

Continuities and Discontinuities. A Methodological Reflection on Sociological Analyses of Time in Multigenerational Family Interviews

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Abstract: Based on sociological analyses of "time" using biographical approaches in family interviews with three generations, I primarily investigate two questions using a case study from the own research in this article. First, I show how information about central aspects of the research issue—namely the reproduction of status in families—can be provided by the heuristic consideration of temporal dimensions. Second, it is traced how familial references to time are negotiated and in the first place established by the participants in the interview. Finally, I discuss the specific opportunities and limits of sociological analysis of time, using family interviews, compared with other kinds of data collection (qualitative verbal and non-verbal data), especially but not exclusively in a biographical research context.

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1. Introduction

At its core, biographical research contains temporal dimensions. ROSENTHAL (2014, p.515), for example, when writing about the characterisation of biographical case reconstructions, says:

"On the one hand, an attempt is made to reconstruct the chronology of biographical experiences in the life course and their meaning for the biographer. On the other hand, the temporal structure of the life story is analysed, i.e. the order in which biographers present their experiences, at what level of detail and in what type of text."¹ [1]

From a sociological perspective, time is a social construct that can be conceived in a narrower or broader sense. In the narrower sense, social time focuses on temporal ordering in human coexistence (coordination, time norms, etc.); in the broader sense, it also addresses the fact that, for example, objectified regulations of time (see, for example, the discussion about the revision of Central European summer time) or psychological experiences of time are rooted in society and are

1 All translations from German texts are mine.

changeable. In this respect, it is important to reflect that the notions of time found in modernity, for example as linear, objective or as a formable (economic) resource, are not universal and that such aspects of time go hand-in-hand with hierarchical concepts of social order (see SCHÖNECK, 2009, Part I, for an overview). In line with the diagnosis of wide-reaching social acceleration (ROSA, 2005), time is even generally characterised as a salient element of modern societies. [2]

If we now take a closer look at which aspects of time are relevant in biographical research,² the following distinctions are particularly helpful:

1. RAMMSTEDT identified (as early as 1975) linear temporal awareness as typical for modern societies. This is characterised by an irreversible sequence of *past*, *present* and *future*. In biographical interviews, interviewees decide as part of their presentation how they address these three time horizons: for example, how far back they want to go into the past or how far they want to anticipate the future. The present is not only a point in time (*now*) without any extension, but also refers to current conditions in the everyday lifeworld (SCHÜTZ & LUCKMANN, 1979). In this way, both continuities and discontinuities are created by generating fractures between (and within) these horizons—viewed from the time point of the interview—and thus establishing the context of a life story from the biographer's point of view.
2. With a slightly different focus, *everyday time*³ can also be distinguished from biographical *lifetime* and supra-individual *world time* (pp.73ff.). In drawing this distinction, it is not so much the sequence (which is regarded as more or less reversible), but rather the interweaving of the dimensions that is of primary importance. At issue are, for example, questions such as the extent to which the anticipated lifetime influences everyday time or how everyday time is interpreted as being embedded in institutional time regimes (e.g. working time) or in historical phases and developments in society.
3. Furthermore, biographical interviewees not only recount and narrate different times and time horizons, but the meaning and significance of specific temporal references are also negotiated in the interview as a social situation (DEPPERMANN, 2013). The distinction made by ROSENTHAL (1995, 2014) between *experienced* and *narrated* time, as mentioned in the above quote, enables the comparison between a chronology of biographical experiences (experienced time) and the temporal structure in the biographical interview (narrated time), especially with the aim of obtaining an analytical instrument for case reconstruction. From the point of view of the sociology of time, it is

2 Thus constituting an excerpt from questions in the sociology of time that also deal with time regimes in organisations (BROSE & KIRSCHSIEPER, 2019) and social sub-areas (for example politics, LAUX & ROSA, 2015, on "social space-time" HENKEL, LAUX & ANICKER, 2017). Other questions deal with the levels of time wealth (RINDERSPACHER, 2002) and work-life balance in various socio-structural groups (SCHILLING, 2015) or time in the context of digitisation (e.g. JOHNSON & KEANE, 2017)—to name but a few examples of sometimes more macro-sociologically oriented approaches.

3 Everyday life is understood here as a fundamental experiential space within the lifeworld which appears to be unquestionably given and in which one can intervene in the world by acting (ZIFONUN, 2014, p.15).

possible to go beyond this methodological application and, by focusing on the content of the interview, to gain a perspective on how different references to time are connected and how it is at all possible to construct time in a social situation. Thus, there are always several possibilities to refer back to temporal structures, for example by emphasising linearity or fractures, by dealing with expectations for the future in a planned or incremental way and by referring to the expectation horizons held by others (here e.g. the interviewer). ELIAS (1988 [1984]) already pointed out that the phenomenon *time* as such is not observable and therefore he pleaded for a stronger focus on time-related activities and thus on *to time* as a verb. This perspective can also be used to analyse how time is handled in the non-standardised interview (see Section 4 for additional methods). [3]

Proceeding from this background of selected temporal dimensions that are particularly fruitful for biographical approaches, I will address two questions in this article by using a case study from our own ongoing research. Our method is to conduct family interviews with several generations that include narrations of individual biographies and family histories. First, we draw on examples to show how, by using these temporal dimensions as a heuristic, information about the central lines of the research inquiry can be obtained (Section 2). Second, we show how the family's references to time are negotiated or established by the participants in the interview (Section 3). The aim here is to illustrate by way of example how aspects related to time can be made empirically fruitful for the analysis (the aim it is not, however, to produce a self-contained theoretical linkage between aspects of time and intergenerational status reproduction, which is what we are interested in here). In the next step we move beyond our empirical example and discuss the specific methodological possibilities and limitations of family interviews for an analysis from a sociology of time perspective, compared to other data collection procedures for qualitative verbal and non-verbal data, especially, but not exclusively, in a biographical context (Section 4). [4]

In the research project⁴ that the example is taken from we deal with the question of how middle-class families in various occupational fields (want to) reproduce their status over generations. Proceeding from the background of current discussions about the erosion of the middle class (among other things due to increasing risks of precarisation or possible insecurities, e.g. BURKHARDT, GRABKA, GROH-SAMBERG, LOTT & MAU, 2013; BURZAN, KOHRS & KÜSTERS, 2014; SCHÖNECK & RITTER, 2018), we investigate the extent to which the principles and values that guide actions have remained stable or have changed in the course of social change, which encompasses, for example, changes to employment or individualisation processes. In the family interviews, the transition from the older to the middle generation, whose members are in their 50s and 60s and have already made important biographical decisions, can be compared with the transition to the younger generation, which at the time of the

4 The project "Status maintenance in the 'middle of society'. Intergenerational stabilisation mechanisms in occupational fields of the middle class" (2018-2021), funded by the German Research Association, is led by myself in cooperation with SOFI Göttingen (Berthold VOGEL). Research assistants in the project are Andrea HENSE and Miriam SCHAD (see also SCHAD & BURZAN, 2018a, 2018b).

interview is usually still in the education or career entry phase. Generation-specific trajectories (BOURDIEU, 1987 [1979], p.187ff.) in the sense of social careers that are embedded in (collective) courses of social advancement or decline of other actors are discussed. [5]

The temporal dimensions mentioned above are central to this research question when it comes to, for example, identifying fractures or dividing up phases in retrospect, determining the *present* and developing, for example, vague ideas or concrete plans for the near or distant future (in recent decades, people in middle-class social positions in particular have often been attributed a forward-looking planning of their lives; BURZAN, 2017; HRADIL & SCHMIDT, 2007). Given the generations' different time horizons, family members' temporal constructions are related in a complex fashion. A comparison between *past* and *present* with reference to continuities as well as to (social) changes is also constitutive for the topic. Methodologically, three generations of a family (i.e. at least three to about six persons) are interviewed and asked to recount their family history, including educational and professional paths. Usually, representatives of the oldest generation speak first. There is no clear ordering of presentations according to age of the family members, rather presentations vary according to the dynamics of the conversation, and the participants sometimes address each other. During this narrative-generating section of the interview and/or afterwards, further topics from the interview guideline (with the core topics education, work, and family, e.g. family traditions) are also addressed.⁵ Categorising and hermeneutic methods are used for the data analysis.⁶ [6]

2. Case Study Part I: Temporal References as a Key to the Research Question

The case study is taken from one of the three occupational fields being considered in the project, namely family businesses in the manual trades and manufacturing sector.⁷ In an interview lasting about three hours, two female

5 After weighing up the advantages of conducting several individual interviews (easier to find appointments, openness, possibly also in the sense of critical statements towards other family members), we decided on family interviews in order to be able to analyse the common construction of "family" and communication dynamics between those present (see also Section 4). This analysis was supported by the fact that the participants also completed a genogram and a short personal questionnaire at the end. These data were further supplemented by the interviewers' field protocols, i.e. by observation data.

6 We work by structuring topics and communicative aspects according to the chronology of the interview, categorisation using categorisation software, recording family history events on a timeline, short descriptions given by individuals, and detailed sequence analyses of selected interview passages to develop a case description of the families, supplemented by the genograms and field protocols. The case description serves as a basis for case comparisons in the next step. At this point we ask, among other things, which role the earlier/later generation transition and the occupational field play for which forms and perceptions of status reproduction, but we still remain open to other relevant dimensions of the constellation of conditions.

7 The other two fields are academic "state-related" professions (e.g. teachers) and technical professions (with at least a degree from a university of applied sciences, e.g. engineers). In this way, different segments of the heterogeneous middle class can be addressed. Within the occupational groups, a combination of selective and theoretical sampling is used (so far, among other things, the homogeneity of family members with respect to the occupational field or the intensity of contact have played a role). Within the families, the contact person and the relatives they invite determine who takes part in the interview (see for more details on the sampling

interviewers talk to five members of a family that owns a business in the automotive industry. The now deceased husband of the oldest generation founded the company in the 1960s, and his son, as a master craftsman, took over the business together with his sister. This son is married (his wife also works in the administrative department of the company), the couple have two daughters aged 18 and 21. The interview is attended by the three members of the middle generation (early 50s), as well as the almost 80-year-old mother of the company owners, who still helps out in the company office, and the oldest daughter from the younger generation. The research team does not determine who belongs to the family (e.g. by degrees of kinship), but "family" is essentially determined by the participants in the interview through their presence or by talking about other relatives (in the sense of "doing family"; JURCZYK, LANGE & THIESSEN, 2010). [7]

The first example concerns the start of the interview and shows how considering the temporal dimensions can provide information about central lines of the research inquiry. The interviewer asks the representative of the oldest generation to relate the family history. She is initially irritated by the question and says, "Okay, so how do I start that?" Her son replies, "At the beginning." And then she starts with the prehistory of how the company was founded and as a result speaks about her husband, who came to the region as a young adult, completed his master craftsman's examination after an apprenticeship and became self-employed. It is interesting that although the mother ultimately decides at what point she lets the family (and that means at the same time: company) history begin, her son already completes or partly continues the narration in this initial passage, i.e. concerning times when he himself was not yet born or was still a small child. The analytical category that can be identified here is *interpretative sovereignty over narrated time*. This category applies to the structure of the conversation (not the temporal structure of the events) and gives rise to a hypothesis that is confirmed in the course of further analysis, namely that the son has a high degree of authority in the family and thus (tends to) take over the role of his father; thus hierarchical aspects of structuring time relate to relationship patterns within the family in general. [8]

The discussion continues with the lives of the family members during the 1960s and 1970s. The company founder is portrayed as a successful planner and decision-maker. In contrast, his wife speaks less about herself, and non-professional family events such as the birth of children are only mentioned in passing. Here, too, it is helpful for the analysis to summarise the contents with a category related to time, namely the category (*established*) *continuity* in the family, here this especially means the company's history. Viewed from today's perspective, this is by no means solely positive. While in retrospect the wife speaks admiringly of her husband and his entrepreneurial skills, although also mentioning that luck contributed to the increasing expansion of the business, her son mentions as a negative side of his childhood that everything always revolved around work. These interpretations tend to be left standing next to each other, as in this case they reflect generation-specific perspectives. Both perspectives

HENSE & SCHAD, 2019).

agree, however, that the founder of the company determined and planned the family events, which were closely connected with the business. There is a consistency in the family (also confirmed by the sister) with regard to this construction of continuity. [9]

Finally, a third category for the start of this interview, *following someone else's life plan* can be identified as the children's view of their father's resolute planning. Again, this addresses an aspect of (here: lack of) temporal autonomy, in this instance related to experienced lifetime. Both members of the middle generation experienced their professional path as "predetermined"; in view of their father's dominance and their early socialisation in the company, which was also located directly next to their home, they saw "no chance" for alternatives. While at one point the son gets carried away with the statement: "Man, what a shitty childhood we had"—even if he immediately puts this into perspective after a general laugh: "No, it wasn't that bad"—a certain legitimisation follows later: "And the older you get, yeah, you say 'hey, of course he [the father] was right about many things', wasn't he"? However, he only gained this insight as an adult, i.e. with increasing life experience and the realisation that his father's planning had also had positive effects. In the narrative the son depicts his changing views as a child and then later as an adult. [10]

References to time are thus found in the interview that go beyond the representation of the progression of a life as evoked by the interviewer's initial question. The categories of established continuity and adherence to the life plan of another express that—especially in relation to the first above-mentioned temporal dimension (differentiation between past, present and future)—a specific, largely linear, interpretation of the family's past history is collectively supported. Furthermore, in supporting the collective interpretation of the family's history individual reinterpretations of the past are also made, such as the son (of the middle generation) explaining that he later recognised the purpose of his father's planning.⁸ The category of interpretative sovereignty over narrated time indicates hierarchical constructions of time in their relation to specific family relationships. [11]

How can these references to time be used to answer the research question that also concerns a temporal phenomenon in the form of patterns of intergenerational status reproduction? Drawing on further analyses, it can be stated with regard to the first generational transition that, as the founder of the company, the father is regarded in the family as the "maker" of status continuity—intragenerationally, because he resolutely pursued plans, gradually expanded the business and encountered economically favourable conditions for doing so (which refers to societal time), intergenerationally, because by building the business he paved the way for his children's employment and later succession. However, this was associated with strong authority, leaving the children no choice but to become involved at an early stage—reinforced by the physical proximity of the family home and the company—and for the father to later demand the

8 The linkages between lifetimes, everyday time and institutional time regimes/societal developments (see the second dimension in §3) are addressed in the second part of the case study.

appropriate qualifications. For his children's generation, this meant fitting into a ready-prepared life path, and not only using the nest the parents had built, but, as the children perceived it, having to use it. At the same time, however, the son was also prepared for his role as a master craftsman and later supervisor, which he had already held for several decades at the time of the interview, so that his current authority over decisions taken in narrated time does not contradict this. [12]

So far, the benefits of references to time for answering the research question have been emphasised. Beyond the specific subject matter, it can also be noted that some characteristics of temporal references as an analytical category are even more complex because they occur in a family interview (and not in an individual interview). Already in the individual biographical interview, paying attention to, for example, which phases of their life the interviewee addresses in more or less detail or not at all, in which order (chronological or not) and at which point the life story begins can lead to richer findings. In the family interview, it is also important to ascertain to what extent aspects of the family history (which not all members can have experienced personally) are presented in the same way or differently. In the above example, the wife and children of the company founder, for example, related, reinforcing each other, that the founder had followed a plan. Such representations in consensus/dissent do not have to refer to the past alone, but can also be directed at other temporal dimensions, such as the breadth and tone of perspectives on the future (e.g. with regard to the family business) or at processes of social change and time norms that underlie assessments and classifications. How much dissent a family (or its presentation façade) can "endure" in the process if it does not, for example, want to stage itself as divided or fragmented, is an empirically open question. Another effect that can be observed when analysing family interviews is who decides which time will be talked about in which way, which process representations are curtailed, etc. (see the analysis category: interpretative sovereignty over the time narrated). This is also an aspect that is negotiated solely between the interviewee and the interviewer in the individual interview. To what extent an understanding of the interview as a social interaction situation can deepen the analysis is illustrated in the following section by a further aspect of the case study. [13]

In summary, the exemplary relationships between aspects of time and status reproduction can be presented as follows:

Category	Reference to Time	Reference to Status Reproduction
Interpretative sovereignty over narrated time	Temporality of the structure of conversation (reference: lifetime) as an expression of family hierarchies	Successful adoption of status as head of the family
Continuity construction, especially of the company history	Collective support of the segmentation, especially of the past	Continuity of status planned (and carried out) by the father (older -> middle generation)
Follow someone else's life plan	Reported degrees of autonomy over lifetimes	Continuity of status planned (and carried out) by the father (older -> middle generation)

Table 1: Relationships between aspects of time and status reproduction in the interview [14]

3. Case Study Part II: Establishing References to Time Through Social Interaction in the Interview

In this section, nine excerpts from the same family interview are used. They all relate to the as yet unresolved issue of who will next take over the running of the company, a question for the younger generation which affects family members' future prospects. Both continuity, in the sense of a succession arrangement within the family, and discontinuity, in view of the fact that neither of the daughters of the younger generation is striving for a qualification in the motor vehicle sector, are still currently conceivable. Furthermore, the perspective on future lifetime is interwoven here with past experiences that are presented as relevant—which already today has implications for the (non-)regulation of everyday time—and also with (anticipated) social developments which form the context for of decisions on the company's future. [15]

The 21-year-old woman of the younger generation (hereafter: daughter) completed an apprenticeship as a skilled employee in the administrative field after finishing secondary school and is still working in her training company. She may wish to change jobs; however, she cannot "yet" imagine working in the family business, i.e. she is keeping a final decision on this open. The interviewee argues defensively and vaguely at several points: Already when speaking of the past, i.e. finding a job after leaving school, she distances herself negatively from the family business, saying that it was out of the question for her to start there. After initially not knowing what to do, she then narrowed it down to the area of "office work". The present situation begins according to her with her next job after having completed her training; she is "now" still employed at the company where she trained and is considering changing jobs to increase her earnings. However, she still finds a short-term decision for the family business "strange". The more distant future is addressed by the fact that, apart from temporary help on Saturdays, she cannot "yet" imagine participating in the company "forever". She does not, however, address a point in time or the conditions for such a possible decision,

but the future remains open, both in terms of time that can be shaped and time that cannot be calculated. The statements are given a defensive connotation by the fact that the interviewee repeatedly distances herself from options that she "somehow" does not want or does not yet want (the interviewer's first question was generally "What is it like in your job?") and because the question of company succession within the family framework is obviously being discussed like an "elephant in the room". If she were a 21-year-old who did not come from a family with a company and had recently finished her training, it would probably require less legitimation not to formulate concrete long-term career plans. [16]

Her father, for his part, also updates the time pressure of a decision in the interview. For one thing, he communicates via "indirect interaction", i.e. via the detour of presentation to the interviewers (see HIRSCHAUER, HOFFMANN & STANGE, 2015 in the context of couple interviews) and by using impersonal expressions such as "one" or "someone" (e.g.: "Of course it would be nice if someone were to join us, we're not getting any younger"). Secondly at one point he also directly addresses his daughter to make a decision: "Remember, you can't wait too long there either". The father mentions various time horizons for taking a break, starting from a general "not forever" to fifteen or even ten years (by then he, his wife and his sister will be in their early 60s and thus close to regular retirement age). Repeated references to how the middle generation is the aging (and the grandmother too, whose efficiency in the office is gradually declining) links the future lifetimes of all three generations in the sense that the life phases of the older generations influence biographical decisions taken by the younger generation in terms of timing and possibly content, and the younger generations are to a certain extent forced to deal with the dwindling lifetime of the oldest generation. [17]

In the interview, certain options are now repeatedly mentioned as being suboptimal, including (partial) sale of the company or letting family members without any expertise in the motor vehicle sector run the company, which would make them dependent on employees for expertise. Incidentally, these alternatives cannot be chosen at will either because, for example, current technological change requires foreseeable innovations, and a company with an "investment backlog" does not sell well (this aspect is an example of a link established in the interview between the family's time horizon and the pace of social change). In addition, care must be taken to ensure that qualified employees do not seek employment elsewhere if they consider their company's future to be uncertain. Finally, the continuity of the company depends on the health of the middle generation of managers. [18]

The family finds itself in a dilemma regarding the problem of succession, which it believes it shares with many self-employed people in its circle of acquaintances: family succession would be desirable—not least in order to secure the status of both the middle and the younger generation. However, there is a central difference to the previous generational transition: according to generally accepted values (and additionally against the background of their own biographical experiences) it is no longer considered appropriate to prescribe a career path for

the younger generation, but rather—and here the options and impositions of individualisation processes are discernible—they should and must find their own way (see also STAMM, 2013). The father emphatically underlines that the children should make their own decisions (and at a point that illustrates his ambivalence, he also concedes what a burden and responsibility would be involved in taking them on in the company). [19]

Nevertheless, an almost ideal alternative emerges, and this is communicatively expressed in the interview—perhaps here for the first time explicitly, albeit jokingly. The daughter repeats that she cannot yet imagine joining the family business, at least not alone. One intra-family option could be a cooperation with the younger sister, who is considered more manually dexterous, but who currently ("still") rejects this idea as she approaches the end of her school days. The following course of conversation now emerges:

"Father: Then one would have to bring a partner somehow.

Daughter: Right, right.

Mother: You have to meet one.

Daughter: I'd have to get to know somebody, who would then be so...

Mother: I nearly said 'job ad'" [20]

In this implied vision of a (suitably qualified) intimate partner who, together with the daughter, continues the company, the business would remain in the family. Both the middle and the youngest generation would improve their chances for maintaining their status, the family would not be dependent on external parties but would still have someone who knew their way around the motor vehicle sector. Furthermore, the daughter could pursue her professional preference for office work without having to prove her leadership qualities on her own (she would thus continue her parents' traditional division of labour), and the sister would be relieved of the question of joining the business—an ideal solution in this sense with the only disadvantage that it is not controllable and is normatively problematic. Nevertheless, in the interview the opportunity is taken to jokingly point this out to the daughter. It is striking that she herself twice agrees with the idea of a "suitable" partner or son-in-law. Within the context of an all-round postponement of a decision on future planning, the shared wish may be expressed that this vision of the future could be realised. For the future prospects of the family as a collective, this means being able to endure the previously discussed uncertainty about the future and lack of planning in current everyday life as long as the vision of a family succession (involving the sisters or one daughter with a partner) still seems possible. Nevertheless, time to realise this alternative is inevitably running out. Incidentally, the discussion in no way addresses the fact that a decision by the daughter against entering the family business could well mean downward social mobility for her. If, in the long run, one partner does not improve the household income, employment as a skilled administrative employee may not guarantee the income and at least not the professional prestige of a medium-sized entrepreneur. [21]

The case study clearly shows how plans for future continuities or discontinuities are not only represented by the break in company succession, leading to it staying within the family or being sold, but are also negotiated in the interview as an interactive situation itself: On the one hand, perceived time pressure is communicated—directly and indirectly—and on the other hand, the negotiation of enduring (provisionally and possibly defensively) the situation where the future of the company is undecided is also expressed. Although the interview may act as a kind of catalyst to explicate certain arguments, it is clear that this topic is also highly relevant to the family outside the interview situation, has already been discussed previously and is perceived as being subject to a certain time pressure. Because of the family business, decisions that are made or not made not only have status-relevant consequences for individual family members, but also for all family members in the different generations. [22]

4. Family Interviews as a Database for Analyses in the Sociology of Time

If written autobiographical documents are not available, interviews are usually the method of choice for biographical research because, among other things, the structuration and experience of time can be determined explicitly from the perspective of the interviewees. What are the advantages and disadvantages of interviews with several family members compared to individual interviews on the one hand and, on the other hand, compared to data collection methods that do not primarily aim at verbal data—especially if the analytical interest is directed towards sociological questions of time? In the case study, sociological aspects of time were initially seen in the context of biographical questions about family history (and in the interview references to historical time and changing time norms were made relevant).⁹ [23]

Family interviews are a rather rarely used instrument in social research (PRZYBORSKI & WOHLRAB-SAHR, 2009, p.122; research examples can be found in WOHLRAB-SAHR, KARSTEIN & SCHMIDT-LUX, 2009 or for family interviews oriented towards group discussion HAAG, 2018).¹⁰ On the one hand, they contain elements of biographical (individual) interviews (FUCHS-HEINRITZ, 2009; KRUSE, 2014), and on the other hand those of group discussions (e.g. BOHNSACK, PRZYBORSKI & SCHÄFFER, 2010). In comparison to group discussions, however, the telling of family history is clearly in the foreground; in addition, the interviewers do not primarily have a moderating function (or at most in specific phases of the conversation). In comparison to the individual interview, the participants communicate and stage themselves in their respective family roles and as a family vis-à-vis the interviewers. Thus, in this performative act, presentation of self and at the same time collective community building become

9 This understanding of biographies as an interface between social developments and life history processes contradicts the assumption of BERTAUX (2018 [2016], p.5) that (also) German social scientists in particular would focus on subjective interpretations and not on the social world "out there".

10 Couple interviews are somewhat more frequent (e.g. BEHNKE & MEUSER, 2013; WIMBAUER & MOTAKEF, 2017). These often focus on gender dimensions, while family interviews also reveal generational aspects.

possible (AUDEHM & ZIRFAS, 2001, HILDENBRAND, 2005; HILDENBRAND & JAHN, 1988). [24]

With regard to the sociological dimensions of time, two advantages of the family interview compared to the individual interview can be emphasised: There is a reciprocal relationship between the family members present that cannot be achieved in this way through individual interviews: additions, responses or different perspectives relate not only to the factual level, but also to the time level. In the case study, for example, it became apparent how "early on" (measured in terms of the life phase that was the current topic, but also at the time point during the interview) the son becomes involved in the telling of his parents' life story. With his perspective on this phase of the family history, which can be distinguished from that of his mother, he thus claims the right to interpret the structuring of time. [25]

A construction of family time takes place *in situ* that goes beyond the mutual references to the other family members. If the interview is interpreted, as described, as an interaction situation, observation data are obtained from the family conversation. This already begins with how extensively someone talks (about him-/herself), when the others should also "get a turn" or have already set standards. The above-mentioned construction of a shared perspective for the future, including its degree of vagueness or concreteness, is another example of this. In this respect, it is also a question of whether individual family members' time horizons are integrated into a collective representation (e.g. of continuities) or whether they are in the foreground as individual perspectives (with, for example, different fractures or ranges). [26]

However, like any instrument, the family interview has its limitations compared to the individual interview. Again, with reference to temporal dimensions in particular, this means: In the one-on-one interview, respondents may talk about themselves in more detail, and may also freely express criticism and differing opinions compared to other family members, while in the family interview conflicts may tend to go unmentioned. This also applies to the individual construction of time in narratives (e.g. the choice of sequences). In the case study, a one-on-one interview with the youngest participant provided deeper insight into her future plans, which (despite her reaction to the suggestion of a suitable son-in-law) may be less in line with family plans than she implied, via indecision, in the family interview.¹¹ Thus, if a (more or less closed) collective family history is usually presented in the family interview, several individual interviews with family members make it possible to compare individual constructions of processes in their respective time horizons. [27]

It remains controversial whether the constraints of narration (KALLMEYER & SCHÜTZE, 1977, p.162; the constraints of detailing, form closure and condensation) are applied in family interviews to the same extent as in individual

¹¹ A longitudinal perspective would also be interesting here, e.g. by conducting this interview two years after the family interview, which, however, would also mean a blending of the lines of comparison of different perspectives and different points in time.

interviews (PRZYBORSKI & WOHLRAB-SAHR, 2009, p.130; WIMBAUER & MOTAKEF, 2017, p.106). In a conversation involving several family members, it may be easier to avoid these constraints by referring to other participants, possibly being interrupted by them, not continuing narrative lines that have already been started, etc. There are also examples of this in the interaction of one individual with the interviewer, but such possibilities multiply in a conversation with four or more people. This can affect the temporality of the narrative (e.g. the sketching of chronological lines), but also which times the story relates or tells about. In the case study, for example, the oldest participant tells little about her personal biography (which becomes plausible when focusing on the company). [28]

These verbal data, which in a biographical context express the subjective interpretations of the experience and its context, are thus already differentiated in themselves, e.g. through individual interviews, family interviews or the associated annotated compilation of genograms.¹² At the same time, however, their validity for some contemporary sociological questions—especially for the investigation of family biographies with regard to status reproduction—is limited, for example if it is a question of (not always reflected) handling time in complex situations. For this reason, verbal data can be usefully supplemented by other data (see, for example, on linking to interaction data outside the interview KÖTTIG, 2018, as an example WITTE & ROSENTHAL, 2007; on linking to ethnographic observations PAPE, 2018). In addition, multi- or mixed-methods approaches (BURZAN, 2016; ALBER, GRIESE & SCHIEBEL, 2018) can often be usefully applied here, although a large number of data collection procedures per person (group) presupposes a high degree of willingness to cooperate on the part of the participants. With recourse to ELIAS' (1988 [1984]) plea for paying attention to the handling of time, "to time" in action contexts can thus be empirically recorded beyond interviews, e.g. how time is coordinated in more or less hierarchical situations in the short or long term, or how time management (e.g. planning a family celebration) takes place. Data for the analysis of such phenomena can then be observation data (field protocols, video recordings) or documents (e.g. family calendars and messages sent to each other in private life or work schedules and strategy papers in family businesses). [29]

Non-verbal data on temporal phenomena thus have two advantages over data obtained from interviews: On the one hand, time can be recorded in more complex situations (e.g. everyday life) or specific processes that interviewees may report selectively or abstractly. On the other hand, for the verbalisation of everyday time in particular, implicit knowledge is usually more likely to be called up (see on time cultures, for example LEVINE, 1999 [1997]), which is accompanied by corresponding difficulties and possibly leads to methodological problems such as socially desirable explanations or ex-post rationalisation. In the family business, for example, the case study could also be used to observe how time is coordinated or how self-determined and flexible the grandmother is in either working in the company or—more or less spontaneously—taking a break.

¹² Beyond the research context presented here, further verbal and also written information could be considered, e.g. filling in network cards or—especially with regard to the dimension of everyday time—keeping diaries (KUNZ, 2018).

However, general disadvantages of observation must also be considered here: for example, if ethnography over a longer period of time is out of the question, the researcher must select in advance which situations to observe (in consultation with the observed persons). There is also a spatial and temporal selectivity in video recordings (assuming that the research participants can decide when to turn off the camera or act outside the camera's field of vision). For research on families, an additional factor for each data collection procedure is that the family members decide who they regard as belonging to the family and thus whom they inform, e.g. about an interview appointment or invite to family meetings—which can have a selective character, for example, in the case of major disputes or after divorces (HENSE & SCHAD, 2019). The person contacted to initiate the interview usually exerts a special influence over the interviews. Although this selection is also meaningful in the sense of "doing family" (JURCZYK et al., 2010), it is sometimes difficult for researchers to find out anything about the fathers, daughters etc. who are not present or even to find out which processes led to them being them being ignored or excluded. The question to be asked, again for observational data, is to what extent this can be used to shed light on questions such as those concerning status reproduction, i.e. those that describe a longer process. Without long-term observations, approximations via detours are necessary here, or data that are particularly meaningful in the multi-method link. For example, one could investigate how (reported) advance planning (as a time-related element of a mentality that may be passed on to the next generation) is lived in specific situations, for example, when future investments for the family business are discussed at a family meeting. This is not so much a matter of considering one type of data as more valid than another, but rather of comparing which staging (in the sense of GOFFMAN, 1969 [1959]) is in the focus in which situations. [30]

5. Conclusion

In the sociology of time, we are dealing with "challenging times", also in the sense of the empirical comprehensibility of time. As has been shown with the case study and through the methodological considerations, time as a cross-cutting issue¹³ represents a complex interface of diverse as well as diversely linked phenomena. For example, macro-micro-connections are addressed as well as changing perspectives of varying scope on the past and future, and processes of change in general, as well as clashing perspectives on time held by different actors. This is accompanied by methodological opportunities and challenges in a broader sense, which concern, among other things, 1. the choice of empirical methods and, if necessary, their combination, and 2. the conceptual connection between time and (in the example presented here), for example, biographical research:

1. With regard to our research interest in status reproduction in families, it became apparent that several methods of data collection (verbal and non-verbal; directed at individuals, interactions and institutional time orders) and data collection at several points in time (or a longer-term ethnographic

¹³ The situation is similar with space, see on the biographical context of both e.g. WEIDENHAUS (2017).

approach) would be desirable in order to capture this complexity. In addition to the question of whether this diversity of methods and data appears practicable both for the research participants and for the researchers, who are increasingly oriented towards precisely timed research projects—here, once again, a time category becomes relevant—this also poses challenges for interpretation. It would be suboptimal to create a complementary sequence of separate data analyses that would only establish a few references to each other. Similarly, the notion that the data could—without difficulty—be used for mutual validation would not be very credible. The ideal, but perhaps a little naive notion would be that all data could be integrated into a coherent overall interpretation. A more realistic approach, however, would be to first reflect on the comparability of the various approaches¹⁴ in order to draw conclusions as to the extent to which different methods can be used to investigate the respective object of inquiry in greater or lesser depth or in greater breadth. To what extent and in which constellations of conditions intergenerational status continuity and its mode of production can be established for families and the various family members can then be assembled into a complex picture from various perspectives and for different types of situations and dimensions. However, the challenges of this multi-method reflection of comparability together with differentiated temporal dimensions should not be underestimated.

2. However, there is a chance to further hone concepts addressing temporality at the interface of sociology of time and biographical research—for example, with regard to the connection between the activity of constructing time in a specific situation (here: in family interviews) and the result of constructed time (e.g. as discontinuous/continuous, autonomous/heteronomous, forming/waiting). The case study has indicated that insights can be gained from this connection for specific questions—in this case, those of intergenerational status reproduction. Similar systematic connections of concepts addressing temporality are also conceivable for the linking of categories from the sociology of time with other approaches, for example to time in organisations or in networks. [31]

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14 This is all the more true when methodological "boundaries", e.g. between qualitative and quantitative research principles, are crossed.

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