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Part 3

TRANSFORMING OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES: BIOGRAPHICAL CHANCES, HOPES, ILLUSIONS, AND DEAD-ENDS

Paraphrasing the words of Alfred Schütz referring to the social distribution of knowledge (1946: 463), we may say that: "There is a stock of opportunities theoretically available to everyone." But, if they are to be practically used by individuals, they must not only be extricated from their settings (Blumer 1969: 80), but also taken into account; not only must they be seen, but also noticed (Garfinkel 1967: 36, cf., Cloward, Ohlin 1961); not only must they be given meaning, but also carry out certain values; not only must they create favorable circumstances, but also be real in their consequences (Thomas, Thomas 1928: 572); not only must they offer new pathways, but also ensure a sense of dignity. To make things more complicated, all these conditions depend on biographically sedimented and constantly modified individual schemes of interpretations, systems of references and biographical orientations, hierarchies of importance, and a (shared collective) stock of knowledge at hand. These can be analyzed in the sequence of events in autobiographical narrative interviews and argumentative commentaries related to them.

The analytical category of opportunity structures proposed in this part is an abstract concept used already by some sociologists to describe social reality, but for us, it is primarily a category generated from empirical data. In both cases, it is of etic character (Pike 1965), however, in the first one, it is a construct imposed on observed reality, and in the other one, it is an attempt to describe a class of phenomena subjectively perceived and experienced by an individual. In other words, in the latter case, we are dealing with the analysis of socio-biographical phenomena "using the narrator's language, taking into account the categories he/she uses, on the other hand, using sociological categories which allow interbiographic interpretation and a generalized explanation of the same processes" (Rokuszewska-Pawełek 2006: 24).[1]

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[1] Andrzej Piotrowski, analyzing the communication ethnography proposed by Dell Hymes, explains that "the actual description, taking into account the distinction

Here we will relate them to a special socio-historical period, which is the political transformation in Poland. Therefore, our focus in this part will be on the interplay between individual biographical experiences and the opportunity structures changing along with rapid systemic transformation in Poland, intense modernisation and globalisation process and the introduction of a new (mainly imported from the West) logic of power based on "governing through freedom."[2] Some of these opportunity structures have been closed, disappearing, or expiring, others have been unblocked, still, others were wide open or initiated.

It should be stressed that especially in the first years of the new order these processes of the economic transformations were extremely dynamic. Adam Mrozowicki notes that:

> Poland was the first among post-socialist countries to apply a radical strategy of economic reforms, or "shock therapy" inspired by neo-liberal ideology [...] The main architect of the reform, Polish minister of finance Leszek Balcerowicz, indicated its three main pillars to be macroeconomic stabilization, microeconomic liberalization, and a deep institutional restructuring which included political democratization, the restitution of civic freedoms and, in the long run, political and economic integration with the European Union. Quoting Eyal et al. (2000: 37).

He adds that:

> the assumption of reformers was that with the right incentive structure, people would become entrepreneurial market actors and active citizens (Mrozowicki 2011: 34).

This dynamic is reflected differently in individual life histories. Initially – as Andrzej Piotrowski points out – a specific "hope-based pattern of thinking" prevailed, carrying the message that "the abolition of anti-order brings order

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between 'emic' and 'etic,' is two-step. The researcher, using a general analytical framework brought in from the outside (etic description I), describes real phenomena reconstructing categories used by native members of a given culture (emic description), and then subjects the initial analytical categories to re-analysis in light of the results of the emic description, creating etic description II (cf., Hymes 1978: 9 in Piotrowski 1997: 120, footnote 9).

   [2] This subtle and sophisticated 'neoliberal variant of the art of government' – as Jerzy Stachowiak explains following Nicolas Rose – "aims at [...] 'governing through freedom' – managing actions of subjects convinced of their own autonomy, independence, and self-determination" (Stachowiak 2013: 144, see also: Czyżewski 2009: 87).

in itself because it simply restores it" (Piotrowski 1997: 329). Consequently, for many Poles, the changes of social worlds and symbolic universes[3] which took place after 1989 brought the longed-for freedom and enabled people to implement the thus-far blocked life plans (the case of Zofia described in Chapter V), giving people an opportunity to develop an unexpected career path and achieve a high standard of living (see Robert's example described in Chapter XII). Others were deluded by the prospect of improving their position, hoping for a better, richer, and calmer life. Attempts to change were often made at the cost of hard work and biographical costs, as was the case with Inga's parents or the young doctor Hanna from Chapter X. For a significant portion of Poles, however, transformation became the beginning of the path to nowhere, taking away the possibility of a decent income, pushing them into poverty, and sometimes even taking away the possibility of an honest or independent life.[4] Such experiences will be discussed in the chapters devoted to the case of Hubert and the case of Pola[5] (see Chapter XIII and XII respectively).

For many years the symbolic elites (including some sociologists) remained in the belief that since specific opportunity structures were created, restored, or democratized "top-down," the sole cause of individual and collective failures (and thus social discontent) were the "inept, unable to adapt numpties" (Buchowski 2008: 101). Those "guilty of themselves" "ordinary citizens" turned out to not be rational, creative, flexible, autonomous, responsible, and resilient enough to meet the challenges of the free capitalistic labor market.

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[3] Fritz Schütze explains that: "According to Berger and Luckmann (1966: 88–90), symbolic universes provide ultimate and integrated meaning for a person's collective life and biography. They are the integrative structure of the collective stock of knowledge shared by the members of an inclusive (group, *milieu*, societal) life world. As social facts and social forces (*faits sociaux*, in the sense of Durkheim), they provide the ultimate meaning and 'logic' of the collective stock of knowledge since they deal with the relationship between the course of personal identity, on the one hand, and the course of society (as well as other inclusive collectivities) and its (their) collective history (histories), on the other" (Schütze 2014: 263, footnote 24).

[4] In 1988, 2.1 million Poles lived below the poverty line (USD 120 per capita), in 1993 there were almost five times this amount – 9.8 million. Wielisława Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Jolanta Grotowska-Leder (2000) "Introduction" [in:] Wielisława Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Jolanta Grotowska-Leder (ed.), *Ryzyka transformacji systemowej* (Risks of systemic transformation), Łódź: Absolwent Publishing House, pp. 5–10.

[5] The analyses of the first biographical interviews collected after the transformation with the so-called "losers of the transformation" the reader will find, for example, in the study of E. Tarkowska, W. Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, K. Wódz (ed.), *Biedni o sobie i o swoim życiu* (The poor about themselves and their lives), Katowice–Warsaw: Śląsk Wydawnictwo Naukowe.

Politicians, journalists, and social scientists rather did not take into account other points of view ("of non-subjective" mass) and either simply ignored them or – defining them as unwise, wrong, distorted, or immersed in the mental legacy of communism – granted themselves the right to lecture and rebuke the "rebellious ward," reluctant to "do up modernizing backwardness" in reference to Europe (cf., Piotrowski 2005: 338).[6] As a result, as Sergiusz Kowalski already wrote in 1997, the process of decomposition of the former state socialism order was spreading: "it was the work of the elite, in which the masses had little to say, and even less to do" (1997: 295). Along with the decomposition of state socialism, the transformation also brought about the collapse of the working class – a significant collective co-author of social changes and the political success of the people's opposition, after 1989 deprived of the driving force which characterized the workers in the process of overthrowing communism. This was accompanied by the disappearance of the discourse regarding social inequalities in class categories (Ost 2010: 250–260, 272, see also: Ost 2015a, b), and the few researchers of poverty and growing social problems were then referred to as the "lamenting sociologists." A couple of years later the situation seems to be much harsher. As Michał Buchowski in his critique of Piotr Sztopmka's analysis claims:

> First, it divides societies into winners and losers,[7] ultimately translated into those wise and able to adapt and those half-witted and unable to adapt, apt and inept. Of course, the first group defines the modes of adaptation and criteria for evaluation. If individuals or groups cannot follow suit, they simply deserve their poor fate. They have proven to be "civilizationally incompetent" (Sztompka 1993), show a "general lack of discipline and diligence" (Sztompka 1996: 119) and obstruct the efforts of those who are accomplished and the progress of whole societies in the region on its way to becoming "normal." The incapacity to reject old mental

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[6]   A critical reflection on such perception of social reality appeared initially among researchers of poverty and social exclusion (e.g., Tarkowska 1999, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska (eds.) 1998; 1999; Tarkowska, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Wódz 2003), who looked for the reasons for the "failure of the individual" in (macro-)structural conditions. However, a critical reflection on the "support" of sociologists for the discourse promoting "agency" and "creativity" of the individual at the same time blaming him/her for the failures came much later (see Giza-Poleszczuk 2018, Król 2015, see also: Chapter II by Kaja Kaźmierska).

[7]   The division into winners and losers was characteristic of the rhetoric of the first post-transformation sociological analyses (including Czapiński 1995, Rychard 1995). However, as early as in the 1990s, authors such as Mirosław Marody, who wrote about "three Polands" – living from capital, full-time employment, and unemployment benefits, pointed out that this categorization is greatly simplified (including Rychard 1995, Marody 2002).

habits forms a complex of the legendary *homo sovieticus* (Sztompka 2000: 55; cf., also Sztompka 2004) which is characterized by such phenomena as egalitarian and demanding attitudes, "disinterested envy," anti-intellectualism and aversion towards the elite, double standards for public and private life, and the acceptance of a meager performance. These people do not know how to make sense of the new symbolic order and cannot fit into the new institutional design in which "civilizational competence" is king (Buchowski 2006: 469–470).

This part aims to criticize, in particular, this schematic, and, in consequence, fictitious picture by showing and discussing biographies of people born in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s who, in different ways and with various degrees, were entangled in the process of transition and positioning between panopticism and "governmentality" (Czyżewski 2009: 95). They also intensively multiply social worlds with their divergent stocks of knowledge at hand, clashing ideologies, conflicting moral standards, dissonant rules of conducts, and expectations (Clarke 1991, Schütze 2002). Our main frame of reference here will be the concept of opportunity structures.

Some initial notes on the concept of opportunity structures

The term of opportunity structures relates to the most classic debate in sociology: structure versus agency/choice, or opportunity versus constraints (e.g., Racko 2008, Loudon 2010, Cullen 2015). This etic concept appeared in sociology at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s. Its origins should be sought in structural and functional orientation, primarily in the theory of social anomy as in Merton's approach. The intention of Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin, the authors who were one of the first to analyze opportunity structures was, however, to create an inter-paradigmatic theory, and the very term opportunity structures was to become a kind of "glue-concept" linking different paradigms. In *Delinquency and Opportunity. A Theory of Delinquent Gangs* (1961) Cloward and Ohlin wrote:

In addressing these themes [social pressures and deviance, the impact of social *milieu* upon the types of adaptation], we have drawn principally upon two theoretical perspectives. The first, initiated by Emile Durkheim and lately extended by Robert K. Merton, focuses largely upon the sources of pressure that can lead to deviance. The second, developed by Clifford R. Shaw, Henry D. McKay, and Edwin H. Sutherland, contains germinal ideas about the way in which features of social structure regulate the selection and evolution of deviant solutions. [...] [W]e attempt to integrate these to streams of thought as they apply to the problem of delinquency. The task of consolidating them required that we redefine the unique contribution of each, that we reconceptualize elements in

both, and that we develop linking concepts. The result is what we call the theory of the differential opportunity system (Cloward, Ohlin 1961: x).

The authors, who were closer to Durkheim and Merton rather than symbolic interactionists and the Chicago school, questioned the assumption of equal opportunities available to everyone in the American social system, indicating that the chances of success depend on the social status of the individual.[8] Currently – based on many works based on the concept of opportunity structures emerging in subsequent years in social sciences, including sociology – we know that the course of individual and collective biographies is embedded in sets of opportunity structures conditioned by systems of factors far more complicated than the social position itself.

The term opportunity structures is usually applied to the analyses of mass behavior, including the dynamics and transformation of social groups and movements with their macro- and meso- (rarely micro-) conditionings (Jeydel 2000, Suh 2001, Loudon 2010, Cullen 2015, Gleiss 2017).[9] In this study, the concept of opportunity structures is used in the analyses of the lives of social actors – witnesses and participants of the systemic transformation, as well as the social phenomena and processes reflected in their biographies. Following numerous definitions,[10] we treat opportunity structures both as subjectively experienced (consistent) aspects, components, and institutional arrangements, but also as dimensions of the political/institutional systems or environments which frame activities of individual and collective social actors (cf., Tarrow 1998 as cited in Bondaroff and Burke 2014, Jeydel 2000, Giugni 2009 as cited in Gleiss 2017). Rewriting Bondaroff and Burke's statement we maintain that "[social] actors make history, but they do not do so in circumstances of their own making. Instead, they encounter constraints and are presented with opportunities configured by the institutional arrangements and the prevailing patterns of political power which are the inescapable contexts" of their life and actions (Rootes 1999 as cited in Bondaroff, Burke 2014: 168, Swindler 1986, Joachim 2003 as cited in Bondaroff, Burke 2014). We assume that every life history is produced in a specific arrangement of opportunity structures

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[8] Cloward and Ohlin stress that: "There is every reason to think that persons located in the social hierarchy have rather different chances of reaching common success-goals despite the prevailing ideology of equal opportunities" (Cloward, Ohlin 1961: 85).

[9] In terms of "constraints, possibilities, and threats that originate outside the mobilizing group, but affect its chances of mobilizing and/or realizing its collective interests" (Koopmans 1999: 96 as cited in Suh 2001: 441).

[10] Similarly to other terms in social sciences, here we are dealing with a considerable number of definitions and with the difficulty to draw sharp boundaries of the phenomenon to be defined.

ingrained in a dynamically changing reality (along with the course of life, historical processes, and structural factors) (Roberts 2009, Staunton 2015, Thompson 2017). We also assume that in every socio-historical context and in every collective and individual history, opportunity structures assume the shape of a "surprise box" – macro-level opportunity structures frame the meso- and micro- level structures, and at the same time, individual constellations of opportunity structures interact with each other.

The narratives presented in this part of the book clearly show the importance of opportunity structures for the dynamics of life stories. In the description of transformational processes one can consider the issues of the relative openness/ closure of a political system with its institutions, presence of influential allies, and changes in political alignments and conflicts, the stability/instability of the set of elite alignments undergirding a polity; unity level among elites, the presence/ absence of elite allies, powers granted to politicians, a state's capacity and propensity for repression or even mass opinion (Gamson, Meyer 1996 as cited in Gleiss 2017, McAdam 1996: 27 as cited in Gleiss 2017: 234; Bondaroff, Burke 2014, Jeydel 2000: 15). Discursive opportunity structures, also transnational discursive structures are connected with political and institutional structures (we will discuss the latter later), they are pre-given and fixed structures, which cover political and legal texts, socio-cultural discourses, and mass-media discourses (Koopmans, Statham 1999 as cited in Gleiss 2017: 235, Motta 2015). Discursive opportunity structures trigger processes of valuing phenomena, mechanisms, processes, and social problems in terms of sensibility, pragmatism, legitimating, et cetera. Basic political, economic, and social issues, even in conditions of the relative stability of political systems, are becoming the subject of "discursive struggle." The ongoing discussions take place in relation to the interests, needs, and attitudes of participants of public life. Especially in the periods of intense social changes, the basic systems of meanings of the "previous epoch" are articulated in a completely new way, reconceptualized or rejected and a "discursive struggle" on transformation or preservation of historical opportunity structures – influences not only meanings, but also attitudes and behaviors (Racko 2008, Koopmans, Statham 1999 as cited in Gleiss 2017: 235).

Opportunity structures also operate on the level of formal organizations. It is within their framework that an individual can have access to institutional resources – both material (e.g., places/institutional systems in which one is educated, works, acts socially, and is subject to impact and influence, infrastructure, and equipment of these places), as well as symbolic – such as organizational culture: knowledge and ideologies, work methodologies/ methods and their transfer strategies, interactions and contacts, apprenticeship opportunities, learning, mentoring, coaching, and consultancy shaping

subsequent self-identification of the individual (Strauss 2012, Reger 2018, see also Loudon 2010). It is also important that certain categories of social institutions (educational and helping institutions) actively participate in the processes of social valuation of individuals and communities, embedding social actors in successive constellations of opportunity structures or structures on non-opportunities (e.g., through the system of allocating badges of ability and inability) (Sennett, Cobb 1972, Golczyńska-Grondas 2014) and thus deciding on the further course of their biography, an example of which we see in the history of "drifting" Pola (Chapter XIII).

While in the literature we can find relatively numerous references to political, institutional, or discursive opportunity structures, we can speculate about their functioning at the level of small social groups rather than formulating certainties. Obviously, access to opportunity structures is related to the functioning of primary groups such as families and neighbourhoods. One can wonder to what extent primary groups also create specific opportunity structures and whether these structures should be treated as external determinants towards social actors (external opportunity structures, i.e., Loudon 2010), or rather as the basis for creating internal opportunity structures,[11] which could be understood, for example, in the categories of internalized cognitive constructs and the disposition for activities associated with agency or resilience.

Between biographical resources and opportunity structures

In individual experiences, the relationship between biographical resources (see Part 4) and opportunity structures can take different shapes and configurations. However, while the former are primarily rooted in biographical experience, the latter are associated with the social framework (primarily with the individual's belonging to different social worlds). As we learn from numerous autobiographical accounts, in the course of life each individual is involved in various social frameworks, which constitute one of the cognitive figures (see Schütze 1984). These are, among others, daily routines, institutions, social units, organizations, institutionalized environments, social relations, social worlds and their arenas, interaction and action situations, and living environments (Schütze 1984, 2008). These social frameworks can create favorable conditions for socio-biographical processes and outline (imagined) action horizons (for the implementation of the expected career courses, as is

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[11] It seems that the term of internal opportunity structures scarcely exists in sociological literature. However, it does not apply to the individual, but the internal settings of formal organizations (Catherine Begnoche Smith 1979).

the case with the institutional pattern of expectations, or for one's own lifelong development, as is the case with biographical action plans). But, they can also be an obstacle for them and trigger the process of "shrinking the world" (as is the case in the trajectory). In the first case, we will talk about opportunity structures (their opposite will be biographical constraints often constituting trajectory potential or mechanisms which dynamize the process of a growing disorder). They can also transform into the other ones.

If, in the course of one's life, a person will (in a more or less conscious way) define this social framework as significant for the course of their life (e.g., family, embedding in social structure, social networks, friends from the neighborhood), then we will talk about biographical resources (see Part 4). At the same time, some of the biographical resources may be unconscious or "seen but unnoticed." An example of this may be a middle class child who (at least at the beginning) does not realize the benefits of his or her position in the structure; that, through the specific educational environment, through the language he/she uses, the schools he/she attends, the lifestyle patterns which are offered to him/her, he/she has different access to the opportunity structures.

Social worlds and opportunity structures

Opportunity structures are present in various spheres of social life, but – to paraphrase Alfred Schütz again – "they are not distributed equally," and – to emphasize the issue clearly – not perceived and defined by individuals in the same way.[12] There are those which emerge from large-scale social processes and decisions made at state, European, or even international and political (macro) levels. In post-socialist Poland, they have mainly resulted from the dynamic processes of modernization, transformation, the introduction of the free-market economy, democratization (also of higher education), or joining the European Union (i.e., free movement of people, access to EU funding and grants, a system of agricultural subsidies, etc.). There are those connected with public institutions, local organizations, non-government organizations, social (resistance) movements, working *milieus*, et cetera. And still, there are those which stem from one's origin, family background, cultural and social capital, and social networks (see the case of Robert in Chapter XII).

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[12] Opportunity structures are subject to interpretation and framing grounded in cultural and structurally based "filters." As Doowon Suh (2001: 442–443) states: "change becomes an 'opportunity' only if it is perceived as such by movement agents," and indicates that only apparent opportunity can be described as casual. A specific way of perceiving and interpreting structures themselves and chances for success linked to taking advantage of them determines if or how they are to be used by social actors.

Another perspective in which we can place considerations regarding opportunity structures are social worlds and their processes. In this understanding, the transformation of opportunity structures will be a derivative of numerous processes occurring both within the social worlds themselves and the interaction of separate social worlds with each other. According to Tamotsu Shibutani, Anselm Strauss, and Adele Clarke social worlds are processes of interpretation and communication focused around specific basic activities, matters, or topics (Clarke 1991, Shibutani 1955, Strauss 1978: 119, 1982, Schütze 2002). Adele Clarke defines social worlds as "groups with shared commitments to certain activities, sharing resources of many kinds to achieve their goals, and building shared ideologies about how to go about their business" (Clarke 1991: 131). The social world is based on common experience, mutual interest, shared symbolization, shared perspectives on "reality" and, what follows, constitutes its own universe of discourse. It neither has its formal boundaries[13] nor is connected with formal membership and authority relations among participants, but is bound "by the limits of effective communication" (Shibutani 1955: 566).[14] Clarke stresses that "[t]hrough extended communication, participants in social worlds characteristically generate, or adapt ideologies about how their work should be done and debate about both their own activities and others' actions that may affect them." (Clarke 1991: 131–132).

Each of the social worlds is associated with a specific universe of discourse, "a common, shared, symbolic system covering an extensive set of categories and classifications, used for interpreting the world and necessary for effective action" (Rokuszewska-Pawełek 2002: 24–25). It also has characteristic attributes which create specific opportunity structures such as basic activities, membership, places, technologies, or internal organization (Strauss 1978: 121, Kacperczyk 2016). These issues, and as we claim, opportunity structures, are created, discussed, and negotiated on respective arenas of discourse (Clarke, Star 2003: 539, Strauss 1978, 1982, 1984). Social worlds are subject to numerous

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[13] As Fritz Schütze emphasizes, social worlds are in their creation, organization, and change […] immensely flexible (Schütze 2002)

[14] Alicja Rokuszewska-Pawełek, therefore, shows that: "There are countless social worlds, small and large, local and international, openly public and hardly visible, separated in space and connected with others, well-organized and more amorphous, whose activities and communication are focused around various matters: politics, art, religion, recreation, sport, science, etc." (Rokuszewska-Pawełek 2002: 24). In this understanding, a social world can be a national or religious community, a political party, a non-governmental organization, music connoisseurs, postage stamp collectors, subscribers to certain YouTube channels, vegetarians, anti-vaccine supporters, social movements, et cetera.

processes of overlapping, intersection, segmentation, budding, merging, or competition. As a result of progressing globalization, multiculturalism, and developing information technologies, these processes have intensified significantly. Not only are these worlds constantly growing (often competing for members), but they become more and more fluid (their borders are blurred) (Schütze 2002).[15] Hence, in the modern world, people participate in many intersecting and deliberating social worlds[16] and their segments, defining collective resources and ways of building identity and "regulating" access to specific opportunity structures (Piotrowski 2006: 250).

Basic features of opportunity structures and its paradoxes

Regardless of the theoretical and methodological framework applied, based on the literature findings, one can indicate the basic features of the theoretical construct, which are the opportunity structures. Above all, they constitute (as well as constraints constituting their reverse) dynamic, relational processes. They are shaped on all the levels of social life through convergences resulting not only from historical processes, but institutional, individual, collective behaviors, as well as dominating or marginal social discourses. In certain political, institutional, and biographical configurations, opportunities fluctuate, open, or close. History indicates that especially in times of systemic change both processes can be noted – simultaneous closure and opening of political and institutional opportunity structures throughout all levels of social structure and social categories. Characteristics of such transformations may be final and irreversible. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that transformations of opportunity structures are conditioned by a variety of factors, but processes and agents maintaining them can remain the same (Roberts 2009). Opportunity structures can also be characterized in relation to their innate properties affecting social actors'

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[15] Thus, nowadays people not only have to deal with various (often contradictory) styles, the logic of behavior and moral standards of social worlds to which they belong, but also with the dynamics of internal changes and disputes regarding the authenticity of core activities in each of them. In addition, all of them – requiring specific knowledge resources, creating their own "We"-culture and awareness (Schütze 2002: 63) – create a sense of moral commitment to achieve common goals and obligation to loyalty. In individual experiences, this "dissonant concert of social worlds" (Schütze 2002: 75) results in growing chaos and systematically deepening irritation.

[16] It should be noted, that being a member of a certain social world may result either from institutional expectation patterns (e.g., various only money-making job worlds), biographical action plans (e.g., the social world of art, non-governmental organizations) and the trajectory of suffering (e.g., the social world of medicine, social *milieu* of homeless people).

capabilities and their *modus operandi*. Open opportunity structures facilitate and promote human activities encouraging social actors' responses to "favorable openings in the social structure," increasing the impact of people, groups, and social movements exerted over institutions whereas closed ones – constrain such activities through differentiated barriers: means, techniques, or strategies of discouragement (Reger 2018: 560, Tarrow 1998 as cited in Bondaroff, Burke 2014, Jeydel 2000, Suh 2001, Gleiss 2017). Transformations of opportunity structures can be linked to the introduction of new themes, absent from the discourse until now, the appearance of new forms of actions, or the emergence of counter-movements against those proposed by social actors who make use of current structures[17] (Bondaroff, Burke 2014: 168, see also Thompson 2017, Reger 2018). Finally, opportunity structures are subject to acts of individual and collective interpretations, which are influenced by both the course of history, current political events and processes, social discourses, and the individual's personal experience (Gamson, Meyer 1996, McAdam 1996 as cited in Gleiss 2017).[18] Such a conceptualization of opportunity structures sets them clearly in the domain of cultural phenomena and it seems hardly justified to differentiate between "objective" structural opportunities and "subjectively" experienced opportunities. It must be emphasized that opportunity structures may remain unnoticed, regarded as too requiring, interpreted as not important for an individual line of development, defined from the very beginning as a deceit/fraud[19] – or on the contrary, they may be treated with enthusiasm, fascination, as a finally given deserved chance.

The analysis of biographical interviews used in the preparation of this study reveals several important paradoxes related to the way narrators define and experience opportunity structures.

Some opportunity structures can be taken advantage of at a given historical time (they are available, for example, to one generation). That is why it seems so important in the project *Experience of the Process of Transformation…* to isolate three different cohorts, each of which operates in slightly different arrangements

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[17] For example, anti-hunt movement causes counter-protest from hunters objecting against being portrayed as killers and murderers of the animals (i.e., Bondaroff, Burke 2014).

[18] In the analysis of social movements, the concept of cultural framing is used here. It is defined in terms of conscious, collective, strategic efforts to construct shared understandings of the world and of the groups which will stimulate and legitimize supra-individual activities (which also means negotiation of meanings) (McAdam et al. as cited in Suh 2001: 442, McAdam 1994 as cited in Gleiss 2017).

[19] For example, the farmer Tadeusz, whose interview is part of the EuroId collection (Miller, Day 2012) claims that, in fact, every system is oriented towards exploiting and cheating farmers, and therefore he also treated the EU subsidies as an attempt at fraud.

of opportunity structures. People born in the 1960s were socialized by primary groups (family, neighborhood, peer groups) functioning differently to those who shaped the cohort born in the 1980s. The processes of cultural change in the individual experience of the oldest narrators entering adult life in the times of the People's Republic of Poland meant, among others, discovering a new world previously inaccessible to them. Travelling abroad was associated with "familiarizing" themselves with new practices and new realities, and the transition to an open, not centrally-controlled labor market in the early 1990s which was often a cognitively shocking and emotionally difficult experience. In the case of the narrators born in the late 1980s, such experiences are treated rather as "ethnographic pictures," they belong to family tales, at school often casually dealt with as a period in the history of Poland – distant history, "not ours." The process of economic, political, social, and cultural change, opening various opportunity structures (those related to education, the labor market, foreign trips, unrestricted expression of one's views) happened at different periods of our narrators' lives and therefore framed their experiences in many different ways.

The collected narratives also point to another temporal aspect of the opportunity structures, namely, that some of them can be used only at certain stages of the life cycle. For example, the yard (see Chapter XV) as an obvious element of reality, can only become a formative experience connecting the world into a whole during childhood. In turn, the biography of Pola discussed in Chapter XIII shows that barriers created by parents and the inability to accumulate educational capital during childhood and adolescence significantly blocks not only a successful start into adulthood, but also has long-term consequences for the personal development of the narrator. That is because many (especially young) people do not see the connection between education and biographical career; this was already noticed in 1960 by Cloward and Ohlin who explained: "Some youths become hoodlums instead of businessmen, not because they lack the ability to succeed legitimately… but because they find out too late the relationship between school adjustment and [upward social mobility]" (Toby 1958 as cited in Cloward, Ohlin 1961: 101). From this perspective, one can look critically at the life-long learning concept declared as widely available, which is an important element of the ideology of knowledge-based management of contemporary democratic societies. It may turn out to be an empty slogan for individuals and groups limited by socio-economic status, family situation, or health condition.

Some opportunity structures have a sort of vague moral character, as, for example, in the case of American soldiers taking part in World Word II who used it as a possibility of going to Europe, to travel, and see places and/or as a way of maturation, departing from the state of mama's boy and of gaining

college education just after homecoming (cf., Schütze 2014). The same
attitude may be found in some life histories of Polish people who recapitulate
the war as the (only) positive and adventurous experiences in their lives
(Marciniak 2016). In this context, it is also interesting to look again at the
Chapter IX written by Joanna Wygnańska in which she describes the case
of Weronika who thoughtlessly shows the transition between the historical
and social formation of socialism to the period of transformation as a kind
of reversal of the experiences of many other narrators from the same cohort.
While most show the period after 1989 as the (coveted) opportunity to buy
Mars and Snickers bars, Weronika is deprived of this opportunity because her
parents – previously politically engaged – lose their jobs and fall into poverty.
This seemingly trivial example, however, shows a certain mechanism in which
opportunity structures are treated as obvious and thus almost "unnoticed"
until the individual loses (privileged) access to them.

Again, regardless of the political system and dominant ideology, some
opportunity structures are of illusory character and owing to their "delusive
mechanisms" often misguide those who use them. For instance in Chapter VII:
Paradoxes of ideological privileges – a case study of a female textile worker from Łódź
Kaja Kaźmierska points out that during the period of state socialism in Poland,
allegedly favoring the working class, there was a systematically growing tension
between the opportunity structures proclaimed by the system and the ones
experienced by individuals. Consequently, as she adds: "Social changes, which
entail modernization changes and manifest themselves especially in the processes
of industrialization and urbanization, have actually taken place at the expense of,
and not through the workers" (Kaźmierska 2014: 139). The same applies to the
access to higher education in post-war Poland, which Agata Zysiak writes about
in her book *Points for Class Origin* (2016). A certain social project, which, thanks
to the reforms of higher education, created preferential conditions for access to
universities for the working classes (workers and farmers) and thus opened for
them the possibility of social promotion and implementation of career paths
other than before, for various reasons (described in detail in the fourth and fifth
Chapter in the aforementioned publication), in fact, turned out to be an illusion
or phantasmagoria (Zysiak 2016).

There are also many "seducing" opportunity structures which offer people
great possibilities, but never fully reveal their possible consequences. They
may also be observed in post-transformation Poland. They usually promise
the development of personal potentials and individuality, but – as Ulrich
Bröckling notes – simultaneously make people solely responsible for their
failures (cf., Bröckling 2016: 5). To put it simply, the inefficient, irrational
individual is always and exclusively guilty – or, to use the offensive words
of Manuel Castells – "selfish parasites of history-making" (Castells 2013:

300). It is particularly worth considering this issue in relation to the case of Hubert (analyzed in Chapter XII), a civil engineer involved in the labor market of the early 2000s and the paradoxes of this market (while Hubert is on a downward spiral, Robert – having an almost identical family background, cultural resources, education, and professional experience is spectacularly successful). In this respect, an interesting autobiographical account is also the story of Julia born in the 80s last century (analyzed in Chapter X), who started university in 2003.[20] For many years, she had been developing her educational and later academic career under the 'mythicized' conviction (not only present in parental pedagogy, but also dominant public discourse) that education guarantees work, allows one to achieve a certain and permanent social position and thus guarantees a better material situation and stability in life. It turned out, however, that the efforts and involvement in both the process of studying or acquiring new qualifications supported by certificates (see also the interview with Czesia mentioned shortly in Chapter X) do not bring the desired stability, but lead to precarious balance of everyday life and are associated with an increasingly painful blockade of one's life plans.

Another type of paradox is associated with the coercion/pressures which coexist within a specific opportunity structure, resulting in tensions and dilemmas which the social actor cannot avoid. Participating in social worlds usually means the conclusion of a certain type of unwritten agreement. Accordingly, the use of the opportunity structures and the connected payoffs and privileges is associated with costs[21] such as formatting the course of personal and professional careers and the related identities, and even the loss of some scope of freedom. Clear examples are found here in the case of people pursuing professional careers framed by the logic of temporary project work – for example, Julia (see Chapter X) postponing, against herself, parenthood plans when the employment conditions changed. Therefore, the implementation of the seemingly autonomous biographical action plan or following institutional patterns is accompanied by the danger of activating the trajectory potential, and the opportunity structures may turn out to be a biographical trap.

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[20] We are talking about the massive growth of higher education students in the early 2000s, which was associated with the creation of private universities, as well as specific requirements of the labor market (the requirement of a master's degree or later a bachelor's degree for people performing a given profession or applying for promotion).

[21] These costs may also mean financial outlays, which suggests the relationship between the chances to use specific opportunity structures and the socio-economic status of the individual: "the middle class person can take advantage of educational opportunities despite their costs," whereas the educational career of the working-class child entails significant effort on behalf of its family, also a financial one" (Cloward, Ohlin 1961: 102).

The individual also faces dilemmas regarding making life choices due to conflicting opportunity structures. Some narrators encountered such structures in their biography. This is illustrated by the story of Hanna, who is considering leaving the country (Chapter X) (she is functioning in two competing social worlds – a traditional Polish family and in the neoliberal reality, confronted with the image of the working conditions of doctors in the 'Western' medical system).

Some opportunity structures available in a political and economic system may be used regardless of its prevalent ideology. This feature may be difficult to grasp, as the order and output of the previous epoch is completely questioned in the newly-binding, post-transformation discourse. The opportunity structures existing in the PPR are illustrated in the chapter on social reformers written by Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas (Chapter V, see also: Golczyńska-Grondas 2019). It is thanks to the access to the configuration of opportunity structures available in the socialistic state, social reformers became not only active beneficiaries, but also creators of political and institutional opportunity structures in the neoliberal order.

Summarizing, it should be emphasized that, especially on the individual level, the use of opportunity structures may involve not only certain benefits, but also costs, since it is related to the socio-economic status of a person. Opportunity structures are not objective conditions or arrangements of certain social units and their meaning and structure is not permanent. Although, people tend to perceive them as real, routine, stable and "taken for granted," as well as a "seen but unnoticed background of common understandings" (Garfinkel 2002: 44). They are questioned and reflected usually only if they are not able to play their nomic function in everyday life anymore.