the interview, the narrator develops a description of the “paradise” in which she again discusses the issue of the felt and experienced everyday life, in the sense of peer contacts and between military families living side by side. Izabela’s narration is filled with a deep sense of neighborly

community (again we can see the trace of *communitas* here), or at least such a feeling resonates in Izabela's biographical memories of that period.

N: But really a very, very nice place for childhood. We all/ also lived in a place consisting of eight blocks, each block had one staircase, one floor, four flats in one building, so thirty-two families. And this was like, almost everyone was military. And it was such a closed enclave. And the whole life went on inside in the yard between the blocks. I remember such, erm, [...] such pictures that the doors to really all the houses are open. The kids running between everyone, all the flats, and every neighbor, every neighbor is an aunt, an uncle. It doesn't matter who is having dinner now. I don't know, you're playing at someone's, they're eating dinner, they will give you dinner. It really was amazing. Our, I remember in the summer, our fathers always played volleyball in the middle, in the middle of the yard. And mommies at that time would take out stools, and on these stools – coffee. And they watched their husbands and sons playing volleyball. Erm, it is quite gendered, but it was like that. The division of roles was clear, and we were just running around on our own.

In the quote above, it is also worth noting the reconstruction of the parents' community – similar to the one found in the first interview with Marian. Despite the idyllic image, the narration also reveals the mundanity of everyday life in "paradise." This time you can see similarities to Adam's story, who efficiently combined the description of the rural yard with the reconstruction of living conditions and educational patterns. In the case of Izabela, it turns out that the isolation dictated by her father's professional career detached the family from their grandparents, mentioned elsewhere in the interview as an important support for the narrator's parents at a time when her father was on duty closer to their home. This, in turn, was associated with an increase in Izabela's responsibilities and her sisters. In addition, for the interlocutor, the lack of the physical presence of the grandparents on a daily basis resulted in the necessity of developing some independence. The parents, who were busy working at that time, could not always devote time to Izabela and control, among other things, the number of duties imposed on her. The narrator comments on this experience in the following fragment of her autobiographical story:

N: So I was this proverbial child with a key around her neck, that's a fact. No, erm/ actually, from the beginning of elementary school which I attended in the nearby town and you had to take a bus, actually only the first time my mother took me at the beginning, showed me the way. And then you had to manage, but I also do not see, not that I complain, nothing like that, no. On the contrary, I was very proud that I would go to school by myself. Anyway, I think there was no other solution since my mother and father worked in the morning. Also, my mother often left earlier than we did to school, so you had to close the house yourself, go alone,

come back and do the shopping for dinner on the way, because it was always so, it was so normal actually. Then after returning drop the backpack

I: (laughs)

N: in the hallway and out to the yard. And always, and always I was such a very absent-minded child who [...] lost everything. And these keys, either I did not close the door to the house, or I lost gloves, or umbrellas, PE outfits, or the shoe bag. There was always something.

I: (laughs)

N: I left my backpack on the bus a few times. And, I don't know, but I really have very good memories of that.

The above quote allows us – as in the case of the fragments of interviews with Marian and Adam cited above – to capture the account of the freedom associated with the childhood of our narrators. The experience of being a “child with a key around the neck” which Izabela mentions also appeared in many other narrations collected in our project. This is an important thread which differentiates our interlocutors' past experiences and their accounts of the present times. It could be assumed at this point that in the post-transformational reality, the perception of this phenomenon, common for our interlocutors' adolescence, is positive, and is now associated more with the categories of a lack of security and proper care on the part of parents rather than a certain social norm.

Later in her account, Izabela, like Marian, tries to recreate a certain community ideal, which she remembers from her childhood. The narrator refers here to the phenomenon of being “a child from the blocks”:

N: I mentioned that I had moved house, but I wanted to say that I am I suppose, deep down, I am a child from the blocks, I have to state it. Although, I have not always lived in such typical blocks of flats, but, but most of the time I think a lot, I feel good in such big human clusters. And I could never have a house in the countryside, or even live separately in the city without a neighbor on the other side of the wall. Now I know it and I also value a lot large human groups which are socially mixed. I like it when there is a big variety, when it's not uniform, that's for sure.

For Izabela, the phenomenon of community which she had experienced while growing up turned out to be formative for her biographical experiences in the perspective of the present. In this fragment of the narrator's biography, therefore, one can see a pattern of argumentation, which next to the already mentioned schemes: the description and narrative scheme is, as we have already mentioned, one of the “elementary communicative schemes of

representing life and world” (Schütze 2008a: 173). The argumentation scheme “searches for explicates and discusses the reasons for decisions between alternative projects of action one was planning or one is presently planning for the management of future developments” (Schütze 2008a: 173). One can, therefore, point out after Fritz Schütze (2008a: 173) that

autobiographical narration is interspersed with subdominant activities of the scheme of argumentation in order to answer questions such as: why certain life historical events would have happened at all and why they would be that important in terms of biographical unfolding, why social frames were established and why they exerted certain social forces on the flow of events and on biographical process structures and what should be considerations and reasons for future biographical developments.

In the quoted fragment of the interview with Izabela, her reference to the topic of being a “child from the blocks” and the phenomenon of living in the neighborly community is also accompanied by a reference to the “alternative projects” of her current (time of interview) everyday life. The narrator emphasizes that the biographical experience of living close to her neighbors means that she could not function in her biographical present in a different reality. In addition, the term “child from the blocks” recalled by Izabela is also an important feature of her biographical identity and a certain link between her experience of the transformational and post-transformational reality.

The last thread, which we consider important for the analysis of the interview with Izabela and related to the study of the category of the yard, relates to discussing the patterns of raising children in a comparative perspective between the biographical experience of being a child and the biographical experience of being a parent. Insofar as Adam relied on his own experiences of being a father when commenting on these issues and comparing the conditions in which his children function with the ones he had been growing up in, the childless Izabela makes such comparison by recalling the perspective of the biographical experiences of her loved ones. To illustrate the topic in question, we would like to quote the following fragment of the narrator’s biography:

N: Just one more reflection, because I don’t have children, but I’ve recently talked to someone who has, with my girlfriend, how it is possible just like that, I just wondered that we, our generation, mostly all children with the house keys on our necks and just allowed to run free, which does not mean that we were from some pathological families, just then there was such a model. That they bring up, that our generation now brings up so, it seems to me a less independent generation of children, who are given much, much more attention. Which is great on the one hand, because we, for example, in my earliest childhood, I told you my father was not there. He was flying around somewhere. However, and it seems to me



that in those houses that I knew, the father was somewhere on the side, but now all the children, now there is more participation of fathers in raising children, which is great generally speaking, I believe. But, on the other hand, when you look out the window, kids don't really see a single child in the yard outdoors. Apart from the small children who are all the time accompanied by moms, yes. So I was wondering how much the model has changed. Because I was wondering, I don't know, we mentioned the proverbial carpet hangers. A friend of mine who is from my year said that he would never let his child go to the carpet beater. I say: why? You yourself would also hang around on the carpet hanger. Because he will break a bone. I say: Well, I'm not sure, back then, everyone would sit on the carpet hanger.

I: And nobody broke anything.

N: They did break, they did, but let's not exaggerate. There was always someone who'd fall down somewhere and break an arm, but I don't know, I don't know. Of course, this is probably a complex problem and so on. As I say, I don't have children, so I don't know certain things. But, when I see that indeed our generation, such very independent kids, suddenly brings up such a limitedly independent generation.

I: Yes, it's such a transition /

N: Yes, and it is a change within one generation, this is such, I don't know. When I recall this very early childhood, for example in this U. (name of a seaside town), where you never really sat at home. I know that this is all so, that these are obvious things, that there was no Internet, et cetera and so on, but nevertheless. I don't really know, in my neighborhood of blocks, now in P. (name of the city in the north of Poland), there are very few children who play in the yard. Except the really youngest ones, under the supervision, under the supervision of parents. But, there aren't such older ones there, about 10 years old or more, really. Then, of course, there is this middle school group that hangs out in the staircases or around the shop area. But, this is a different story. And these children as if in this age in-between are not there, disappeared somewhere, I suppose.

In this elaborate quote, one can see a few threads that we would like to draw attention to. First of all, the key characteristic of Izabela's childhood – just like in the cases discussed earlier – was spending time outside the home, being in a peer group and beyond direct parental control. At present, the narrator notices and confirms by pointing to her friends' biographical experience that from a certain stage of their growing up children are spending most of their time at home. The justification for such patterns reconstructed here is primarily the issue of security. However, in the interview with Adam analyzed earlier, we could see that these could also be issues related to planning time after school and organizing extra-curricular activities for the children. Secondly, Izabela sees another dimension of the change related to the greater participation

of the fathers in raising children. On the one hand, the narrator refers to her own childhood experiences in which her father's role in upbringing was marginalized due to his professional career. On the other, she also raises the topic of independence, attributing her generation with greater resourcefulness and autonomy.

Summing up, in Izabela's narration the thread of the yard community is the contextual theme in her entire biography. It also plays an important exemplifying role – it allows the narrator to outline the perspective of social change, which in her account is not related to economic or political issues. However, it is of great importance because of the consequences for social life. Izabela's reflection in the interview does not go that far. In her narration, nonetheless, one can find several issues important for our analysis, such as first, the story of freedom and control in the biographical experience of growing up. Secondly, the experience of the neighborhood community, which has also influenced the current biographical choices of the narrator. Thirdly, an important thread is also the issue of comparisons between the experience of Izabela's adolescence and the present times. An additional element organizing the experience of transformation in Izabela's autobiographical story is her reconstruction of the atmosphere of that time by showing some new, emerging material goods and the phenomena related to consumer culture.

## Conclusions

The considerations undertaken in this text, on the one hand, refer to a fairly obvious sphere of the social change related to the ongoing process of modernization, affecting the experience of everyday life. Being aware of this certain obviousness of the presented problems, we wanted to reconstruct the ways of problematizing the broader social change (transformation) and refer to those threads that play an important role in the process of making these experiences meaningful throughout the course of one's life, based on the biographical experiences of our narrators. Moreover, the biographical experience of the yard appeared in the interviews in the spontaneous narrative phase and thus functioned within three communication schemes: narration, description and argumentation (Schütze 2008a). This means, as we tried to show in the analysis above, that by referring to the story of the yard, our narrators, on the one hand, presented the social framework of their biographical experience, reproducing the course of social and historical events (Schütze 2008a: 173). While on the other, the biographical experience of the yard in childhood and adolescence constituted an important part of their autobiographical accounts and influenced their adult choices. In this perspective, it has become an important biographical resource, recalled from the perspective of their biographical "now."

In the introduction to our analyses, we also emphasized that the biographical experience of the yard, to which our narrators assigned the meaning of a symbolic biographical resource, plays the role of a metaphor. It captures this space of biographical experiences of interlocutors, which combines both the experience of community, peer relationships, being beyond adults' reach, and the experience of growing up. This is also an important theme illustrating the change in the socio-spatial landscape. Based on the analyzed narrations and our own observations, we can conclude that in both urban and rural space, yards are often no longer a permanent element. Additionally, our interlocutors point to the problem of the disappearance of this common space in relation to the changes of the feeling of community, which is the foundation of the biographical experience of the yard.

In our reflections, we have presented three examples of the description of the biographical resource we are interested in, focusing on the different dimensions of the biographical experience of the yard and the impact of this experience on the entire biography of our narrators. In other words, we referred to the biographical theme of the yard community experience, its reconstruction performed by the narrators in their autobiographical stories and its significance for the development of their biographies. We also looked at the function which the references to the biographical resource of the yard experience played in those biographies. In the case of Marian's narration, the yard was one of the main analytical categories important for the interpretation of his entire biography. The theme of the yard community appears in Marian's main narration and is one of the dominant frames around which the interlocutor builds a picture of his childhood and adolescence. The yard community in his case is primarily an extension of the neighborly community created by the residents of the tenement houses and the block in which Marian's family lived. An interesting thread here is the issues of the interdependence of security and control. Marian reconstructs the first theme through references to the social and economic system of the PPR, in which social inequalities were small. In this way, the social distance which the interlocutor noticed and recalled in the narration was not dysfunctional. Therefore, it was possible for families of different socioeconomic profiles to function together in one space (Marian's family was privileged in this context, which could, of course, affect the way the interlocutor presented this situation). In turn, the issue of control was reconstructed by Marian by pointing to its lack or by referring to his relationship with peers, which was focused on avoiding it. Importantly, such behavioral models were, in his opinion, possible because of the approach towards security issues, which parents demonstrated in those times.

Additionally, Marian's yard community is of an ideal type and is a model for him in the search for subsequent groups which the interlocutor belonged to, and which he refers to while reconstructing his biography. Starting from

secondary school, through his involvement in the student opposition, the hippie subculture to the creation of one of the centers operating within the framework of alternative education, the narrator has always sought poorly structured, informal (or at least based on informal contacts) communities, anti-systemic in a way. Even the army, to which he was sent for a few months at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, was a place where he actively fought with the hierarchy and orders. The experience of the yard community was, therefore, a role model for Marian, which he tried to recreate to a lesser (oppositional activity) or greater (running an educational center) extent. As we know, community (sometimes referred to as an anti-structure) in itself has a structure-forming potential. However, in the moments of too strict rules, clear hierarchies, closing or limiting common spaces, Marian simply left subsequent environments (as it was the case in the described student strike situation).

In Adam's case, the yard community is much less essential in view of the entire interview. The central frame of his main biographical narration is his struggles with professional work and curbing the trajectory potentials associated with entering the world of a psychiatric hospital. However, the theme of the yard is activated in important passages regarding the comparisons between Adam's adolescence and the conditions in which his children are growing up. When we compare Adam's considerations with the narration of Izabela, we will find some similarities related to the functioning of the yard theme as a reference frame for comparisons, which we have treated as one of the dimensions of reflection on social change, which is important for this book. In other words, in the analyzed narrations, transformation is contextualized through the changes in the yard community, understood here primarily as a bond with the peer group. The interlocutors no longer see this among their children (Adam) or in their surroundings (Izabela).

Additionally, the analysis of Izabela's autobiographical story is also of important research value. Considering her narration, we have selected a new biographical vector – "rooting in popular culture," which, next to "rooting in history" and "rooting in *milieu*" (Piotrowski 2016) proposed by the research team of the Department of Sociology of Culture at the University of Łódź in the early 1990s,<sup>16</sup> we consider significant for the analyses of autobiographical accounts. In our opinion, "rooting in popular culture" is characteristic of those interviews in which the narrators make the different stages of their life history meaningful by referring to culture – here we mean the symbolic culture, popular culture, and consumer culture. In the pool of the 90 interviews collected in our

---

<sup>16</sup> These vectors were indicated based on the analysis of the research material collected in the research project on the war biographies of Poles. See more in the introduction to Part II of this book written by Joanna Wygnańska.

project, in some cases, we have noticed the use of the thread of participation in culture. This served the purpose, *inter alia*, of the argumentation of our narrators' biographical identity-forming process. Referring to the classic concepts of "rooting" cited above, the rooting in culture would be indirect – it would be somewhat between rooting in macro processes (important historical events) and the microcosm of the local *milieu*. In our opinion, linking the transformation period with the participation in and consumption of the contemporary then elements of mass culture (starting from television, films through food products, clothes, etc.) is not without significance. Perhaps this is a phenomenon entwined with the mass adaptation to capitalist forms of consumption coming from the West, which virtually the entire Polish society at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s took part in.

Therefore, we can summarize that in the analyzed narrations, the disappearance of the yard, as a community built on the basis of direct, physical contact, from the field of perception of our interlocutors would be the dimension of change. In their reconstructions, the life of the yard was less controlled than modern children's activities. An important value cited in narrations was the small social distance which the narrators attributed to the yard community. Of course, it was not homogeneous, and economic or cultural differences were still visible to the interlocutors. However, they did not have a destructive effect on the bonds between adults and children, and above all on the peer bonds recalled in the analyzed narrations. However, it is worth remembering that at least in Marian's case, the fact that the narrator himself came from a family with a higher social status than the rest of his peers could have played an important role, which, however, did not ultimately result in the development of a sense of social inequality between the narrator and his friends.

Since, as we have said, a certain type of community is disappearing, it seems reasonable to ask what appears in its place? If we were to provide an answer based on the cited narrations, it seems that what appears instead is conscious and intentional parental practice shaping the activity of children in the so-called free time. This can be interpreted as one of the consequences of changing the cultural pattern of raising a child, who, relating to neoliberal rhetoric, should be equipped with the right resources from an early age to manage whether within educational institutions or later on as adults on the labor market. At this point, it is worth referring to the considerations of Philippe Ariès (2010), who notes that childhood as an experience is constantly subject to the processes of construction and reconstruction, it is dependent on the wider social, cultural, economic, and technological changes. He, therefore, understands childhood as a semantically changing process, the meaning of which depends on the cultural and historical context. In the modern optics, the child becomes for the parents a central reference point, a project and an investment. Granting

children with the so-called better start in life is therefore associated with the aforementioned multitude of extra-curricular activities and the provision of the most comprehensive education of one's offspring. The modern times are also characterized by a departure from the community of the world of children and adults, due to the deepening processes of parents' professional development on the one hand, and the most complex offer of education for children on the other. Additionally, children's play areas are nowadays often lonely islands, fenced off from the outside world. The yard in the sense of a community of adults and children, recalled in the narrations of our interlocutors, which is an open and vibrant space, disappears in favor of a space which is safe, but strongly dependent on adult control.

In a broader context, we can also observe how the public institutions characteristic of the PPR get transformed after 1989 (state-funded holiday camps or active scout movements, which had pre-war roots, but after 1945 was also an ideological support for the system)<sup>17</sup> and now coexist with the offer of the free market. In the latter case, the aforementioned phenomenon of the multitude of additional classes offered to children and young people today plays a significant role.

The marketization mechanisms are clearly seen in the juxtaposition of Marian and Adam's narrations. The first one recalls, as something natural, his engagement while growing up through, among others, annual summer camps or scout activities, which at that time were assigned to the role of state institutions. This sphere is also currently dependent on the individual activities of parents, organizing and paying for the activities of their children. This is what mostly Adam talks about: "For sure, even certainly, we even talked with my wife, I say, even to the kids, right? I say – you have whatever you want. Holidays, you go wherever you like or that." Adam refers here to the situation of parents participating in the organization of their children's free time and making this process dependent on economic and social capital.

The dimension of social change we have shown is also related to the contemporary phenomenon of the culture of individualism and individual society. Małgorzata Jacyno (2007: 12) notes that:

The decisive meaning for the formation of the modern order was "conjuring up" by the authorities a new object which became the subject of its influence and control. Changing people by institutions or by other people is time consuming, difficult, and

---

<sup>17</sup> The year 1989 is also an important moment in the history of Polish Scouting. The thus-far monopoly of the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association is broken after the creation of the second nationwide scouting organization of the Scouting Association of the Republic. Currently, there are four nationwide and over a dozen local scout organizations.



expensive. The modern power transfers the related costs and time onto individuals who perceive themselves as objects of possible influence. The new discipline of psyche-ology allows an individual to rationalize the efforts *to create oneself*.

In this perspective, individuals are focused on “self-management” and “self-struggle” (Jacyno 2007: 13), and the modern power “has begun to *produce* opportunities, chances, perspectives, and outlooks for a good life” (Jacyno 2007: 40). This way, a feature of an individualized society is experiencing the world as a structure of possibilities and perceiving one’s life in terms of a project, and “the belief in the possibility and necessity of creating oneself is a constitutive experience of the culture of individualism” (Jacyno 2007: 52). Therefore, the above-mentioned treatment of a child as an investment, as a central reference point is the result of neoliberal rhetoric, which forces an individual into the compulsion of constant, individual work on self-development, in an educational and professional sense (e.g., Czyżewski 2009, Waniek 2016, Waniek 2019 and Chapter IX in this book, Wygnańska 2019 and Chapter VIII in this book). The effect of this individualism is a clear disappearance of the peer bonds recalled by our narrators, being also part of the disappearing space of the yard, in favor of the time spent on extracurricular activities or in front of a computer screen. On the other hand, the experience of individualism can also generate biographical costs associated with, for example, difficulties encountered in the “self-management” process. The purpose of our reflection is not, however, a broader analysis of the problem of an individualized society. At the end of our analysis, we only wish to note that, to some extent, the dimension of change related to modernization, the change in the logic of power and the social landscape, as problematized by our narrators, is also part of the discussion on the culture of individualism.

It should be added as well what role this text could play regarding existing states of knowledge? In the introduction we have listed different approaches focusing on the topic of socialization, upbringing, anthropology of youth, and ethnographic studies devoted to the yard itself. We would like to underline that the results of our analysis place this article in a different perspective. The yard here is not explored as a unique and autonomous topic. We are not interested in reconstruction of every aspect of yard memories that could be found in collected interviews. While using this topic in analytical procedures, we are trying to show how it influences the biographical experience of individuals. In that regard, we are focused on broadening the knowledge of building a narrative about social change – related to transformation, as in the case of Adam and Isabella, and sometimes beyond, as in Marian’s interview.

This chapter, devoted to showing the biographical resource of the yard and the changes related to this thread, is also intended to bring the reader

closer to this dimension of social change, which is not necessarily its central frame. The importance of this topic, however, lies in the sense it has for understanding the biographical processes which translate into the experience of individuals. In the three narrations analyzed above, the yard plays a different role as a reference frame: from being one of the key resources for the formation of a biographical identity as in the case of Marian, the argumentation of her biographical decisions as in the case of Izabela, to the context function for the main topics of biography, as we could see in the case of Adam's story. However, in all three analyzed autobiographical accounts, by using the indicated thread intentionally or not, the interlocutors reconstruct the broader background of their biographical experience of the transformation time in Poland.