

FOREWORD

The book presents results of the research project titled: *Experience of the Process of the Transformation in Poland. A Sociological Comparative Analysis Based on Biographical Perspective* funded by the National Science Center in Poland (No. UMO-2013/09/B/HS6/03100). The project was conducted in the Department of Sociology of Culture (University of Łódź) in 2014–2019. The research team included: Kaja Kaźmierska (principal investigator), Katarzyna Waniek, Jacek Burski, Joanna Wygnańska (from the University of Łódź), Piotr Filipkowski (IFiS PAN) and Maciej Melon.

The publication is a result of many years of collecting and studying the empirical material and developing our reflection on the issue of the great systemic transformation that we have intended to know from the perspective of individuals and analyze their biographical experiences told in autobiographical renderings. Its content is based on analysis of huge biographical data collected in 90 autobiographical narrative interviews. Thus we would like to thank our interlocutors for the effort of sharing with us their life histories. We were listening to them carefully in the hope that we could reconstruct the socio-biographical process of “the Great Change” from individual experiences. As a result we have got many biographical accounts from different parts of Poland in which the systemic transformation could be seen from various, but always bottom up, perspectives. As it happened in our other projects, the social process was more recognized in individuals’ life strategies, decisions, motivation than presented straightforwardly by articulating attitudes towards, evaluation of, referring to the process of the systemic transformation. Thus we aim here at presenting a wide spectrum of issues and phenomena that during the process of analysis attracted our attention. For sure we have not figured the problem out. On the contrary, we feel like just touching a complex matter. However, we hope that the findings presented in the book will complement and enrich the universe of the sociological, political and public discourse.

The majority of the applied material and chapters are based on the project implementation. Nevertheless, in order to fill in the gaps and show the multidimensionality of the process under investigation, we sometimes refer to collections of interviews gathered by our team members in other projects. We especially have in mind two of them: *Biography and National Identity* based on life stories of Poles who experienced WWII and the project *The People’s Republic of Poland and the German Democratic Republic in Memory and Biographical*

*Experiences of People Born between 1945–1955. Sociological comparison based on the biographical comparison.*¹ As a result of these projects, the Department of Sociology of Culture disposes of more than 200 narratives with people born in the following decades of the 20th century, beginning with the oldest narrator born in 1909 and the youngest in 1988. This rich empirical material, in relation to the past two projects, is used in the book only episodically, but it provides us with important empirical data and the analytical and theoretical inspirations that accompanied us as background knowledge while working on this book. Another project which we also refer to, but in a slightly narrower way, is *Euro Identities – the evolution of European identity: using biographical methods to study the development of European identity.*²

We also invited other authors who, using a biographical approach, studied these aspects of social reality that could very well complement the complex picture of transformation processes. Thus we invited Renata Dopierała whose text is based on the project materials, Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas who contributed to the analysis of “pre”-transformation period, Danuta Życzyńska-Ciołek implementing, so importantly for us, time and generation perspective and last but not least Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas and Małgorzata Potoczna who, referring to other biographical research and data, focused on the issue of poverty and lower class as these kind of data, what we regret, were not that easy to be collected in our project. Thus the authors of two texts analyze different materials yet representing biographical data. Our motivation to include these analyses did not stem from the desire to “fill” the book – which is very thick anyway – but from the idea of showing the most multi-threaded view of the transformations from a biographical research perspective. In our analysis we consequently try to apply the approach to biographical materials, which is based on the methodological and theoretical concept of autobiographical narrative interview developed by Fritz Schütze. Nevertheless, we left the invited authors free-hand to present their analytical approaches as we find it as one of the main assumptions in the process of analysis, believing that “the researcher is solely responsible for his or her own product, when acquiring descriptive writing

¹ The first research was conducted in the early 90s. The department of Sociology of Culture at the University of Łódź (Czyżewski, Piotrowski, Rokuszewska-Pawełek 1996, Dopierała, Waniek ed. 2016) and the second project was financed by the Polish-German Scientific Foundation (PNFN 2012-03) implemented in 2012–2015 by the Department of Sociology of Culture of the University of Łódź and the Otto-von-Guericke University in Magdeburg, funded by the Polish-German Foundation for Science (Każmierska, Schütze 2013).

² The project (2008–2011) was implemented as part of the 7th Research Framework Program of the European Commission (Nr 213998). Polish team: Andrzej Piotrowski, Kaja Każmierska, Katarzyna Waniek (Miller, Gray eds. 2012).

skills and developing one's own style of description" (Riemann, Schütze 1987: 9). In other words, he or she has a right to speak his/her own voice and we do not treat this as a kind of methodological inconsequence.

The book consists of four parts: the first one plays the role of introduction both to the project theoretical and methodological assumptions and the social background of described phenomena and processes. The second presents social and historical background and it is based on the conviction that the main character of social process is an emergent overlapping of phenomena and constant change, which assumes an evolutionary rather than revolutionary change of form. The third part examines different aspects and interpretation of opportunity structures that have appeared due to the systemic change in Poland. The fourth part refers to biographical resources which can be considered as stable, traditional, social frames. We intended to show if, how, and in what direction they have changed.

How to read the book? We are aware that it is a very extensive monograph – the following parts are subordinated to the logic of a holistic concept showing, first of all, the process-oriented approach to social phenomena. Thus we would be very satisfied if the reader would read the whole book. At the same time, we realize that he/she may be interested in some of its parts, threads, or themes. It is one of the reasons why we decided to precede each part with a preface, in which its main ideas coming from material analysis and its theoretical conceptualization are outlined. We also offer short introductory remarks to chapters included in each part of the book.

We would like to express our acknowledgements to many people. First of all once more we are grateful to our narrators. Since the biographical research demand seminar and workshop work over the last few years we invited many scholars experienced in qualitative research studies and biographical research in particular. We would like to thank here: Fritz Schütze, Gerhard Riemann, Lena Inowlocki, Anja Wildhagen, Markieta Domecka, Adam Mrozowicki, Mateusz Karolak, Rafael Mrówczyński, Ina Alber, Andrzej Piotrowski, Marcin Gońda, Kamila Biały, Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas, Patrycja Kruczkowska and Jakub Gałęziowski for their valuable criticism, inspiring comments, interesting reflections and any other kind of scientific support.