FQS FORUM: QUALITATIVE SOCIAL RESEARCH SOZIALFORSCHUNG

Volume 24, No. 3, Art. 3
September 2023

Between *Life Story* and *Life History*. Contextualizing Biographical Narrative Interviews With Questionnaire Data

Piotr Filipkowski & Danuta Życzyńska-Ciołek

Key words: biographical method; case study; reusing survey data; mixed methods; data integration; research styles

Abstract: Within sociology, there are many different research styles, and a multiplicity of methods. Opinions are divided on feasibility, sensibility, and the appropriate ways of combining them, especially at the level of data rather than conclusions. As for contemporary biographical methods, some of exponents (e.g., ROSENTHAL, 1995) have postulated that an interviewee's *life story* should be compared to the actual course of the life in question (i.e., the *life history*). Researchers, however, rarely have access to data beyond narratives.

In this article, we look to outline intra-sociological splits in order to provide background and context for two biographical narrative interviews which have been conducted with long-standing respondents to the Polish Panel Survey (POLPAN). These interviews, in turn, will be juxtaposed with the data derived from survey interviews, a valuable source of additional information about the interviewees, at least in some areas. Finally, we reflect on the potential benefits of such comparisons not only for proponents of the biographical methods but also for survey researchers. We draw on some of our methodological and theoretical considerations previously published in Polish.

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Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research (ISSN 1438-5627)

> Motto: "Finally, every one of us constitutes the most private experience for ourselves. When the spiritual content of anyone of us is to be used as comparative material for research into a broader or general phenomenon, we feel somehow degraded. Thus contrived: one is always unique to oneself, albeit the questionnaires and statistics tell us a different thing. I presume both of us, me and you, can feel this uniqueness of our existence, though we do know there are millions of people living together with us, with the other millions of years having passed before we came over. In point of fact, however, there is no reason for us to be ashamed of such a feeling. True, the feeling is irrational but has the salutary and indispensable illusion to it, one without which you would not figure out an individuality. It is dreadful to think what we would have been if everybody considered themselves mean or average" (BRANDYS, 1989 [1977], p.9)[1].

1. Introduction: From Sociological Plenty to Biographical Unity

In "The Sociological Imagination" (1959), MILLS argued for a comprehensive research of history, social structure and histories of individual lives (MUCHA, 1985). The popularity of the book did not, however, imply a broader implementation of what it postulated. Below, we endeavor to take up the mantle with respect to specific research material—namely, two case studies in the form of narrative-biographical interviews with individuals who are long-standing respondents to the Polish Panel Survey (POLPAN). We begin by outlining intra-sociological splits, followed by a comparison between the biographical data derived from various research contexts (and styles), and finally, we indicate the potential benefits of such comparisons. A portion of the theoretical and methodological reflections, included in this article, were previously published in Polish (FILIPKOWSKI & ŻYCZYŃSKA-CIOŁEK, 2016). [1]

Sociology can be categorized in various ways. There is a sociology of labor, family, urban/rural communities, and sport; there is sociology of science, medicine, language, education, etc.[2]. Looking through the websites of scientific institutes and sociological institutions, or the agendas of national conventions of sociological societies, one may infer that such thematic classification represents institutional arrangement. If, however, the measure of importance is not the degree of institutional ring-fencing or the social importance of the subject of research (group, phenomenon, social space, etc.); it is rather the emotions and disputes within the sociology milieu where one comes across completely different divisions. Particularly apparent is the disunity, referred to as paradigmatic, identifiable as *positivist* versus *antipositivist* sociology, appearing as such in a variety of concretizations and determinations. The division into *quantitative* and *qualitative* sociology, though not identical with the aforementioned one, has probably gained the greatest popularity (see for example, KNAPPERTSBUSCH, 2023; SCHWEMMER & WIECZOREK, 2020; TRAAG & FRANSSEN, 2016). [2]

1 This translation has been done for this particular article.

2 See, e.g., the research committees of the International Sociological Association, https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/research-networks/research-committees [Accessed: May 15, 2023].

Polish sociologist SOJAK (2013) proposed another categorization of the sociological area, appearing as supplementary remarks to his considerations on the sociological struggle, particularly with regard to the increasing complexity of social realities and sociology itself. His categorization is worth highlighting in view of the matters discussed in this essay. Inspired by the notions of "*thought styles"* and "*thought collectives"* proposed by FLECK (1979 [1935], p.9), SOJAK (2013, p.61) discerned between three, relatively disjunctive, styles pertaining to sociological research and knowledge described respectively as "tekstualny" [textual], "surveyowy" [survey-based], and "tożsamościowy" [identity-related]. [3]

According to SOJAK, the *textual* style is specific for those who pursue sociological theory, or (more broadly) sociological theorizing in an unrestrained, essayistic form, where empiricism is of secondary importance. It often appears in the form of anecdotes, free insertions and references to common experience (so-called anecdotal evidence). What matters most here is contact with other texts, and the incessant switchovers and tension surges between them. Such a style is driven by the logic of forgetting (as opposed to problem-solving), whereby concepts grow worn-and-torn and cease to exist, whilst other concepts come in lieu of them; otherwise, certain old concepts find themselves being reinstated. Methodology here is at best nominal. [4]

The second, *survey-based* style is characterized, in SOJAK's opinion, by a limited theoretical horizon and a narrow subject matter, which is compensated for by empirical meticulousness, precision of measurement, the reliability of the data and analytical results derived from such data. The point is, though, that the tangle of such detailed resources makes it difficult to find the leading thread. What one gets is a mosaic of reliable research that is not quite synthesizable, given the theoretical deficits and fragmentation of the subject. Yet, SOJAK overlooked what we believe is an important characteristic of the survey-based style: it is the only one that allows researchers to formulate empirical (rather than only theoretical, speculative, commonsensical) utterances concerning—as it is often said—*the entire society*, in a well-grounded and verified manner. There clearly must be a consensus that there is a need for such knowledge. What happens, or does not happen, with/to it on further stages is a different story. [5]

The third style is the one referred to by SOJAK as *identity-related, which addresses both* the researcher and the discipline. Rather than knowledge for its own sake, central to an *identity-related* style is the transformation of the social world by the implementation of various emancipation projects, or at least their potential initiation via the critical descriptions of reality. According to SOJAK, this type of sociology comes to prominence in research fields such as gender studies, queer/LGBT studies, and analyses of new social movements, ethnic minorities, religious movements, etc. A number of research projects, situated at the borderline of sociology, anthropology, and history, and collectively labeled as oral history (THOMPSON & BORNAT, 2017), can be added to this list. The foundation call of this research tradition—"Give voice to the voiceless!" (criticized by some authors for consolidating dominance over the reduction of inequality, e.g.,

ASHBY, 2011; DUFFY & BAILEY, 2010)—has led to a style which can be described as identity-related. [6]

SOJAK's division is distinctive and suggestive, even if unjust, pungent or incomplete in details. One can ask, for instance, where to place a sociological biographical research within it. It is empirical and definitively not survey-based but tends to avoid emancipative rhetoric. Is it, therefore, part of the identity-related style, or perhaps creates some style of its own; a niche, though increasingly a popular (sub)style? Still, the imperfect and overstated categorization in question highlights a trait of the styles that is important to the further course of our analysis —namely, their severability and, so to put it, intransitivity. [7]

This is particularly true for the relationship between survey-based and identity-related style. While both refer, at least ritually, to (their related) theories and to their respective textual allies, and theorize on their own account, their permeation or penetration on the grassroots level, that is, closer to the investigated reality and exploratory empiricism, is a rather sporadic phenomenon. There obviously are research projects with a qualitative section coinciding with a quantitative section; however, such concomitance, having been known in empirical sociology at least since the Chicago School, does not by itself predestine actual flows of knowledge between such sections, nor does it suggest any integration on the research data level. It also fails to settle the degree of methodological reflection imbued with the aforesaid concomitance. This is owed not merely to a lack of good will in terms of cooperation, or a lack of knowledge with regard to what colleagues practicing a sociology in a different style may be doing but there are real difficulties behind such integration as well (COXON, 2005; KNAPPERTSBUSCH, SCHREIER, BURZAN & FIELDING, 2023). This is well reflected in the discussion reported by the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* (issued by SAGE Publications) and inspired by a report on the future of mixed methods, published in 2016 by the Mixed Methods International Research Association (MERTENS et al., 2016). Even a superficial review of the major utterances shows the scale of the difficulties occurring, if there are troubles with resolving or settling the very basic issues. For instance, CRESWELL (2016) stated that the *mixed methods approach*, viewed against the other research/investigation strategies, involves the combining of data, rather than merely the publishing of juxtaposed analyses based upon varied types of data correspondent with the same or a similar topic:

> "Finally, there is one topic that I would have liked to learn more about—integration. It seems to me that integration is the distinguishing factor that separates mixed methods from all other methodologies. It does need to be further explored, as mentioned in the Task Force Report. All too often I have been privy to large mixed methods projects where the investigators believe that mixed methods is simply gathering quantitative and qualitative data. Moreover, for some, they have not even thought about what constitutes qualitative data and quantitative data (arguably, the distinctions are not always clear). This distinction is a prerequisite to bringing together or integrating the data. ... Mixed methods research involves more than simply

> collecting two types of data: It also involves linking or mixing the two databases" (p.218). [8]

Indeed, as SCHOONENBOOM (2023) has shown, the distinction between qualitative and quantitative data is far from clear. Definitions of both kinds of data should be reviewed and rethought. If such basics have to be restated, these being the constitutive issues—it might mean that the bar has been set very high indeed. It is a bar which we ourselves have chosen not to hurdle as our designs are much more modest. We have so far outlined a general map of the sociological difficulties with integration, casting our concrete research case against its backdrop. This is, namely, an instance of the survey-based style confronted with the biographical approach. The confrontation takes place on the level of individual *data* and the various ways of reading and interpreting them. Specific to our comparison is the fact that these *data* and the research styles built thereupon concern exactly the same persons. [9]

2. Biographical Interviews with POLPAN Survey Respondents

The basis for our comparison is two biographical interviews held with respondents to the POLPAN survey. POLPAN is a panel survey of social structure that has been carried out for more than thirty years at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences (IFiS PAN), based on the individual questionnaire-supported interviewing method. Commenced in 1988, the survey was resumed six times afterwards, in the years 1993, 1998, 2003, 2008, 2013, and 2018, with the same individuals. (A subsequent wave of the survey was in preparation at the time of this article's submission). The respondents selected for the initial study, in 1987, were part of a random sample that was representative for the population of Poland, aged 21 to 65. New respondents representing the youngest age category have been attached since 1998 (TOMESCU-DUBROW et al., 2021). [10]

In the years 2014-2019, our team conducted forty-nine autobiographical interviews (SCHÜTZE, 1983) with selected respondents to the POLPAN survey. Our assumption was to complement the survey data gathered from 1988 onwards with narratives of the oldest generation—those aged seventy-two or more. For the biographical project, we sought to select highly diverse interviewees in terms of their education and socio-occupational categories (at the time of the interview or in the past), region and size of the place of residence. The vast majority of the interviews have been archived at the Qualitative Data Archive of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences (FILIPKOWSKI, 2021; ŻYCZYŃSKA-CIOŁEK, 2021). [11]

Most of the interviews (42) were conducted between 2014 and 2016, that is, between the sixth and seventh wave of the POLPAN survey. The individuals interviewed by our team at that stage of the biographical project had participated in all of the six previous waves of the POLPAN survey. The reader may doubt whether the premise of the biographical interview method was met, i.e., whether the biographical narratives were impromptu, since the respondents had answered

questions about their lives many times before participating in the biographical interview. In our view, answering close-ended questions that deal with issues of relevance to the researchers' interests cannot be treated as biographical narrative training. It can, however, be a source of certain expectations on the part of interviewees, e.g., that the biographical researchers will ask specific questions, or that certain areas of the interviewee's life (e.g., work) will be more interesting to them than others. We tried to deal with these expectations in various ways when conducting the interviews. [12]

When starting the biographical interviews and, subsequently, doing their analysis, we were aware of what the interviewees' replies had been over the years. Herein, we approach this knowledge as being background information for a biographical story. We try to complement—or, at times, confront—the life stories with or against the corresponding life histories reflected in the POLPAN data resource. Biographical narrative always remains in the foreground. However, on analyzing the selected interviews, we made certain observations that, in our opinion, may be supportive in interpreting the questionnaire data regarding the concrete persons. The question remains open whether, and in what ways, the conclusions from such comparisons made on an individual level may be of use for the POLPAN as a whole. Worth emphasizing at this point are the differences between the two sources of knowledge we used—and such dissimilarities cannot be reduced to the fact that a portion of the *data* had been expressed in numerical terms and another portion in words. Below we group key differences into four main categories. They refer to 1. role of individual biography within the research, 2. thematic focus of the interviews vs. the survey study, 3. time perspective, 4. language and communication aspects of the research. [13]

Firstly, the biographical approach in sociology is focused on analyzing biographies and narratives of individual persons. Many recognized proponents of this approach have authored studies in which they analyzed single biographies (RIEMANN & SCHÜTZE, 1991; ROSENTHAL, 2002; SCHÜTZE, 2016). ZNANIECKI (1968 [1934]), regarded as the precursor of biographical research in sociology (in general) and of analysis of individual biographies (in particular), is not out of place here; indeed, references to ZNANIECKI can be found in the aforementioned studies. However, biographical scholars mostly attempt to generalize the knowledge taken from a dozen or several dozen interviews, believing that this is a way to say something more than they would have been able to state based on one interview. Yet, even then, one does not lose sight of the individual. The desired and declared direction of analysis is usually inductive. In this regard, ZNANIECKI and his analytic induction once again prove to be useful. In turn, a questionnaire-supported survey into social structure is carried out, in principle, in a nomothetic, rather than idiographic, way. To analyze the biography of an individual is not the actual purpose of such a survey; reconstructing such a biography is but a means to an end in terms of detecting/identifying the regularities relating to broader social groups (classes, socio-occupational categories, etc.). It is, so to say, a "non-narrative biography," very different from what we know from common daily experience, biographical literature or biographical methods in sociology. It contains no biographical story. [14]

In quantitative research such as POLPAN, once the relevant information is gathered from individuals, the individual level is not resumed (unless to check for the correctness of the fragmentary data acquired). The conclusions produced resulting from statistical analyses are not compared later to the individual situations of the respondents, the underlying assumption being that the models constructed are probabilistic and the gained coefficients do not have to correspond with any specific individual case. Whilst POLPAN *is* a panel survey and researchers follow the respondents over time for many years, it is not expected to mirror the biography of an individual in a similar way as such individual may have reported during the biographical interview. An expectation like this would be contrary to the assumptions and purposes of POLPAN, as would be the expectation that a set of a dozen/several dozen biographical interviews could become the basis for drawing legitimate conclusions about a large (e.g., nationwide) population. Instead, we attempt to approach each source of data in line with its properties. [15]

Secondly, in proceeding with our biographical interviews, we did not assume that they would be availed at a later stage for the purposes of elaborating some specified topic—such as, for instance, the experience of war or life in Poland under communism. The main incentive behind this biographical project was to find people from the random sample—those who originally had become respondents by chance (rather than having been selected by way of family/professional/comradely relationships or contacts, or through the snowball method—the sampling methods often practiced by biographical sociologists)—and to ask them to tell us their *entire life (hi)story*, their *whole biography*. [16]

The inquirer would thereby deal with a life as a source of facts, opinions, views, attitudes, beliefs or convictions, preferences, strivings and endeavors, and so on. What we pursued was for the interviewees to be unrestrained in selecting the experiences they would be willing to report to us as part of a flashback insight into their own lives (to the extent that we did not lead them with our questions; nor did the context of the POLPAN-associated study take precedence). They were encouraged to tell us their life experiences in their own words and to interpret them by themselves; to imbue them with meaning and importance within the perspective of their life as a whole. Bearing in mind that a biographical story is (also) a form of personal self-creation, we, however, made the assumption that the *experiences* and *lived situations* recounted in the interviews were of significance to those who talked to us. [17]

In spite of the broad scope of issues that POLPAN embraces, the authors of the study focused on the happenings/occurrences and traits/characteristics that allowed for placing the individuals within a social structure; and for classifying them with a specified category or group. Some experiences in a person's life are perceived by the interviewees as crucial, and are associated with strong emotional feelings. These may be of no relevance for an investigation of the social structure. In POLPAN—for understandable scientific reasons— people's life histories are instrumentalized. And, vice versa, certain topics covered in the questionnaires, and which are of importance to the survey researchers, are

marginal to, or completely absent in, the biographical stories. Consequently, the data from both these *biographical* sources do not communicate the same message. In any case, our reading of them is different. The data acquired through the questionnaire imply a depersonalized (de-individualized) structural and macro-process analysis, whereas the narrative data are used to recognize, name, sort and (re)arrange the biographical processes and identity (re)constructions (see for example FISCHER-ROSENTHAL & ROSENTHAL, 1997). [18]

Thirdly, biographical interviews and POLPAN data differ in their temporal perspective. For biographical narrative, it is a retrospective view. With the POLPAN questionnaire method, the issue is somewhat more complex. The interviewers visited the respondents for the first time in 1988; the queries concerned the respondents' current life situation and their views, and, to a narrower extent, their families of origin. They also aimed at gaining a picture of the respondents' employment situation, asking first to specify their current job, the previous one and, lastly, their first employment. With the numerous changes in their ways of making money, it might have happened that a part of the older respondents' careers was not reflected in the questionnaire survey. Each of the following waves had questions about the respondents' current situation. Apart from this, the inquirers endeavored to reconstruct the participants' professional history related to the period since the preceding survey. For the purposes of verification, some of the previously answered questions were asked again. As a result, what we have received is a set of pieces of information recorded at several points in time, part of them concerning the events/occurrences and opinions of relevance at the moment of survey whilst others have been reconstructed retrospectively. [19]

Fourthly, a biographical interview reveals the subjective vision of individuals' lives and their social environment as expressed in their natural language or a language that is only slightly modified (at least, compared to the questionnaire) by the questions they are being asked. Obviously, it is not their private language (which would have not been possible in such a situation) but the way they communicate on a regular, daily basis—in other words, their idiolect. In turn, when answering questionnaire questions, the respondent is forced to frequently assume a position with respect to the categories imposed by the inquiry which are not always expressed in a language that he or she would comprehend. It is at times difficult to combine the data gained from such a variety of sources—particularly with regards to opinions, as opposed to information of a more factual nature. We are not always certain how significant the replies given in the questionnaire really are, to what degree they correspond with the established conviction of the respondent, or represent an attempt at dealing with a difficult or uninteresting task in a way that somehow satisfies the interviewer (see for example, KROSNICK & PRESSER, 2010). [20]

In the following section of the article, we shall present two biographical narrative interviews and compare them with selected information from the POLPAN survey regarding the same individuals. We wish to emphasize that our aim is not to

analyze biographical interviews by any of the methods adopted in this approach. Instead, for both persons, we proceeded in the following way: first, we summarized the biographical narrative; next we briefly discussed the interview, emphasizing its most important threads, referring to the circumstances of the interview and introducing elements of interpretation; and then we searched the POLPAN questionnaire data for a confirmation and complementation of the basic factual information presented by the narrator in the biographical interview. Finally we reviewed such information from the POLPAN survey that may complement or extend our knowledge of the events and experiences we considered the most important and which the narrators reported in the biographical interview. The procedure described here allows for a detailed empirical analysis of two types of data on the same person. [21]

A few remarks before we proceed to the next section. The search of POLPAN data for a reflection of the factual information included in the biographical interview was partially used for purposes of verification. Such an idea may meet with resistance as qualitative researchers oftentimes perceive the relation(ship) with—as they sometimes say—*their* interviewees in an idealized way, as one that is always close and permeated with mutual trust and respect. In other words, it is seen as an approach that denies the need for check up. This being the case, there is no point verifying because *narrative takes precedence*. On the other hand, however, the actual incentives behind offering to be interviewed in respect to biography tend to vary. In some cases, it has to do with a desire for self-promotion. Even those interlocutors who try to make a story of their life with all its pros and cons may feel astonished by some of the interviewer's questions and are thus unprepared to give a sincere answer. Apart from the possibility of the investigator being deliberately misled, human memory is liable to fail. What is more, narrative has its own laws, and interaction with another person implies concealment or the exaggeration of certain threads or motifs, for psychological reasons, with the resulting distortions (or "Ausblendung" [fadeouts], to borrow the term from SCHÜTZE, 1992, p.155). Hence, some of the known and recognized exponents of the contemporary biographical method—like ROSENTHAL (1995)—have postulated that the life story be compared against the actual course of the life concerned—i.e., the life history. With all the difficulty in defining the difference, one can identify this issue as being central in the research approach under discussion. In fact, the issue is solved in a variety of ways, usually by means of typologization and the mutual comparison of various narrative sequences within a biographical interview. Why? Such a solution is followed not only because of one's inclination for narrative analysis but also because of the limited availability of alternative sources concerning the narrators. [22]

Our biographical project is peculiar primarily because of the fact that we had access to certain other sources of knowledge on the interviewees (*sources of knowledge*, not *facts*, since our comparison of an interview with a dataset is not based on the conviction that any of these sources is free of deformation). However, confluence (between the waves of questionnaire survey, and between the questionnaire survey and biographical interview) increases the plausibility that the events or happenings referred to in the conversation really occurred in the

circumstances and at the time reported, or that both methods evoke the same or similar reminiscences. What is more, the details concerning the interlocutors' life situation in the late 1980s, or their views in those years, may have been more reliably recorded in a questionnaire carried out in that very period, compared to a retrospective biographical story taken down twenty-five years "after the fact," so to speak. A biographical story clearly loses nothing of its importance if it ignores the facts. However, once these differences have been noted, one can consider the reason behind their appearance, which may, in turn, cast a new light on both —the life history and life story of the person. No less important is the verification that does the opposite, that is, shows how certain events/occurrences and experiences, recorded some time ago in the questionnaire as important ones, have lost their acuity, altered their meanings, or completely disappeared from the biographical flashback. What remain are a few major ones that may (which does happen) become self-interpreting keys to the person's entire life. This is explainable not only in terms of defective and variable human memory but also in terms of reoriented biographical perspective. Simply speaking, from the distance of years and from the standpoint of a person's life coming to an end, his or her own biography looks different than seen at a closer distance. And, it gains the dimension of fate or destiny—a train of irreversible occurrences. [23]

3. Two Autobiographical Narratives and Fourteen (Background) Questionnaires

3.1 Narrative 1: Lucjan[3]

3.1.1 Interview summary

Lucjan told us that he was born in 1931 in Warsaw as the youngest of three siblings. Before World War II, his father had worked as a caretaker at one of the ministries, while his mother did not work professionally. In 1938, Lucjan started to attend school. When the war broke out, the family was evicted by the Nazis from their flat, which was located in a building of the ministry, and moved to other premises in Warsaw. According to the story, Lucjan was studying, but as school buildings were gradually seized by German troops, the teaching of lessons was moved to private flats, where they were conducted in cramped conditions. To support themselves during occupation, Lucjan's family traded groceries thanks to their connections with relatives who lived in the countryside, some 70 km from Warsaw. The narrator also mentioned that, on such occasions, he sometimes carried underground "newspapers" (illegal printouts produced in conspiracy). [24]

Lucjan's situation changed dramatically due to the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising. His parents, expecting this event, wanted to take the boy to the countryside, but he refused to go:

3 Names and certain details that would allow an easy identification of the persons interviewed have been changed.

> "A day before the Uprising broke out, my parents went to the country to collect provisions. Everyone was generally aware that the Uprising would break out. They wanted to take me, but I didn't want to go. I insisted that I was not going, etc." [25]

Lucjan further said that he stayed in Warsaw with his brother, who had been, however, detained for a week in another part of the city on the day of the outbreak of the Uprising but who returned home afterwards. On August 15, 1944, Lucjan, together with other residents, was expelled from his flat by the Nazis, the building shot upon ("cartridge cases were literally falling on my head") and then set on fire. Lucjan told us that, after that event, he was sent to an interim camp located in Pruszków near Warsaw, and then transported to Germany. There he worked in an armaments factory (only four hours per day, as he was underage). In mid-November 1944, he accompanied an older couple with whom he worked to a camp located in another town. There he was not assigned for work due to his young age. Around the middle of December, those workers who were ill were discharged home. The narrator also managed to obtain a discharge. He got to a village near Warsaw, where he reunited with his family. Regarding the period of the War, he also mentioned the heavy shellfire during the Red Army offensive in January 1945 and the German soldiers killing a Soviet lieutenant near his house. [26]

As Lucjan said, after the War his family returned to Warsaw, to their pre-war flat located in the ministry's building, but after three or four months they had to move, as the building had been commandeered by the Department of Public Security. The family moved to another, half ruined, building which was also situated on the premises of the ministry. Lucjan's father started to work in a construction enterprise (judging by the name, it was a pre-war cooperative transformed into a state-owned enterprise soon after the war). The narrator started to attend school. He graduated from high school as he told us in the interview: "I finished the mechanical high school." In 1949, he began working for a state-owned installation enterprise where he was employed until his retirement in 1990 or 1991. Lucjan stated that in 1952, he started his military service and was sent to a school for non-commissioned officers. Upon graduation, he was directed to a military road company, and there, invited by the quartermaster, he started to manage the quartermaster's office, which meant he had to join the Polish United Worker's Party (PZPR). [27]

When Lucjan was in the army, his parents were awarded a flat on N. street (it was "probably in 1953"). He said that after returning from the army, he moved back in with his parents and returned to his previous job. He met his future wife during a holiday trip and they got married in 1962. In that same year their daughter was born. In 1964, Lucjan moved to a flat on S. street along with his wife and child. [28]

The installation company where he worked changed its name and at some point, it also changed its business profile. The narrator did not tell us the year of that change, but one of the fragments of his story suggests that it was in 1960. Over the course of his career at the installation company, Lucjan changed his job

positions several times. He started as a "construction draughtsman" and later worked, among others, as a technician, senior technician, site foreman ("all the time in technical supervision"). Judging from the interview, the manager was an important and positive figure for the narrator. When he was promoted at the company, he always "dragged Lucjan along" with him. The company had an engineering and rationalization club which organized trips to communist countries. Lucjan traveled a lot, both within and outside the club. He also joined the Solidarity trade union. We do not know exactly when that was, but Lucjan told us that at the same time he remained a member of the PZPR. [29]

After retiring, Lucjan started to work part time at a private company. He was encouraged to do so by his colleague from the previous enterprise, who managed the company. He said, "she needed someone she could trust." The company was involved in the construction of heating and water supply networks. His job was to prepare tenders, and do cost estimates and quotations based on the documents received. He worked there for around ten years. [30]

The interview was conducted in the autumn of 2014, in Lucjan's apartment (newly bought), in Warsaw. Before the interview, the narrator explained that he had been persuaded to move by his daughter so that he would live closer to her. Lucjan told us in the interview, that his wife had died "two years ago." At the time of the interview, Lucjan's parents and also his siblings were deceased. [31]

3.1.2 Discussion of the narrative

When interpreting the course and contents of the narrative, we should mention that the interview with Lucjan was the first one in the biographical project. As a consequence, the situation was special both for Lucjan and the researchers. Lucjan had previously participated in the POLPAN survey six times, where he had only answered particular, close-ended questions. This time, he was asked to freely relate the (hi)story of his entire life. Also, we had been directed to Lucjan not by way of recommendation, as is often the case in qualitative research, but based on a specific set of demographic features recorded in the POLPAN data. Therefore, we knew nothing about the type of life story we would hear. Nor were we aware of Lucjan's narrative skills. That may have impacted the course of the interview. Lucjan gave relatively short and specific answers, focusing more on facts (dates, names, main events) than on experiences. This, in turn, led to us asking questions with the aim of facilitating a dialogue. However, the whole process was not short (it lasted for one hour and 40 minutes) and contained longer fragments of free narration. The longest fragments were those when Lucjan was telling us about the last period of World War II (the Warsaw Uprising, his forced labor, the Soviet offensive, and his return to Warsaw after the war). In our interpretation, the emotional burden of those experiences, which fell on him as a 13- or 14-year-old boy, remained something tangible and palpable. [32]

The interview also included a great deal of information about Lucjan's professional work. In our later practice within this particular biographical project, this was quite common in narratives given by men who had worked professionally

in areas other than agriculture. A stimulant could have been the previous experience of our interlocutors from their participation in the POLPAN questionnaire survey (which included extensive sections dedicated to work) and, in the case of Lucjan, the questions asked by us. [33]

In Lucjan's report, also a lot of information about daily life in the Polish People's Republic can be found. Some information includes amusing anecdotes, such as the story about his efforts to buy a car and about his subsequent travels with that car. Some memories refer to situations from his professional life which forced the narrator to get involved politically (or, at least, to declare his political allegiances). Lucjan presented himself as a person who is rather indifferent in terms of politics and who does not show any serious initiative in this respect. Also, in the final part of the interview, we noted the narrator focusing on private spheres. When asked about the values that drove him in his life, Lucjan replied that he would always "put the wages on the table" (meaning that he would give it to his wife/family), and then he emphasized the importance of family relationships in life. [34]

In our interpretation, a broader context for the fragments of the interview regarding certain events in his professional life, the reality of life in the Polish People's Republic, and his approach to the (changing) political reality could be the system transformation at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. We believe that this is what induced Lucjan to make cogent comparisons pertaining to the eras, and perhaps it sometimes also called upon him to explain to the much younger researchers the conditions that drove some of his decisions (such as his decision to join the PZPR). The comparisons that were particularly clear and expressed directly were those that referred to his work at a state-owned enterprise and his work for a private company after 1989. Below, we present a sample remark of the narrator about the atmosphere at his workplace. The initial part of the quotation refers to different (small) teams in which Lucjan worked at the state-owned enterprise during communism.

> "In such a small group, the conditions were really like in a family. One would go through fire and water for another. It was a completely different atmosphere. Because when I retired and then worked for ten more years, at a private company and part time. [...] You know, in those private companies, the atmosphere was totally different. Nobody trusted anybody, there were no friendships." [35]

When asked directly by the researcher, Lucjan assessed the changes brought about by the transformation as "mostly [...] beneficial for people." However, he criticized some changes in the labor market, i.e., the black "cash-in-hand" labor, after which people cannot receive pension benefits. [36]

3.1.3 Comparison and complementation of factual information

In this case, most of the information from the biographical interview proved consistent with the data included in the POLPAN questionnaires. Beginning with the simplest issue, i.e., the dates, the years for the births of Lucjan and his oldest sibling and the date when he took up his first job or entered the military service were consistent in both data sources. Other year dates (his wedding, his daughter's birth, the move to a separate flat after getting married, retirement, or the loss of his wife), were slightly off by 1-2 years. The POLPAN data confirmed the information about the number of Lucjan's siblings. They also complemented the details on his parents in a way that was consistent, or at least not contradictory to the biographical story. According to the questionnaire data, both his parents had basic education. Since the dependent interviewing method (JÄCKLE, 2009) is not used in the POLPAN survey, it sometimes happened that the information recorded in individual waves was different. For example, the work of the father when Lucjan was 14 years old was classified twice as belonging to the category of "manual workers in elementary occupations" and once as belonging to the category of "sales and service workers" (let us remember that Lucjan turned 14 during the war, when the permanent job of his father as a caretaker was replaced by temporary *ad hoc* jobs). [37]

The POLPAN questionnaire data delivered additional details about Lucjan's education: he first completed a lower-level vocational school and then a secondary vocational school specialized in "machinery production," where he obtained a matriculation certificate. His education was classified in the POLPAN survey as "secondary vocational education." [38]

Some inconsistencies as to facts occurred in the information on Lucjan's professional work. As arose from the interview, at a certain point (probably in 1960), the company where Lucjan worked changed its business profile. In the information contained in the questionnaire data, that fact was sometimes ignored (in such a case, the information indicated that Lucjan worked continuously from 1949 to the beginning of the 1990s), but in some waves of the survey, it was considered as the beginning of a new job (in line with a rule usually applied by POLPAN, according to which a new position or a new type of work performed at the same company was classified as a new job). In addition, the questionnaire data did not reflect the frequent changes in position which Lucjan had mentioned in the interview. [39]

Furthermore, the questionnaire data from 1993 contained information about a new job (started in 1992), which was not mentioned in the interview. It was a new paid part-time job at a state-owned entity, in a profession classified as "construction technician." When asked whether the company had undergone changes in ownership, Lucjan selected the answer "Yes, partially privatized." Therefore, it is possible to interpret that, following his retirement, Lucjan continued to work for a short time in the same, partly privatized company. However, this is only a hypothesis. [40]

In the next two waves of the POLPAN survey (1998, 2003), it was recorded that Lucjan had worked for a private company from the latter half of 1993 onward. However, he had already specified a different profession, which was classified as "record-keepers, inspectors in employment and wages." This is consistent with the data originating from the biographical interview. Regarding other aspects of life unrelated to professional work, the POLPAN data provided additional information about the members of Lucjan's family, for example about the profession of his wife or grandfather, their dates of birth, etc. [41]

3.1.4 POLPAN data as a complementation of the main threads of the narrative

As we have already mentioned in the section titled "Discussion of the narrative," Lucjan paid a lot of attention in the interview to his experiences from the period of the war. However, the POLPAN survey included just a few questions about childhood. Even during the first wave of the survey, when these questions were most numerous, none of them referred directly to the experience of war. Consequently, the POLPAN data contributed very little to this thread of narration. Only in the data from 2003 do we find an indirect confirmation of the high importance of the war period for the narrator's life. The POLPAN respondents were then asked the following open-ended question: "During your lifetime, what political event has been most important to you? What event have you felt mostly or experienced?" As the first event, Lucjan mentioned World War II (and as the second one, the declaration of Martial Law in 1981[4]). [42]

We were interested in how Lucjan continuously evaluated the changes related to the transformation in the 1990s. In 1993, when asked whether the changes introduced in Poland in recent years had gone in the right direction, Lucjan replied "Rather yes." He also assessed that the changes brought most people "more gains than losses" and gave people such as him "more new opportunities than threats." When asked about the pace of the changes, he selected the answer "Too slow." He also assessed that the privatization changes that had taken place at his company were "Rather good." When asked a general question about whether profitable state enterprises should be privatized, he replied "Yes." However, he declared that "prices for basic food products should be under the government's control." Based on the data from the questionnaire, we can conclude that in this period Lucjan consistently presented a (moderate) optimism as to the ongoing transformations, and supported them. [43]

His replies, recorded in the POLPAN data from 1998, indicate a little higher reserve in assessing the transformational changes. When asked to evaluate the then existing Polish power system, Lucjan selected the answer "the existing power system is wrong, and it should be changed." When asked to assess the changes that occurred in 1989-1993, he answered that they had brought "the same gains as losses." He evaluated the functioning of economics as "neither

4 Martial law was announced in Poland on 13 December 1981 and lifted on 22 July 1983. At that time, civil rights and daily life were restricted and opposition activists were repressed. This was government's radical reaction to expanding social protests and the rising activity of the independent Solidarity movement.

good nor bad." The respondents were also asked, however, whether for people like them, Poland was a better country to live in 1988 or 1993 or whether it was a better country now (1998). In both cases, Lucjan selected the answer "it is a better country now." He also assessed that the changes had brought him "slightly more opportunities than threats." He sustained his opinion from five years before that profitable state enterprises should be privatized. When asked about whether he generally thought that changes are worse than no changes at all, he selected "definitely not." As can be seen, Lucjan's optimism regarding the course of changes did not become totally extinct. [44]

The POLPAN survey includes many questions regarding political views and behaviors. These data have confirmed that, as mentioned in the interview, in a certain period of his life Lucjan was a member of both the PZPR and Solidarity. They have also shown that Lucjan took part in almost all elections starting with the presidential elections in 1990, and his decisions at the ballot box were internally cohesive: he voted for candidates and parties having a conservative-liberal, pro-democratic and pro-European profile, which originated from the former anti-communist opposition. This information allowed us to reshape our previous impression pertaining to the political indifference of the narrator with whom we had completed the biographical interview. [45]

3.2 Narrative 2: Janina

3.2.1 Interview summary

Janina was born during World War II (in 1943, as she stated in the interview), in a village in eastern Poland, only a few kilometers from the village she had lived in from the date of her marriage until the date of the interview (2016). The narrator began the (hi)story of her life with her childhood and the situation of her family. Janina's parents supported themselves by working at their own farm. Each of them completed only 2-3 grades of primary school. Janina told the researcher that when she was two years old, her mother got seriously ill, so the girl had to start helping at the farm at a very early age. After a long time, her mother recovered. Janina completed 7-grade primary school. She mentioned in the interview that she would often leave classes to work with her parents in the field:

> "Many times, [I remember] from my childhood that the children were going there on those trips, led by their mistresses, and I was working. And mummy, whenever they were walking through that road, and we were working in the field, she would hide me in those ... between the rows [...] she covered me and ordered me to lie down so the kids wouldn't see me and laugh that I was not going with them but instead pulling up weeds." [46]

Janina stated that the headmaster encouraged her mother to allow her to continue attending school. However, although she had very good grades, her mother did not agree because this was the time when Janina's father had become ill, and her older, and only, brother had been called up for military service

so that no one was left to work the land. Aside from her obligation to work hard, Janina also mentioned the poverty of her childhood. [47]

When she was 17 years old, her mother wished for her to marry a much older farmer. According to the narrator, her mother approved of the fact that he lived close and had land nearby. She treated the marriage prospect of her daughter as a way of expanding the farm. On the other hand, the bachelor appreciated Janina's hard work and skills that would prove useful on the farm (she could plough, handle a horse, etc.). Her mother insisted on the marriage taking place, so much so, that she even changed Janina's date of birth in her certificate with the help of family and friends in order to make Janina eligible to be married as soon as possible. However, the narrator strongly opposed her mother, who finally relented. [48]

One year later, Janina married a bachelor she liked. The family farm was taken over by her brother, and after her marriage, Janina moved to the house of her parents-in-law, who ran a farm in a nearby village. According to the narrator, the house was very cramped. Janina recalls the first months spent with her husband's family as being difficult; she did not know the relations or the customs existing within the new family. She felt strange, "like a rabbit in a cage." However, she gradually found her place. She soon gave birth to two sons. The family also built a new, bigger house and expanded the farm. [49]

As the narrator stated, her life continued peacefully until the end of the 1980s. This was when her older son, who was about to graduate (he had studied a field related to agriculture and was intending to take over the family farm), encouraged by his friends, decided to go for some time to the United States to "earn something and see how [things are] in the world." His travel fits in the historical trend of migration from the villages and small towns situated in eastern Poland (in the region of Podlasie) to the U.S. (JAŹWIŃSKA, FIHEL, PRASZAŁOWICZ, WEINAR & KACZMARCZYK, 2007). Janina's son went to Boston and started to work there as a courier (delivering food to private homes). After three years, it turned out that he was seriously ill. As the narrator says, he had hidden his illness from his parents for almost two years, but his doctor insisted that someone from the family should come to the U.S. to take care of him, and so the family finally came to learn about the illness. Janina and her husband decided to visit their son, so they went to the U.S. Embassy in Warsaw. According to the story, the Embassy official did not want to issue them visas, claiming that they were lying about the illness of their son, and they actually wished to go to the U.S. for economic purposes. Janina told the researcher that, by crying and referring to parental feelings, she begged the official to issue one visa for herself. Her husband had to stay in Poland. [50]

The travel to the U.S. turned out to be difficult, as Janina had never left her neighborhood before. In the interview, she told the researcher about her life at that time: "I had never been any further. And I had never even seen a train, not even from a distance, not to mention traveling." The narrator also did not speak English. At the transfer airport, she missed her son's friend who was to help her

get on the next plane. The colorful and vivid story of Janina about her journey to America recalls the memory of Polish immigrants arriving in the U.S. at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. They must have had similar feelings of confusion, fear and strangeness. [51]

According to the narrative, Janina spent two years in Boston. At the beginning, she was solely occupied with taking caring of her son, but in time she also took up a job, working in private homes as a cleaner and cook. At the end of her stay, she went with her son for a long trip across the U.S. to visit a relative. Her son's health deteriorated. After two years, they both returned to Poland, where he passed away. At the time of the interview, Janina and her husband were living with their youngest son, who had taken over the farm, and with his family. They continued to work on the farm so as to help their son as much as possible. Janina was very proud of her three grandchildren; the youngest of them showed a great interest in agriculture and declared that he would take over the farm in the future. [52]

3.2.2 Discussion of the narrative

The story of Janina is replete with views characteristic of the ethos of Polish peasants, where the two fundamental values are land and work (SIEKIERSKI, 1992). One of the threads that are well developed in the narrative is the description of a poor childhood filled with heavy work and overshadowed by the illness of the narrator's parents. However, Janina did not express grievance against people or her fate. She accepted adversity. Janina presented the need for a school-aged child to help her ill parents working on a farm as a reasonable life necessity, which at that time was an integral part of human fate. "People had to work, people had to support themselves," she said, adding that "everyone lived like that." The expression "people had to" was repeated almost 40 times during the interview (which lasted 1 hour and 45 minutes). Janina often referred to the first 50 years of her life in the plural form ("we kept geese," "we planted strawberries") or impersonally, as above ("this is how it was done"). It seems that it was a life lived according to the rules and expectations of the community, with a very narrow space for individualism. For people interested in the social history of the Polish rural areas and the perspective of the *longue durée*, the interview with Janina represents excellent source material. [53]

In Janina's narrative, some relatively long periods were summarized in one or two sentences. We suppose that this may be due to the nature of work on farms, which is repetitive, and sometimes monotonous, while it completely engages time and energy and binds a person to a particular place. Maybe also we, as people brought up in a city, find it more difficult to notice in Janina's story the events that are important from the point of view of a farmer (such as, for example, the construction of a barn, which the narrator mentioned at some point in the interview). Anyway, we think that Janina's story is much less (and in a different way) focused on events than the story of Lucjan. On this background, we can clearly notice a biographical turning point: the illness of her son, which made her go to America and live there for two years, and later—his death. The narrator not

only had to face the suffering of her child, but she also had to leave her family and move to an entirely foreign country, not having had any previous experience in traveling or changing cultural surroundings. [54]

Here we should mention the context of the interview. During the meeting, Janina told the researcher that the date of the interview was very close to the 21st anniversary of her son's death. As it turned out, it was still a very difficult time of the year for her. This might be the reason why she initially tried to finish the conversation as soon as possible without touching that difficult topic at all. The initial part of the interview was dominated by descriptive and argumentative passages (SCHÜTZE, 1987). Longer and typically narrative fragments appeared only after the researcher asked the following question: "Do you have one son?" Despite that, Janina's story about the period of her life when her older son had been ill was dominated by references to the clash with, and adaptation to, American culture, and not with her son's health condition and the care of him. So what follows shall focus on the "American thread." [55]

Janina dedicated a large part of the interview to her work in various American homes. The freedom with which the narrator described, assessed and compared her employers proves that, over time, the work became something normal and familiar. It allowed her to make contact with an "otherness," with people possessing different characters, lifestyles and origins. An important element of the story about her stay in America is also the description of the trip to her aunt living in California. Janina was delighted with both nature and the cities which she saw on her journey. [56]

It is probably due to her coming into contact with a world completely different from the one she had known that she was able to critically refer in the interview to some aspects of her life in the countryside. She said, for example:

> "Now everything is different, a different level, different views, generally, and the countryside has become much like the city now, with equipment, with accommodation, cars, and life. But back then, there was ignorance! It was just terrible. The countryside was extremely backward. [...] [In] our village, [...] there was no chance of going somewhere, or doing something easier. No, one had to dig as it was ordered. Simply, as they plough the land with a plough today, back then they would use a scythe to mow crops, collect them by hand, thresh by hand. What kind of work was that? What kind of a life for young people was that, what kind of a childhood? What did I see? I didn't see anything … I didn't go anywhere when I was young." [57]

The musings of Janina were, however, exclusively based on her own experience. At no point in the interview did she refer to the broader, social, political or economic context of her own biography. She also did not spontaneously recall any historic events, even World War II. To characterize this style of narration, which omits a broader social and economic background, MROZOWICKI (2011, p.125) used the expressions a "neutralization of history" and "private frames of remembering." [58]

3.2.3 Comparison and complementation of factual information

As in the interview with Lucjan, a large part of the information overlapped in both of the sources analyzed. The date of Janina's birth recorded in the POLPAN data differed by one year from the date given (twice) in the interview; it has been corrected. We think that the difference proves her story about the change in her certificate made by her mother (the POLPAN data included information taken from the official register from which the sample was drawn). As for the other annual dates, Janina directly mentioned in the interview only the date of her wedding (1963) and the dates of birth of her sons (1964 and 1967). The date of the wedding recorded in the POLPAN data was the same as the date given in the interview. As for the dates of birth of her sons, the one for the older son was indirectly confirmed by the POLPAN data from 2013. Janina then gave the age of her oldest son (49), but in the answer to the question about his job, it was recorded that he was deceased. In 2018, some information appeared regarding the oldest son born in 1974. That date seems to be an error (a mistake by the interviewer?). However, the following variables that accompanied that information corresponded to the characteristics of the oldest *living* son of Janina; it referred to a man with a basic vocational education who worked as a farmer. [59]

The POLPAN data confirmed the information about the education of Janina's parents ("incomplete primary") and about their work on the farm. Also, the education of the narrator was recorded in line with what Janina had told us in the interview ("primary"). As in the previous narrative, the POLPAN data contain information on other members of Janina's family, which did not diverge from her biographical story. [60]

We were surprised, however, that Janina's occupational history, composed of information from seven waves of the POLPAN survey, included no information about her work abroad as a cleaner and cook. The data from each year were consistent as to the type of work: they indicated that she had worked for her entire life as a farmer. In 2008, POLPAN included a direct question: "Have you ever had a job abroad for more than three months?" Janina answered, "No." [61]

The omission of her time working in the U.S. while answering the survey questions can be interpreted in three ways. On the one hand, it may indicate a fear about tax implications (the job was probably illegal); in this case, the fact of describing those events in a biographical interview should be explained by the difference in the method applied and, perhaps, by a different atmosphere of the meeting, which favored greater openness. On the other hand, the fact of omitting the information about working in America can be explained by the narrator's reluctance to recall that period of her life because it was connected with grief and sadness. There is also a third possibility, i.e., researchers involved in the POLPAN survey have stated that sometimes respondents failed to mention jobs performed abroad because they were ashamed of them (these jobs often included menial work) or saw them as a break from a *real* job performed in Poland. We do not think that Janina was ashamed of the work she performed in

the U.S., but it is possible that she never considered what she did as work in the same meaning as the work she had performed on the land. [62]

3.2.4 POLPAN data as a complementation of the main threads of the narrative

As we have mentioned, the POLPAN survey includes almost no questions regarding the early age of the respondents. In consequence, we could not use the questionnaire data to add new information to Janina's story about her childhood. Similarly, we lack questions that could form a background for the most difficult experience of Janina, the death of her son. The only signal that could indirectly relate to that event is the information, repeated three times in the POLPAN data, that Janina retired in 1995, as well as a single fact, mentioned in 2003, that from December 1994 onward, she had received an unspecified type of annuity. If we assume, according to the interview, that the year of the interview fell on the 21st anniversary of the death of Janina's son, then it would be exactly the year 1995. Janina was then relatively young (52), and she could not have retired yet. However, it occurs that respondents mistake retirement for the annuity received for an incapacity to work. We can form a hypothesis that the fact of obtaining a long-term benefit under social security was linked to adversity and, maybe, to the deterioration of her health. [63]

As we have already indicated, Janina's travel to the U.S. has not been recorded at all in the POLPAN data. It was difficult for us to find any, even indirect, traces of that travel in the questionnaire data. If, for example, respondents were asked a question about their attitude to people of a different race or nationality (such questions are asked in certain other surveys, e.g., in the European Social Survey), we would expect some changes in Janina's approach in this respect after she had returned from the U.S. However, such a question was never asked. [64]

Therefore, are the POLPAN data completely useless when it comes to the possibility of complementing the most important threads in Janina' narrative? Not entirely. Let us remember that an implicit but crucial thread in Janina's biography is her work on the farm. In the first wave of the POLPAN survey (in 1988), the respondents being farmers were asked a separate, extensive set of questions. These concerned, for example, aspects regarding the ownership of the farm, the nature of the farming activities, the number of persons working at the farm, the types (classes) and area of ploughland, the available machinery and equipment (specifically listed), professional preparation of the farmer and his family members, or the income generated by the farm. In 1993, some of the questions were repeated, some were withdrawn, but new questions were also added regarding the situation in Poland at that time (they referred, for example, to a farmer's relation with the market, or competition). Since 1998, the questions designed for farmers have been repeated in each wave, yet in a strongly limited scope. However, if we wanted to thoroughly analyze this sphere of Janina's life, the POLPAN data would prove to be very useful. [65]

4. Summary: Two Different Maps But One Biographical Territory

What is to learn from these two exemplary biographical portraits—by necessity, compendiously outlined? One certain answer is that questionnaire-based data obtained from the respondents as part of a panel survey may become an important complementary source of knowledge about such individuals. Moreover, this knowledge may be of use in analyzing biographical-narrative interviews. Thus, the starting cognitive situation, if one may say so, is significantly different than where there are no such data available and (almost) everything known about the person concerned is based on the interview itself. For the purpose of narrative analysis, the questions in the questionnaire that provide relatively indisputable facts-related information or data, that show the solidified ways of interpreting the latter, prove to be the most important. Nonetheless, the views and/or opinions that most of the questionnaire's questions are meant to seek and extract are often less reliable and much more ephemeral. If, however—as is basically evident in both of our case studies—some general and persistent attitude toward the world can be read from them, this very part of the questionnaire would also be useful in elaborating a better or deeper interpretation of the biographical interviews—particularly with respect to their argumentative or theoretical fragments, to follow a typology of narrative forms popular with this research (SCHÜTZE, 2016). Such a benefit is quite basic and fairly one-dimensional, for it virtually boils down to supplying the biography researcher with some additional historical data. Historical in a dual sense—that is, 1. obtained in the past and 2. oriented toward grasping *an objective reality*, rather than its retrospective, narrative images and interpretations. [66]

It is perhaps worth mentioning at this point that our analyses have shown that the basic assumption behind the sociological biographical method, whereby the narrative here-and-now and the experienced there-and-then are interconnected, is (cautiously) defendable, at least at an elementary level. While a biographical narrative is not simply *true,* it is *not* changeable and fluid in any way possible, nor is it entirely subjective. Putting it otherwise: it is impossible to jump out of your life history when you are constructing your life story. Important experiences of one's life somehow get through in a standardized questionnaire which seeks to determine the respondent's current placement within the social structure—as it does surface in his/her retrospective story of his/her own life. Of course, the way in which these experiences are named (or typified, as is frequently the case with questionnaires) and interpreted is not identical in both cases. Yet we provided an impression that we worked with two different maps of the same biographical territory. [67]

In order, however, to abstract such a map out of the questionnaire-based data, not only is access to such data required (thus, they would need to be archived in some way and made available for external users) but the task calls for skill and patience, because it is not easy to extract such data from the maze of variables. Without competence in this area at even a basic level or without cooperation with someone who has such skills, one would not be able to enrich the biographical

research. Hence, with a unilateral benefit, the required effort is bilateral denoting a failure to break down inter-paradigmatic barriers. [68]

What can be achieved in exchange, then? What benefit may follow from biographical interviews with interlocutors who are, or once have been, respondents to panel surveys? Let us make some working suggestions. Narratives of this sort offer insights into individual actualizations of the recognized macro-structural regularities, and reduce generalized probabilistic descriptions to individual concretizations. They can be referred to as *exemplifications*, although each such biography might, and actually does, divert from the calculated average, a successful interview will also show the interrelation and mutual influence of a bundle of diverse variables—the real such effect, which relates to the concrete life, however exemplary it may be. [69]

Another suggestion we would like to make is more methodological. Analysis of a narrative interview with interviewees who are also survey respondents may demonstrate their own way of *naming and interpreting* the different essential events and experiences and their influence on the decisions they made in life. It may even reveal hesitations with respect to what decision or choice to make out of those possible in a given situation—or, out of those within the reach figured by the interviewee. Aspects substantiated in the survey style sound deterministic—and it cannot be otherwise, since it is all about recognizing the cause-and-effect, structural, and *objective* (inter)dependencies. A single biographical interview will probably never weaken them but perhaps will help perceive, from *the narrative inside*, the individual decisions and choices unnoticeable in *the questionnaire-oriented outside*. [70]

This is true not only for decisions and/or choices but also for *random occurrences*, chance events, coincidences, unexpected and unplanned events, external to one's intentions or designs. They might destabilize biographical paths and lead to structural downgrades. But they might also upgrade people's trajectories. Clearly, what has not, though could have, been chosen by an individual and what might have happened had something different (not) happened earlier on, may be omitted in structural analysis. What is ultimately of relevance is what *really is*, what has happened, and chosen or opted for. Seen from the inside, from the individual's perspective, this is not necessarily so. For a retrospective interpretation of one's own biography, its *random occurrences*/*chance events* and *lost choices* may be of quite a basic importance, not merely *subjective* but translatable into the further plans for life, motivations, incentives, or, let us say, *the life energy*. This is, again, hard to generalize and embed in structural analyses. But perhaps the fact that it *is*—or rather, *happens*—is worth knowing. Seeing *what it is like*, when appearing is worthwhile as well. [71]

Taking this ephemeral dimension of the individual's (that is, subjective) contemplativeness—even if somewhere in the background, untranslatable into measurable variables—may imply one more effect of relevance to macro-structural analysis. This dimension, namely, refers directly to the values the respondents as human beings are driven by. All the same, macro-structural

sociology cannot avoid conceiving society other than in a hierarchical perspective. Even though it might try and offer a *pure description* of a society (as far as this might be feasible), its semantic equipment is inevitably evaluative: higher/lower (as e.g., income or prestige); more/less (e.g., years of education). Narrative interviews with the same respondents may reveal how such often unintended and hidden valuation diverges from the values the concrete respondents/interviewees/people are driven by in their lives. Once this aspect is discovered, the point is not to challenge the value or purpose of structural determinisms described by sociologists. It would suffice if this recognition can remind us that a different description is possible, seriously taking into account the variety and complexity of contexts and motivations within which people make their life decisions. [72]

All this has apparently long been known, though on an abstract level, i.e., from fiction and various philosophies of existence, or from philosophical anthropologies. Or even, from (probably) the world's most popular introduction to sociology by BERGER (1963), where several chapters disassembled voluntaristic illusions. But ultimately BERGER encouraged us not to completely quit the non-sociological, or, more generally, unscientific (to his mind) category of freedom. Its rejection, including in the interpretation of one's own behaviors and choices, is described by BERGER as "bad faith," following SARTRE's existentialist phrase (pp.142-145). [73]

Coming back to our analysis: we believe that it is worth verifying from time to time our cognitive habits. It is also imperative to understand that sociological analysis of the social structure as well as narrative-biographical analysis are different stories about the same people. Generalized and not directly translatable to the individual fate (from survey data perspective), individual and not convincingly generalizable (from biographical-narrative perspective)—they are not necessarily completely separate. There is a long way from this recognition, even if supported by a research example, to an off-style or inter-style sociology—to refer to the discussion which opened this article. Rather than anticipating such a sociology, we have attempted to loosen a few bricks in the intra-sociological wall. [74]

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Authors

Piotr FILIPKOWSKI is a sociologist, an assistant professor at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, where he is also the head of the Qualitative Data Archive. He is engaged in various historical and sociological research projects devoted to biographical experiences and memories of the war, socialist modernization, and capitalist transformation in Poland and Eastern Europe. Furthermore, he is interested in the theories and methodologies related to social research.

Contact:

Piotr Filipkowski, PhD

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences
Nowy Świat 72, 00-330 Warszawa, Poland

E-mail: pfilipkowski@ifispan.edu.pl

Danuta ŻYCZYŃSKA-CIOŁEK is a sociologist, an assistant professor at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Her research interests include biographical approaches in sociology, the sociology of poverty, social data archiving, and methodologies of the social sciences.

Contact:

Danuta Życzyńska-Ciołek, PhD

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences
Nowy Świat 72, 00-330 Warszawa, Poland

E-mail: dzyczynska-ciolek@ifispan.edu.pl

Citation

Filipkowski, Piotr & Życzyńska-Ciołek, Danuta (2023). Between *life story* and *life history*. Contextualizing biographical narrative interviews with questionnaire data [74 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *24*(3), Art. 3, https://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-24.3.3985.