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Changes in a Human Life

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Editorial:

Changes in a Human Life

Abstract The subject of the volume *Changes in a human life* is the process of the broadly understood transformation taking place in the lives of both individuals and whole communities. It is a process that may have various faces and characters and that may refer to numerous fields of research and various contexts. Therefore, the group of notions that the authors of this volume focus on is comprised of those related to the problems of disability, fatherhood, prostitution, intelligence, corporate work or migration. The included articles are of an overview, exploratory and empirical nature. However, all of them bring the reader closer to the processuality, changeability and dynamism of the lives lived by individuals and communities.

Keywords changeability, processuality, individual, society, qualitative sociology

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tative Data Analysis Software. Using of the NVivo and Atlas.ti in the research projects based on methodology of the grounded theory (The University of Lodz Publishing House, Lodz 2014).

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The world is built from social meanings, ascribed by people (...). The matter of changing the state of affairs consists in transforming the ascribed meaning. (Soder 1989: 121)

It is often emphasized that the lives of individuals and whole societies are connected with omnipresent dynamics, and the existence of contemporary man may be perceived as a process of permanent change. In a sociological context, the change means the transformation of one system status to another. Separate changes are interconnected, overlapping, and they trigger subsequent transformations. Therefore, they create a series of subsequent phases or stages of a given process, causally conditioned (Sztompka 2005:20-27).

The transformations may take place in various fields and in different dimensions, and they may be analyzed on various levels: macro-social (in whole societies and international systems), mezosocial (taking place in local communities and large organizations) and micro-social (within small groups and human attitudes). These levels penetrate and stimulate each other, creating a space for various social phenomena.

The psychosocial mechanisms and consequences of the processes of social transformations provided a topic of interest for scholars from the Chicago School, who were the first authors of works applying *life records* (Szczepański 1976:36). As far back as 1921, in the work entitled *Old World Trains Translated* (Park, Miller 1921), which related to the Americanization of emigrants, particular chapters were devoted to, among others, the problems of lost status, adjustment to the individualist society, the func-

tioning of immigrant societies, or interconnected institutions (Golczyńska-Grondas 2014:21). Herbert Blumer (2007) in turn, one of the key representatives of the Chicago School, believed that a change poses an indispensable attribute of a society, which - as he claimed - was not a static structure, but rather a being that is dynamically reconstructed within a course of interactions taking place between individuals. He stated that social reality is of a processual nature, based on the interpretation of the meanings of common definitions of particular situations agreed on by its members. Individuals are active and fully aware actors here, acting on the basis of meanings ascribed to objects, therefore co-creating reality, and not reacting passively and lifelessly to external stimuli (Blumer 2007). Individuals that interact with one another communicate, thus creating the basis for the construction of a real and intersubjective world of people endowed with the sense of their own ego. Society, in turn, is created, maintained and transformed thanks to people's abilities not only to think and define, but also to self-reflect and self-evaluate, presenting the result of human actions, how all significant aspects of their life are interpreted on a current basis (Szacki 2002:545 and further). Hence, society is a process of entities that adjust to each other during interactions, acting in a specific social context (Blumer 1975:78; 2007:55-60). The individuals interpret a given situation on a current basis, which means that each course of action is constructed from the beginning (Blumer 2007:17).

At the same time, as is pointed out by Anselm L. Strauss (1959:94-95), being influenced by new conditions, external circumstances and various types

of human relationships, the identity of a given individual may undergo transformation. Some of those changes are planned or at least supported by members of social institutions which the individual takes part in (e.g. transformations of identity related to a professional career), others take place despite or against such regulated anticipations (then we can speak of the trajectory of a human life) (Strauss 1959).

Therefore, to grasp the transformations in a human life we may use the notion of a career, which will be understood in accordance with the definition developed by Everett C. Hughes (1958:63), as a “moving perspective in which the person sees his life as a whole and interprets the meaning of his various attributes, actions and things, which happen to him.” It is usually possible to list several stages or phases within each career which transform the positions, functions and the manner of how the self is perceived by individuals (cf. Goffman 1961; Becker 1961 et al.). The category of career, as suggested by Howard S. Becker and James W. Carper (1956:289), bears both an objective component, pointing to changes at the level of participation in institutions, and a subjective one, “looked into in categories of ego, identity and transformation.”

In turn, the already mentioned notion of trajectory is related to the course of certain experiences in time. According to the concept proposed by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (1968; 1975), this notion describes the evolution of a given phenomenon, the appearance of subsequent stadia as well as everything that supports their creation and development. As claimed by Fritz Schütze and Gerhard Riemann (1992; see also Schütze 1997), a trajectory is

a process of chaos, encroaching the individual process of life, leaving permanent traces in a biography and identity.

Taking into account the inspirations and theoretical references mentioned above, the articles comprised in this issue are related to the perspective of those researched, transforming their own points of view into a starting point for the construction of theoretical generalizations (cf. Włodarek, Ziólkowski 1990:55). The authors of particular texts adopt the aim of finding meaning in the experiences of ordinary people, thus answering the questions: how do they ascribe meaning to their experiences, and how is it defined, interpreted, understood, expressed and embodied within interactions that take place between actively operating individuals?

The issue opens with a text by Elżbieta Zakrzewska-Manterys, entitled *A History of the Exclusion of the Mentally Handicapped*, where the author deliberates the comprehension of the words “disability” and “intelligence” (which create the term intellectual disability). Two contrasting ways of comprehending the term intelligence have been presented there: derived from ancient times and introduced by the modern system of psychological measures. The author makes an attempt to bring the reader closer to the consequences of understanding the human conditions entangled in the modern world which are brought by the application of those two approaches to the term intelligence. Both linguistic deliberations as well as those related to the application of the segregation policy towards the intellectually disabled serve to highlight the worse social situation of this category of person. The author presents numerous

examples of the treatment of intellectually disabled individuals over the course of decades, thus proving the transformations that influenced how they were perceived by society, especially in the states of the Western cultural circle, which developed a policy of integration and social inclusion. Zakrzewska-Manterys, in the conclusion of her article states that *community with intellectually disabled people starts being symmetrical, which means that it enriches ourselves*. For numerous years, relations with our disabled fellow human beings took the form of charitable actions. It is changing. We do not need to defend their humanity anymore, because they are able to take care of it themselves.

Also, Jakub Niedbalski, in his article entitled *The Role of Sport in the Reconstruction Process of the Identity of a Person With an Acquired Body Dysfunction*, raises the notion of transformations that take place in physically disabled individuals through their involvement in a sports activity. In the article, the author attempts to prove that practicing sport may create advantageous conditions for self-discovery and self-acceptance by a person with an acquired body dysfunction. Niedbalski's goal is to present the mechanisms of the emancipatory role of sport practiced by individuals with disabilities, as well as to emphasize the manner in which sport influence the self-perception of a disabled person. Therefore, the purpose of the conducted research is to analyze the processual dimension of the transformations of a disabled person's life which take place under the influence of experiences related to practicing sport. The drawn conclusions suggest that sport constitutes not only an opportunity to stay fit and healthy, but also to integrate the disabled through providing

them with the possibility to participate in a broader social life.

Kamila Biały, the author of a text entitled *Professional Biographies of Polish Corporation Workers in the Late Capitalist World*, presents three types of professional careers, based on narrative interviews with managers and representatives of professionals. While applying a conceptual framework derived from sociological language, especially from the perspective of Fritz Schütze, and psychological language, mainly the characterological-developmental theory developed by Stephen Johnson, the author makes an attempt to reconstruct the course and particular phases of the process where the subjects get involved in the corporational order. The author is interested, on the one hand, in the basic structures of the biographical experience of the maturing process in a corporation and, on the other, in their connection with the sphere of institutional solutions. Hence, the interest in biography should answer two crucial questions: what kinds of experience do we need to deal with (*biographical action scheme, institutional schedule for organizing biography, trajectory, biographical metamorphosis*), and how does it reflect something called corporational order, i.e. a certain kind of arrangement characteristic for late capitalism in its connections with Europeanization and globalization processes, multi-culturalism and trans-culturalism, as well as the neoliberal organization of a social life.

Two other texts are also related to biographical experiences. The first one, written by Paulina Bunio-Mroczek, *Becoming a teenage father. Having a Baby as a Turning Point in Biographies of Young Men of Low*

Socioeconomic Status Inhabiting Poverty Enclaves, raises matters related to the reconstruction of the process of becoming a father in the case of young men lacking father figures themselves, and whose fatherhood was often questioned because of their low socio-economic status. The aim of the article is to reflect on the process of change in the biographies of young men of low socio-economic status brought up in so-called "poverty enclaves" who became fathers as teenagers. The empirical grounds of the analysis are qualitative interviews that were part of the research on teenage parenthood as a risk of poverty and social exclusion conducted within the framework of "Strengthening Opportunities and Weakening the Processes of Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty among the Inhabitants of the Cities of the Lodz Province – WZLOT" project. The theoretical framework for the analysis is the concept of transformation and identity change by Anselm L. Strauss.

Another text related to biographic research is the article written by Agata Zysiak, entitled *The Socialist Project for a New Intelligentsia and its Limits. Academic Careers in the Polish Post-War University: a Biographical Perspective*. The author examines the postwar period of reconstruction of the Polish academic system from the perspective of young academicians and students of that time. The author examines the stories of the Polish Intelligentsia, who after WWII had to face dramatic events related to the forthcoming reform of science and the higher education system, which was an attempt to build a socialist university and an egalitarian society. According to Zysiak, those processes are often viewed as the political domination of academia, the captivity of professors and the seduction of students. However, on the ba-

sis of the conducted research, the author concludes that the academic field and its associated processes shaped the biographical paths of erstwhile academics as strongly, if not stronger, as political factors, which are usually brought to the forefront by researchers. To confirm her statements, the author selected three academic biographies to present the complexity of those processes. At the same time, they reveal different patterns of the interplay among political changes, the university, the academic habitus and higher education reform.

The next article in the presented volume is entitled *The Importance of Subjectively Constructed Meaning: Integration Viewed From the Perspective of Immigrants*, written by two scholars, Markieta Domecka and Antonella Spanò. The authors are focused on the term integration, which is commonly viewed in the context of migration. According to the authors, the perspective of the receiving countries (not migrants) - dominating in the performed social studies - which is based on 'objective indicators' and statistical analysis, the level of integration is measured and assessed as 'low' or 'high', 'sufficient' or 'insufficient'. Therefore, the authors decided to ask the migrants themselves what integration means to them. The analysis of the narrative interviews conducted with Ukrainian, Srilankese and Senegalese men and women living in the South of Italy has demonstrated that integration for them is related more strongly to the notion of a 'good life' than to the desire to become 'one of us'. From their narratives emerges the idea of integration as acceptance and satisfaction but without aspirations for equality, participation and full social and political rights, which calls for more active integration policies.

The issue closes with a text entitled *The Influence of Significant Others on the Course of the Process of Leaving Sex Work*, written by Izabela Ślęzak. The author raises the matter of a biographical change which is blocked, and regardless of the intentions or desires of the individuals, it cannot be realized. The author, based on her long-standing research experiences, presents the phenomenon on the example of women who provide sexual services in escort agencies. More precisely, it is based on the example of those researched women who thought about, expected and planned to leave sex work, though they were incapable of executing this transformation. The article presents the conditions which interfere in the process, support identity transformations, and effectively block the potential of *sex workers* to realize their biographical plans of action. As a result, the researched women continued engagement in *indoor sex work*, even if the action was highly unsatisfactory for them.

All of the issues collected in the articles present the problems of the transformations in the researched individuals' lives, triggered by particular experiences, in a matter appropriate for their authors. Referring to the selected theoretical background and methodological basis for the research, the authors of the separate articles make successful attempts - in a highly interesting and well-thought out manner - to reconstruct the process of changes related to biography, identity and the ego of individuals, doing it in various contexts of social life. Therefore, they not only bring the reader closer to the scope and character of the transformations that take place in lives of those researched and their environments, but they also prove that the process of change, both in the individual and collective respect, is permanently inscribed in the sphere of sociological research.

Happy reading!

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Zmiany w życiu człowieka

Abstrakt: Przedmiotem tomu zatytułowanego *Zmiany w życiu człowieka* jest proces szeroko rozumianej zmiany zachodzącej zarówno w życiu jednostek, jak i całych zbiorowości. Proces, który może mieć różne oblicza oraz charakter i który może odnosić się do wielu obszarów badawczych oraz rozmaitych kontekstów. Z tego względu wśród podejmowanych przez autorów niniejszego tomu zagadnień znalazły się te odnoszące się do problematyki niepełnosprawności, ojcostwa, prostytucji, inteligencji, pracy korporacyjnej czy imigracji. Zawarte w nim artykuły mają charakter przeglądowy, eksploracyjny, jak i empiryczny. Wszystkie jednak odsłaniają przed czytelnikiem procesualność, zmienność i dynamizm życia jednostek oraz zbiorowości.

Słowa kluczowe: zmienność, procesualność, jednostka, społeczeństwo, socjologia jakościowa