

# Biography and Society



Photo: Nadia Atlas-Kaplan

NEXT CONFERENCE: BIOGRAPHIES OF BELONGING  
AMSTERDAM, MARCH 10-11, 2015

BIOGRAPHY AND SOCIETY

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RESEARCH COMMITTEE 38 OF THE ISA

NEWSLETTER/DECEMBER 2014

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENCY

December 2014

Dear Colleagues,

We had a great World Congress in Yokohama this summer, with an RC program containing altogether fifteen sessions, including an Integrative Session and three Joint Sessions organized together with other RCs, and around 75 papers presented. The response to our program was excellent also in terms of attendance, with an estimated total of around 450 participants from almost all over the world. Besides the official program, there were plenty of occasions for meeting old and new friends and for encounters with young colleagues who came to our RC for the first time. We are happy to see the community developing continually, attracting new members, keeping good traditions concerning the topics we deal with, and also enlarging the scope of inquiry in new fields of societal developments.

During the Business Meeting the attending members voted a new presidency and board. You will find the results in this newsletter with a short presentation of the new team. According to changes in the Statutes, the next voting will take place in four years also via e-mail, allowing all members to participate.

The next **World Congress** will take place in **Toronto/Canada in 2018**. Next year, we will have the **Third ISA Forum in 2016 in Vienna**. Preparations for this conference have already started. The general theme is **“The Futures We Want: Global Sociology and the Struggles for a Better World.”** Quoting from a letter of the President of the ISA Forum 2015 and the newly elected Vice-President of Research, Markus Schulz, the theme “is meant to [...] encourage forward-oriented research ranging from the tiny worlds in micro situations to the broadest macro dynamics affecting the entire planet. The rather uncommon plural “s” in futures points to the diversity of possibilities, projects, and visions. Social actors aspire, desire, envision, expect, fear, imagine, plan, and ultimately shape in their more or less contentious interactions at multiple scales new conditions. Empirical, theoretical, and normative research from around the world is needed to help tackle the critical problems and opportunities in our age of advanced globalization” (Markus Schulz, letter to presidents of ISA RCs, WGs, TGs, Dec. 2014). We think this provides a very good framework to topics from biographical research. However, sessions with other topics are welcome and will be included in the program as well. The **Call for Sessions** starts on **15 January 2015** and will be open **until 15 February 2015**. You will find other relevant dates in this newsletter or on the conference webpage (<http://www.isa-sociology.org/forum-2016/deadlines.htm>).

Even before the Forum in Vienna, an **interim conference on “Biographies of Belonging”** will take place in **Amsterdam on March 10-11, 2015**, organized by Kathy Davis and a team at the Vrije Universiteit/Free University. The response to the Call for Papers was enormous, and we look forward to a rich and intriguing program!

We hope to see many of you at any of these forthcoming occasions! Meanwhile we send season's greetings and wish you relaxing holidays,

Roswitha Breckner, Lena Inowlocki, Hermilio Santos, Maria Pohn-Lauggas

## EDITORIAL

Dear colleagues,

I am pleased to present the second Newsletter of our Research Committee of 2014, which is now under my responsibility after Michaela Köttig did such a great job in publishing the Newsletter for many years.

First of all I would like to thank all those colleagues information to be included in this edition. One of the main topics of this edition of the Newsletter is a review of biographical research in Ukraine, by Mykola Borovyk and Alla Marchenko. In the section "Concluded Research" we present two PhD theses that were just concluded at the University of Göttingen, Germany. The thesis of Ina Alber discusses the civic engagement in the transformation carried out during the last decades in Poland. Rosa Maria Brandhorst conducted her research on transnational families in Cuba and Germany and their impact on the recent transformation of Cuban society. Both theses were conducted under the supervision of Gabriele Rosenthal, former President of the RC 38. In the section "Project Announcements", Artur Bogner announces a new research project, started early in 2014 in collaboration with Gabriele Rosenthal, with its main objective to reconstruct biographies, life courses and reintegration processes of former child soldiers and underage abductees of the Lord's Resistance Army in the central part of northern Uganda. In the same section, there is a report of Catherine Delcroix and Lena Inowlocki who started a German-French joint research project on the learning of languages by migrants in both countries. The research aim to evaluate policies focused on families with migrant background. In the following section we present three new publications: a special dossier of the Brazilian journal *Civitas* on "Narratives – theories and methods", organized by Hermilio Santos, Bettina Völter and Wivian Weller, in which different perspectives of narrative in sociology are presented, with authors from Germany, France, Great Britain, Austria, Poland and Brazil; the Portuguese translation of the book *Interpretative Sozialforschung – Eine Einführung*, by Gabriele Rosenthal; and "Dancing Tango" by Kathy Davis, our former RC president, in which she goes into the passionate involvement of dancers in the salons of Buenos Aires and Amsterdam and the paradoxes this presents. Finally, we call your attention to the next conferences that could be of interest to the members of RC 38 and give some details about the newly elected board of the ISA and of the RC Biography and Society.

All the best for 2015!

Kind regards,

Hermilio Santos

**Membership fees**

Please remember to pay your membership fee:

Regular members U\$ 40

Students and members from countries B and C U\$ 20

(see ISA regulations)

**Bank account:**

We are about to set up a new account, and will let you know about the details in January via e-mail. In case you like to transmit the membership fees immediately, you can ask Maria Pohn-Lauggas for advice:

[maria.pohn-lauggas@univie.ac.at](mailto:maria.pohn-lauggas@univie.ac.at)

**The deadline for the next newsletter is at the end of May 2015.**

Please send us:

- ⇒ A short paper (3-7 pages) on a topic you are currently working on
- ⇒ A presentation of your current project
- ⇒ Some reflections on your experiences of teaching biographical approaches and methods
- ⇒ Reports or some notes about conferences you have attended
- ⇒ General reports about activities in the field of biographical research in your institution, university, country, continent
- ⇒ Interesting calls for papers for conferences, workshops, summer schools
- ⇒ New publications from you, also in your respective native language
- ⇒ Any other thought or information you would like to share.

Send your contribution directly to:

[hermilio@pucrs.br](mailto:hermilio@pucrs.br)

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## REPORT ON BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

### *Biographical Research in Ukraine: A new field in a new country*

Mykola Borovyk,

Alla Marchenko

Research traditions in social sciences and history are still being developed in Ukraine, shifting between positivistic and hermeneutic approaches to the research. The positivistic approach deals mainly with observed data, while the hermeneutic one implies focus on hidden meanings and interpretations. Therefore, biographical research with its focus on individual experience and subjective perceptions belongs to the latter; its goals are reached due to the possibilities of using various methods, from document analysis to interviewing. The origins of contemporary biographical research may be found in Chicago School of Sociology, and the classical work of Thomas and Znaniecki "The Polish peasant in Europe and America" based on life stories of Polish immigrants (1918-1920). While the so-called "renaissance" of interest to the hermeneutic approach took place in Western Sociology through the 1970-1980s (Rosenthal, 2004: 48; Breckner & Rupp, 2002: 291) and advanced into several independent streams (Wengraf et al., 2002: 246), such interest sporadically came to the Post-Communist space only in the 1990s. Although biographical research appeared as an interdisciplinary issue, its cross-disciplinary nature became more evident and established in recent times due to the wider possibilities for social networking and collaboration (Apitzsch & Siouti, 2007).

In the realm of sociology in Ukraine, the interest in biographical research was initially triggered by the individual efforts of researchers, not by the institutionalized environment. We could distinguish several significant research streams in Ukraine: some of them started during the late Soviet period and developed afterwards, e.g. research of youth life strategies and life success (Golovakha, 1984; Sokhan, 1987; Golovakha, 1987; Sokhan et al., 1995), while others appeared later. Four important dimensions of biographical research in the sociological streams of Ukraine indicate both stability and dynamics of the research foci over the course of time.

First, there is research of marginalized groups on sensitive topics. Such research is conducted at several institutions, for instance, the Centre of Social Expertise<sup>1</sup> established in 1995 (led by Privalov & Saenko), or the Ukrainian Institute of Social Research named after Olexandr Iarenchenko<sup>2</sup>. The topics of research vary from AIDS, drug and alcohol addiction and the impact of the Chernobyl catastrophe upon personal life in different social strata. Sensitive topics characterized the biographical research of religious socialization (Skokova, 2004), as well as investigations of neo-Protestant groups (Myronovych, 2009).

Secondly, there is research on transitions. Here we may refer to the study of the consequences of macro-transformations in everyday life, e.g., the emergence of self-organized movements in Donbas during the reforms of the coal-mining industry (Kononov et al., 2001), and the research of youth in the context of changing values (Sokurianska, 2006). Special attention is paid to the research of conflict rhetoric in the framework of a "linguistic-conflictological" approach to the transition society, from the examples of Lviv and Kharkiv in 2005-2006 (Danylenko, 2007), as well as the recent examples after Euromaidan (Danylenko, 2014).

Thirdly, we differentiate research of professional and class mobility (Symonchuk, 2000; Symonchuk, 2011) including biographies of Ukrainian sociologists (Lenchovsky, 2009). Besides, we should mention the research of political elites as a special class during the Post-Soviet transformations. Here we can refer to life-stories of

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<sup>1</sup><http://csep.org.ua/index.php/en/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.uisr.org.ua>



emerging elites (Shulga, 1997), or the development of regional elites in Ukraine (Zotkin, 2005); interest in such topics was driven by hypotheses about a possible continuity or disruption of mechanisms of political recruitment regarding the Soviet past.

Finally, we could mention methodological research. Such papers, dealing either with biographical method in sociology (Profatlova, 2003; Lisovska-Muskeeva & Sydorov, 2013) or psychology (Zlobina, 2011) indicates the necessity to fill the absence of established tradition of biographical research in social sciences in Ukraine. The Institute of Sociology of Ukraine<sup>3</sup> conducts regular methodological courses where biographical research is envisioned through the lens of methods (for instance, a special workshop on qualitative interviews including biographical interviews conducted by Olena Symonchuk). At some universities, students who study Sociology write their personal autobiographies - for instance, at the Faculty of Sociology at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv; such autobiographies are considered to be a course work, which develops the sociological imagination and self-reflection during the first year of studies.

Biographical interviewing (the most popular method of biographical research in sociology in Ukraine) is close to oral history (Musiezdov, 2010: 85); it has combined social context and personal historical changes and cannot be used exclusively by any science. Fritz Schütze and Gabriele Rosenthal seem to be the most cited international authorities in Ukrainian biographical research (both in Sociology and History); their approaches were also thoroughly analysed in one of the recent articles (Hrinchenko, 2008). Such similarity of authorities gives us a key to understand the role of biographical approach in both sciences. Therefore, we proceed to the peculiarities of biographical research in history in order to outline the comparative perspective of conclusions. The first projects dealing with oral history in Ukraine were also launched in the 1990s.

As in other post-communist countries, methodological innovations in this area appeared under the influence of Western science. It is significant that among the participants of "Methodology and Methods of Oral history - the Life History in Sociological Research", the first oral history conference in Ukraine held in 1994 in Lviv, there were only a few researchers from Ukraine, but most participants comprised researchers from Western Europe and North America, including Robert Perks, Alessandro Portelli, Alexander von Plato, and Daniel Bertaux<sup>4</sup>. Ukraine's first course in oral history was taught by the Canadian researcher Iroida Vinnytska in 1992 to historian and folklorist students of Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (Kis, 2014).

It is worth admitting that oral history in Ukraine has always been oriented towards Western standards and communities (which is not typical for the general Post-Soviet historical framework). Unlike biographical research in Ukraine's sociology, which has always been intertwined with biographical research in Russia due to the earlier appearance of institutionalized communities there, oral history in Ukraine developed independently from the influence of scientific centers of the former metropolis. Communications with the Russian scientific community were maintained on the level of personal contacts and sporadic participation in a few common research projects. In addition, in Ukraine, unlike Russia, oral history never experienced significant opposition from the academic establishment<sup>5</sup>. The high authority of Western science was one of the reasons for this. It was partially caused by methodological confusion that still exists in Ukraine since the fall of communism. Possibilities provided by using oral history in the public sphere played a role as well.

This primarily concerns the study of the Great Famine in 1932-1933 (called in Ukraine 'Holodomor'). The US-American historian James Mace initiated the recording of the memories of survivors of the tragedy. This topic has become the focus of public debate since the late 1990s. It stimulated an exponential spreading of such practices. Thousands of interviews have been recorded. Some of them were documented in compliance with standards of

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<sup>3</sup> <http://i-soc.com.ua>

<sup>4</sup> About the conference see: Kis, 2014

<sup>5</sup> About the situation in Russian research environment see: Hrinchenko, Rebrova, Romanova, 2014

research<sup>6</sup>, but many other interviews were recorded by amateurs, mostly by students and public activists. A conditional division of oral history research to professional practice and the sphere of amateur activism, which was launched at that time, still exist till today.

Another issue that is important for public discourse in Ukraine is the Holocaust. In 1996—1999 the USC Shoah Foundation - The Institute for Visual History and Education recorded 3,446 interviews, either in Ukraine or abroad in Ukrainian, of people who survived the Holocaust. Further research and educational projects in this area were supported by the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies<sup>7</sup>, The Center for Studies of the East European Jewish Culture and History in Kyiv<sup>8</sup>, and other organizations. Despite considerable interest from researchers, the Holocaust, unlike the Great Famine, has not become an integral part of Ukrainian historiography. Moreover, ethnic perspectives of history, which retained their influence in Ukraine as a part of the Soviet legacy, have resulted in a situation that is sometimes described as a "competition of victims" (Podolsky, 2009). It is important to mention that we are currently observing a strongly growing interest in Jewish history by larger parts of the Ukrainian society. This recent development also could be the launching point for more scientific studies in Ukraine dealing with the Holocaust and its long-term effects based on biographical interviews<sup>9</sup>.

In general, similar to other countries with a colonial experience or the experience of life under totalitarian regimes, subjects of oral history projects in Ukraine are concentrated mainly around the extreme events - dramatic social transformations, wars, and political repressions. Thus, the first oral history project in Ukraine was "Profiles of Fortitude: An Oral History of the Clandestine Life of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church", initiated by Borys Gudziak in the newly created Institute of Church History in Lviv in 1992<sup>10</sup>. Another large project was initiated and headed by the US-American anthropologist William Noll in 1993 - 1995. It was devoted to studying the experience of transformations that were brought to peasant culture by forced collectivization<sup>11</sup>. The project "Oral History of Decollectivization in Ukraine in the 1990s: Rural Perspectives and Experiences" (2007-2008) which was implemented under the leadership of the Canadian researcher Natalie Khanenko-Friesen (both projects were implemented with the involvement of Ukrainian researchers) can be regarded as a kind of thematic continuation of Noll's project (Khanenko-Friesen, 2010).

Experiences of World War II are among the most interesting topics for researchers in Ukraine as well. "Ukraine during World War II: the everyday experience of survival" is one of the largest projects on the subject. The project has been implemented at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv since 2010; it has about 300 interviews thus far (Borovyk, 2012). The international project "Names Instead of Numbers. Memorial Book of the former Dachau concentration camp prisoners" (2006 - 2007) combined research and educational purposes. Interviewing and writing biographies of citizens of Ukraine who were in the concentration camp were objects of the project (Rebrova, 2008).

The phenomenon of forced labour of Ukrainians in Nazi Germany is one of the most elaborated topics of oral history, mainly thanks to foreign funding. The international project for recording memories of "Ostarbeiters" was held on the initiative of the German Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future" in 2005-2006. During the project 80 biographical interviews were recorded in Ukraine (von Plato, 2008). A project authored by Kharkiv researcher Helinada Hrinchenko was devoted to this problem as well (Hrinchenko, 2004), being the first project on this topic.

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<sup>6</sup> Among the most successful projects see: Mytsyk, 2003; Borysenko, 2007

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.holocaust.kiev.ua/eng/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://en.judaicacenter.kiev.ua/>

<sup>9</sup> Some projects, which have already been realized in the last years: Velychko, Pastishenko, 2008; from Germany Radenbach, 2011; Concerning the genocide of the Roma see Tyaglyy, <http://romagenocide.com.ua>

<sup>10</sup> This project is still not completed and is the largest scale project in the field of oral history in Ukraine. Till now around 1900 interview are recorded, documentary archive of the project consist about 700 photocopies of personal documents, about 5 000 photos. About see: Gurkina, 2008; <http://www.ichistory.org>; Hrinchenko, Rebrova, Romanova, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> The result of this project, in which about 400 interviews in different regions of Ukraine were recorded, was the publication of a collection of documents: Noll, 1999. The collection still remains the benchmark for such publications in Ukraine.



Gender issues have an important place in Ukrainian oral history, touching the problems of social justice. For instance, the project "Twentieth Century Ukraine in Women's Memories" is one of the most successful on the topic (Kis, 2007).

It is possible to state that the documentation of memories with the help of biographical interviews is becoming an established research practice in Ukraine, based on the highest professional standards. However, Ukrainian scholars are at the beginning of their journey of data processing and interpretation. Ukrainian researchers often use biographical interviews only as an additional source, as raw materials for the reconstruction of historical events.<sup>12</sup> Only in some cases do authors try to analyze the narrative structure of the interview and its discourse features, which are used not so much for the reconstruction of the past as for studying the mechanisms of the collective memory function, analyzing the intertwining of past and present (Hrinchenko, 2013).

Oral History in Ukraine has an ambiguous status in its institutional relation to the academic environment. On the one hand, Oral History projects are often based on academic and educational institutions. For example, there is the Oral History Institute at the Department of History and Culture of Ukraine at Zaporizhzhja University, the center of Oral History in Pereyaslav-Khmelnytskyi State Pedagogical University exists from 2005, and a research laboratory "The Centre for Oral History" established at the Department of Modern History of Ukraine at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv in 2010. Oral history courses exist at universities in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhja, etc. Oral history was also taught at Donetsk University, but developments of the last months made it unavoidable to continue it at another place.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, oral history even in the framework of renown institutions maintains its status as the private initiative of some enthusiasts and gets funding from NGOs (primarily foreign). In 2006 the Ukrainian Association of Oral History was established, becoming an important step on the way of the self-organization of scientists. The Association arranges conferences (annually since 2012) and publishes collections of papers.

The process of digitization provides huge possibilities for the development of biographical studies and it has already changed them in Western countries. This process is just beginning in Ukraine. It's enough to say that the first oral history Internet resource (the site of the Ukrainian Association of Oral History) started its way just in 2014<sup>14</sup>. The development of this sphere is very important, as there are only two well-ordered archives that provide access to biographical sources – The Archive of the Institute of Church History in Lviv and The Archive of the Center for Oral History at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. One of the most vivid biographical projects in recent times is the project "Collapse of the Soviet Union. Oral History of Independent Ukraine 1988-1991"<sup>15</sup>, which includes 69 biographical interviews with public figures of that time and may be used as a database for various research purposes.

Events that happened in Ukraine in 2013-2014 (Euromaidan, Crimea annexation and the armed conflict in Donbas) constituted the most important fields of current research for historians, sociologists and anthropologists who use narrative-biographical interviews in Ukraine. Moreover, they have uncovered the demand of biographical research and the essential need to include personal stories into the logic of analysis. Along with the efforts of journalists and social activists, who record testimonies of witnesses of the 2013-2014 events, some scientific projects were launched. For example, the project for collecting biographical interviews of Maidan participants has started in Kyiv National University under the supervision of Mykola Borovyk. The projects' aims are to establish a set of sources, which could be the basis for further inquiries of shaping and transforming memories of these events, as well as research mechanisms of mass mobilizations during the revolution.

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<sup>12</sup>Among the best works of this kind: Pastushenko, 2011

<sup>13</sup> The University of Donetsk is currently moving to Vinnitsa in central Ukraine.

<sup>14</sup> <http://oralhistory.com.ua>

<sup>15</sup><http://oralhistory.org.ua>

We should also mention the existence of a special Facebook community dealing with life stories of people who helped Euromaidan – "Слюди - maidaners"<sup>16</sup> which may also be interpreted as a step towards public attention to life stories as valuable sources of information. A non-profit organization "Museum of Maidan"<sup>17</sup> also regularly gathers personal life stories of Euromaidan participants that could be later used for scholarly purposes. The biographical method is also used in the current research by Oxana Mikheeva which is oriented to internally displaced persons in Ukraine at the end of 2014<sup>18</sup> and their previous experiences. Such trends really show the potential of biographical research for reflecting and conceptualizing contemporary social challenges.

So, we can assume that biographical research in Ukraine has found a specific niche, which is neither dominant, nor marginal (especially when we speak about Oral History). The current context in our country has become a stimulus for the intensification of qualitative research of the most problematic areas and topics: social tolerance and mutual acceptance, social adaptation and inclusion of ideological issues in everyday life, and the experience of trauma and post-traumatic syndrome. It is also worth doing (but difficult to conduct) biographical interviews with people who are still living in Crimea and in the war zone. Dramatic events present a challenge for researchers to reflect their own role and the role of values in the field that could enhance the appearance of new papers. Thus, even such dramatic circumstances may become a prerequisite for a new wave of interest towards biographical studies in Ukraine and show the future potential of interdisciplinary research.

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<sup>16</sup>[www.facebook.com/maidaners](http://www.facebook.com/maidaners)

<sup>17</sup><http://Svoboda2014.org>

<sup>18</sup> The number of internally displaced people reached 490 046 people on November 28, 2014, as reported by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in collaboration with humanitarian partners. The report is available under: <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Sitrep%2020%20-%20Ukraine%20-%202028%20November%202014.pdf>

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## REPORTS ON CONCLUDED RESEARCH

### ***Civic Engagement in Poland in Times of Transformation – an approach using biographical research and discourse analysis***

Ina Alber

#### ***Introduction***

The year 2014 was filled with anniversaries for Poland – 10 years of membership in the European Union, 25 years of the round table and peaceful transition to democracy, 75 years and 100 years to remember the beginning of the two World Wars. The discourses of remembrance oscillate between war and peace, violence and civic virtues, empires and national sovereignty. These patterns of interpretation constitute the framework within which civil society activists in Poland perform their engagement. But why do people interpret themselves as civil society activists? Which biographical experiences lead to a pattern of acting called civic engagement and how do the activists through their everyday actions reproduce and transform the discourse about civil society?

These were some of the questions that my PhD research tried to find explanations for. I focused on a social phenomenon that is both powerful and very vague: civil society and civic engagement in times of transformation. I would like to present in this short summary some of the methodological and empirical results of the work.

#### ***Methodological background***

Focusing on the question of “doing civic engagement” in times of transformation my study was conducted within the framework of the sociology of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann 1967). This means amongst other premises taking into consideration both the level of discourses and actors as well as their interdependencies. Furthermore, my argumentation was based on the ideas of Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 2006). Starting with a theoretical sensitivity for the scientific discourse about the ‘transition to democracy’ and the stated importance of civil society in Poland I tried to generate empirically grounded hypotheses from the collected material. The qualitative, sociological project focused particularly on the discourse on civic engagement and civil society and biographical trajectories that led to civic engagement. I conducted 13 qualitative biographical-narrative interviews with civil society activists in different towns in Poland. I then did biographical case reconstructions – always paying special attention to the difference between the narrated life story and the experienced life history, according to the methods introduced by Gabriele Rosenthal (2004, 2006).

The aim of the sociological reconstruction of biographies was not to collect the memories of a specific historical person (of interest), but to understand the triad of experience, memory and narration from a phenomenological point of view<sup>19</sup> as a dialectical relation between the individual and collective patterns of interpretation and acting (Schütz and Luckmann 1979; Rosenthal 2006). Therefore the sociological case was of interest and the theoretical generalizations that could be drawn from a detailed case reconstruction that takes into consideration not only the biographical narrative interview text but also further sources like archive material, newspaper articles, history text books and scientific literature.

To systematically analysis these source materials as well as the interview texts from the perspective of discourse theory I did an interpretative discourse analysis in the tradition of the sociology of knowledge introduced by Reiner Keller (2012). Starting from the biographical cases I analyzed the interview texts as well as different

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<sup>19</sup> In short this means applying the philosophical ideas of Edmund Husserl that there is only a *noema* of memory, not a static, one and forever pattern – but memories that appear as different phenomena depending on the *noesis* of the person remembering. The context of the present day situation of narrating therefore structures the way the experience is remembered and told. The idea of the biographical research is therefore to understand the genesis of today’s *noesis* to the *noema* (Rosenthal 2006).



internet and paper publications about civic engagement in Poland after 1989, for example from the organizations in which the interviewed civil society activists are engaged. Special attention was paid to the triangulation of biographical and discourse analysis within this framework trying to find answers to the question how civic engagement is constructed through everyday practice both in discourses and the acting of the biographers themselves. The results of these triangulations show both a variety of patterns of interpretation within the discourse of civil society as well as two types of interpreting civic engagement either as qualification or empowerment. These results I'd like to summon up shortly.

### ***Diversified Discourse of Civil Society***

The 'discourse of civil society' in Poland can be characterized as diversified. Civil society was used by oppositional movements in the 1970s and 1980s both as pattern of interpretation and acting against the state. After the 1989 transformations free associations were guaranteed in the constitution and there was a lot of engagement by democracy promoters: private US-based foundations as well as German political party-based foundations. They were especially influential in the late 1980s and early 1990s and came for short-term projects, for building infrastructure, for grant-making and financing initial projects, political education and intended and unintended transfers of knowledge. All these different ideas and practices of civil society could have led to a variety of patterns of interpretation. But the empirical material shows that there are mainly two types on the level of interpreting civic engagement: qualification and empowerment.

### ***Civic engagement as qualification or empowerment***

With the triangulation of biographical and discourse analysis I could reconstruct that representatives of the qualification type interpret themselves as experts for a newly established social phenomenon: civic engagement in a democratic society. Their own expertise and qualification is either seen as the key for their successful career within the civil society sector – often coming from voluntary work to regular jobs – or presented as "just doing something normal". The civic engagement is usually highly professionalized and formalized. The reconstruction of the biographical genesis of this pattern shows that civic engagement functions as a means of social inclusion and of power. Within certain elite networks in major towns civil society activists can reach highly influential political positions. In many cases the biographers continued their family tradition of adapting quickly to new political frameworks or of keeping high social positions. Civic engagement as qualification serves as a solution to the new social problem of unemployment and democratic transition. The representatives of this type perceive themselves as qualified experts to educate others democracy, human rights and the liberal job market. They reproduce a pattern of interpretation and acting found in the scientific and political discourse about the positive functions of civil society – qualification and 'usability' for the job market, but also social inclusion.

The other type of civic engagement reconstructed on the level of interpretation can be summarized as the empowerment type. The representatives of this type see their civic engagement as a form of emancipation (referring to a concept on the level of social inequality and participation for excluded social groups) and empowerment (referring to psychological and social work concepts of individual empowerment). They refer to and reproduce thereby also the discourse found in democracy promotion of the UN or others stating that civic engagement serves as empowerment and a form of participation for minorities, for instance. Their civic engagement functions as a powerful resource to do biographical work and to overcome bad past experiences. Their own experiences of being outsiders and being discriminated against are re-interpreted when fighting for inclusion, participation and resources for other. The individual negative experiences are negotiated on an overall political level of human rights and ideals of tolerance and democracy. Think global, act local – could serve as a motto for this type. The civic engagement is mostly temporarily and informally organized with friends and private



network partners. Posting and blogging on the internet are powerful instruments in promoting idea(l)s and political messages. To become politically influential is part of the engagement as well, but other than the representatives of the qualification type the 'empowermentists' do not aim at establishing high political positions but at fighting against discrimination and in solidarity with, for instances, women, the LGBT-movement, ethnic or cultural minorities. They experience also social inclusion through their civic engagement, mainly within the private networks, but refer also to global movements like Amnesty International.

### Conclusions

The triangulation of biographical and discourse analysis was very fruitful to approach the social phenomenon of civic engagement and civil society activists in Poland after 1989. Although the discourse can be characterized as diversified there are mainly two interpretative types of civic engagement within the sample of democracy and human rights activists: qualification and empowerment. The biographical genesis shows that civic engagement functions as a means for social inclusion at many levels in both cases. The reconstruction of the biographical cases shows that war and peace, democracy or national sovereignty are not the incentives to get engaged. To become socially included, to do biographical work or to gain influence are the biographical functions of engagement. The 'high ideals' serve rather as a pattern of interpretation to refer to when presenting one's activities, especially to a young German female researcher.

The civil society activists reproduce and transform the discourse of civil society through their engagement and everyday actions. And of course, my own study also contributes to the reproduction of the powerful, yet unclear discourse of civil society – but hopefully its transformation at points as well.

A new phenomenon in reproducing and transforming discourses is the use of the Internet to promote one's ideas and messages. This gives more power to the actors – and raises new questions for biographical research, for instance, if the data online can be used in the same way biographical-narrative interview texts can or how to protect vulnerable personal data.

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Ina Alber studied political sciences, sociology, media and communication studies in Göttingen/Germany and Toruń/Poland. She works at the Herder-Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe – Institute of the Leibniz Association in Marburg/Germany and is the executive director of the Leibniz Graduate School „History, Knowledge, Media in East Central Europe“. Her research topics focus on interpretative social research, mainly biographical research, discourse and text analysis on the one side, on Central Eastern Europe and post-socialist transformation, on democracy, civil society and human rights on the other side. Her PhD thesis was completed at the Centre of Methods in Social Sciences (supervisors: Prof. Dr. Gabriele Rosenthal, Prof. Dr. Ilja Srubar) at the University of Göttingen in November 2014.

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***Transnational family networks between Cuba and Germany and their impact on social change in Cuba. A family- and life historical approach***

Rosa Maria Brandhorst

Since colonial period, Cuba's economy and society have been organized around extended family networks. In revolutionary Cuba the role of the family has decreased substantially, as the state has assumed many of its traditional functions (Arés Muzio 1990, 2004; Smith/Padula 1996). But in process of socio-political and economic transformation in Cuba since the 1990s the family has regained its position as a primary force in society – now organized transnationally. In spite of the relative isolation of Cuba, an increasing number of families live in a transnational space. In the face of the economic crisis and the dual economy, these transnational households emerge as new survival strategies for the families and the system.

In my PhD thesis I analysed the formation of transnational families between Cuba and Germany and their impact on social transformations in Cuba, using the reconstructive analysis (Rosenthal 1993, 2002, 2004) of narrative biographical interviews (Schütze 1977, 1983, [1984] 2005) and participant observation, which I conducted from 2006 to 2014. As sociological migration research in the past tended to focus on the migrants' integration into host societies, there was a lack of analysis of migrants' cultural context of origin. To overcome these simplifying notions, I opted for this multi-sited and family- and life-historical methodology to reconstruct the migrants' lives prior to migration and their transformation with the migration process, and to portray the migrants' role in the host society and in the country of origin. In the first theoretical sample (Glaser and Strauss 1967), I interviewed Cuban migrants living in Germany. In a second sample, I visited their families in Cuba, basing my selection on the first analyses with interviewees in Germany. Within each family network, participant observation and narrative biographical interviews with various family members were conducted. This multi-sited methodology helped me to reconstruct the flow of ideas, goods, concepts, and patterns between Cuba and Germany. Often different generations of one family network were interviewed. Adopting a case level of life and family histories and thus a time frame of several generations (see Bertaux and Thompson 1997, Rosenthal 2002) enabled me to reconstruct the genesis of social phenomena over the long term and analyse family and life history as they interrelate to the history of larger groupings. This diachronic perspective on family histories serves as a promising approach to analyse the impact of migration on Cuban society and on the current social transformations in the country. The reconstruction of a biography not only provides information about an individual, but takes into account the interdependency and fluidity of the individual and society, and thus bridges micro and macro levels of analysis (Rosenthal 2012, 207). This approach shows that the decision to migrate is not merely an individual one, but has to be understood in the context of social groupings, figurations, and discourses. In total four family networks were analysed.

The empirical findings reveal, that besides the escape from a bad economic and political situation – as postulated in the Exit, Voice and Loyalty model (Hirschman 1970, 1993) or in neoclassical approaches (e.g. Todaro 1969), family relations and delegations play a crucial role in the decision of migration. This finding shows the special and until recently seldom recognized importance of familial decision-making in migration trajectories. Furthermore, three types of migration trajectories could be reconstructed. These types may be found in the same structure in other families and migration contexts and offer theoretical findings on migration and transnational family relations: In the type „Exit of the Outsider“ – reconstructed in the families Hernández, Parra and Villa - a family member emigrates because of his/her outsider position in the family. Due to the family's dependence on remittances the emigrated relative obtains a new powerful position within the family in Cuba. As the average salary in Cuba is 445 Pesos Cubans (17,8 US\$) (ONE 2012), even 30USD/\$ can make an important contribution to the household income. Due to the new position in the family the migrant re-intensifies the contact with the family of origin and constructs a belonging to an imagined place of home linked to the family, which serves him/her as a resource when confronted with a low social status or discrimination in

Germany. A remigration is improbable as the powerful position of the migrant in the family is linked to living abroad and providing remittances. The impacts of migration on the family of origin in Cuba are a socioeconomic ascent and an increasing focus on consumerism and migration.

In the second type „*Delegation of Upward Mobility*“ the family sends a member abroad. The reconstruction of the family cases López and Mendez reveal a transgenerational strategy of social ascent, which in the economic crisis leads to the resurgence of familial upward mobility strategies deriving from the pre-revolutionary era. These are especially hypergamy and migration. Although this time these strategies are realized on a global stage: Instead of migrating to the urban centres like their grandparents the biographers migrate abroad. Instead of marrying a wealthy Cuban, like their grandmothers/or mothers did, the biographers marry up in terms of social and geographic location by marriage migration (Constable 2004:168). Motives of migration are closely linked to economic factors, which enable the socioeconomic ascend. This type can be differentiated into two subtypes. The type „*Delegation of Upward Mobility and Attachment*“ shows an intensive transnational relationship and a high frequency of social, cultural and economic remittances. The migrant's low social status in the country of settlement (here Germany) leads to a rapprochement to the family in Cuba, which serves him/her as an emotional resource and an imagined space of home. In contrast, the type „*Delegation of Upward Mobility and Distance*“ shows a restricted transnational relation after the migration. Whereas the distancing from the family began prior to the migration, the migrant's higher status in the country of settlement makes it easier to maintain the distance. In both aforementioned subtypes the migration of a relative leads to a generational conflict in the family of origin in Cuba between - as I call it - the “younger generations” (Mannheim [1952] 1997), “the children of the revolution” and the “revolutionaries”. It shows an improved standard of living and social upward mobility of the generation of the migrants' parents (revolutionaries), and a focus on social disintegration and an increasing interest in living abroad of the younger generations, which lead to the migration of the latter.

In contrast to the prior mentioned types the migration trajectory in the third type „*Educational Exchange*“, which is represented by family García, is linked to the expectation of education and the familial experience with student- and labour exchanges in the scope of Cuba's socialist commitment. Although also an important person within the family is sent abroad, the focus is less on economic factors, as the family condemns remittances as a betrayal of the socialist project. The conformity and loyalty with the Cuban socialist system leads to a continuity of interfamilial positions after emigration. The family members in Cuba continue being employed in the state sector and integrated in socialist organisations.

The research results show a connection between the migration trajectory, the maintenance of the transnational relationship and the way of living of the families of origin in Cuba. This connection does not only refer to the analysed cases, but can in this structure also be found in other families and migration contexts. Also a connection between a low social status in the country of settlement and intensified transnational ties to the family of origin can be observed. The empirical results show that Cubans, who have relatives abroad and receive remittances, profit from the socio-political and economic transformation in Cuba. The current reforms under the presidency of Raúl Castro show a withdrawal of the state and hence make nongovernmental informal survival strategies necessary. Migrants' remittances provide economic development assistance and fill the wholes of the reduced Cuban social welfare system. Nevertheless, the unequal access to convertible currency leads to an increasing inequality – and to a reversal of power hierarchies within the Cuban society. The remittances on the one hand enable Cuba's economic subsistence and the legitimacy of the government; on the other hand they challenge the status quo. Thus, the social impacts of migration such as social inequality, the loss of socialist principles and brain drain undermine the system and trigger further social change.

Besides these results, the empirical study of Cuban migration challenges key assumptions of the transnationalism paradigm in the following aspects: 1. regarding the conceptualisation of transnational migration as a *new* phenomenon developed and sustained through global media flows, infrastructure and

communication technologies, 2. regarding underestimating the power of the social construct of the nation, 3. regarding the definition of transnational action, 4. regarding power relations. This reveals the need for more empirical research in the field of transnational migration research.

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## PROJECT ANNOUNCEMENTS

### ***Child Soldiers in Context: biographies, familial and collective trajectories in northern Uganda***

Work on this research project started in May 2014 and is directed by Prof. Dieter Neubert (Chair for Development Sociology) and funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) for the years 2014–16. The First Researcher is Artur Bogner. The project has been designed and is conducted in collaboration with Prof. Gabriele Rosenthal (Center of Methods in the Social Sciences, Georg-August-University Göttingen). The principal objective is to reconstruct biographies, life courses and reintegration processes of former child soldiers and underage abductees of the Lord's Resistance Army in the central part of northern Uganda. However, in contrast to previous research data collection and analysis shall focus on embedding their biographical self-presentations in the contexts of family histories and the histories of their local social settings and collectivities, interpreting them within these diachronic and socio-collective contexts and taking into account their intertwining with the latter.

The methodological design of the study is based on the principles of social-constructivist biographical research and figurational sociology with an emphasis on family histories. One focus is on the intertwining between self-presentations and collective discourses, self-interpretation and interpretation by others, and another one on the differences, tensions and interdependencies between various socio-historical generations and between 'generational units' (Karl Mannheim).

The main instrument of data gathering will be narrative interviews on their biographies and family histories with former child soldiers or abductees and other members of their families. This method of data collection has been tested in a pilot study on the spot. Case reconstructions will aim to capture the effects of familial pasts and family-biographical work for the life courses and self-interpretations of the interviewees before and after demobilization. Biographical and family-biographical interviews with family members shall be complemented among others by interviews and group interviews with other informants, largely from their local social settings.

An important aim is to combine biographical and family-biographical case reconstructions with the analysis of local discourses and their historical change. The theoretical sampling of cases will be guided among others by disputes or tensions between different groupings (including historical generations and generational units) that are related to diverse or conflicting interpretations of e.g. the transition from rebel-fighter to civilian and from adolescence to adulthood.

We envisage comparisons to the findings of our previous project on the post-conflict process in the adjacent West Nile region of northern Uganda. Thereby we hope to help improving practical efforts as well as methods of research and counseling in the context of the reintegration of former child soldiers or abductees into civilian life.

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**Thematic Network of young researchers – DFH/UFA (Deutsch Französische Hochschule/Université Franco-Allemand)**

**Socialization, families and gender in migratory contexts – A biographical evaluation of the policies concerning the learning of languages by migrants in France and Germany**

This program will run over a period of two years from June 2014 to June 2016 at the University of Strasbourg and Goethe University Frankfurt am Main and is funded by the French-German University in Saarbrücken (UFA-DFH).

### **Description of the project:**

Biographical evaluations are a tool of the evaluation of policies that was developed in the last years by Ursula Apitzsch, Maria Kontos, Catherine Delcroix and Lena Inowlocki. In contrast to an approach “from above” that often considers different political fields as separate from one another (for example, health policies, education policies, etc.), a biographically based evaluation of policies enables us to find out how different political fields intersect in the lives of the individuals. We can thus study how policies actually affect the life course and describe the strategies that individuals and groups of individuals develop to adapt to policies or to resist them. An evaluation of policies that departs from migrants’ experiences seems particularly relevant also because policies that are set up on a larger scale in society are often tested on migrants first.

The topic of this network concerns *language policies*. The question of languages is particularly relevant for the study of migration issues but also more generally for the study of contemporary societies. Learning the language of host countries of migration is currently at the heart of European integration policies. Since 2005, different member states of the European Union, among them France and Germany, have introduced so-called “integration contracts” that are based on the knowledge of the language of the host country.

In our project, we plan to conduct an exploratory research. Based on criteria of theoretical sampling, we will choose migrant families in Strasbourg and in Frankfurt and conduct biographical interviews with members of the different generations in these families (about five interviews per family). Through our reconstructive analysis of the life stories, we plan to conduct a biographical evaluation of the different policies that concern languages, by studying the ways these policies have affected the different life phases of the family members and their life as a family. Our respondents will differ by sex, age and also generation. This will allow us to go back in time, to deepen our analysis in terms of historical and intergenerational contexts and it will enable an evaluation of changing policies over a long time span.

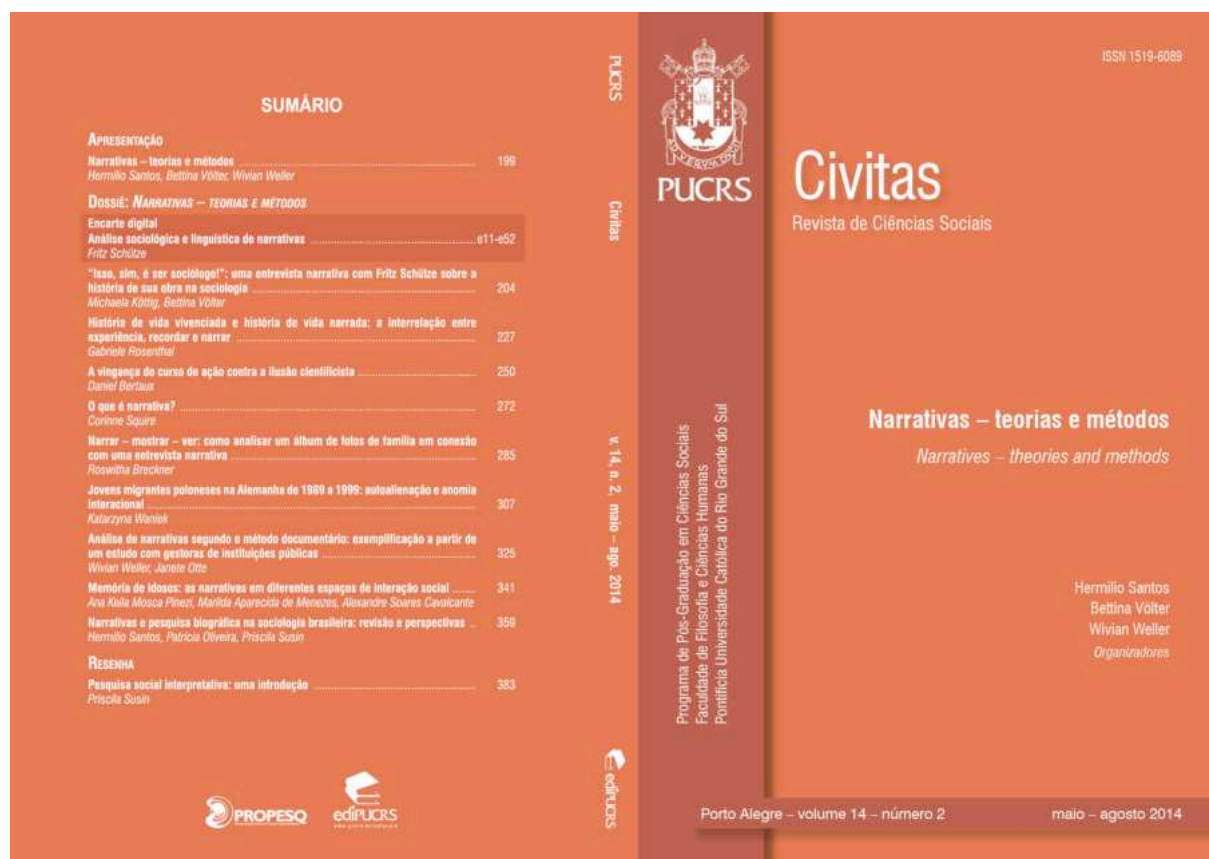
In addition, we will not only concentrate on the policies that concern the learning of the language of the host society, but also on the measures that exist in Germany and France for the learning of languages in general. This will allow us to think about the ways language policies and language learning in France and Germany position these two countries in a “European mental space” (Fritz Schütze), and about the relationships of both countries to the image of the nation state. It will also enable us to study the way policies encourage or discourage the learning of languages of migrants’ countries of origin and to understand the choices of the encountered families concerning their linguistic practices. This point is particularly important with regard to families’ transnational lives that often contrast with assimilation oriented policies of host societies that are based on a mono-linguistic model and the idea of a mono-national sense of belonging. However, for several years now an introduction of teaching the native languages of migrants in primary and secondary schools in France and Germany can be observed.

Thus, based on our reconstructive analysis of the life stories of members of migrant families, we plan to evaluate policies concerning languages over a longer time span and the impact of these policies on different stages of the

family life of the migrants. This will enable us to gain insights also into further political fields linked to languages, i.e., the fields of education, health, family reunification, employment, and others.

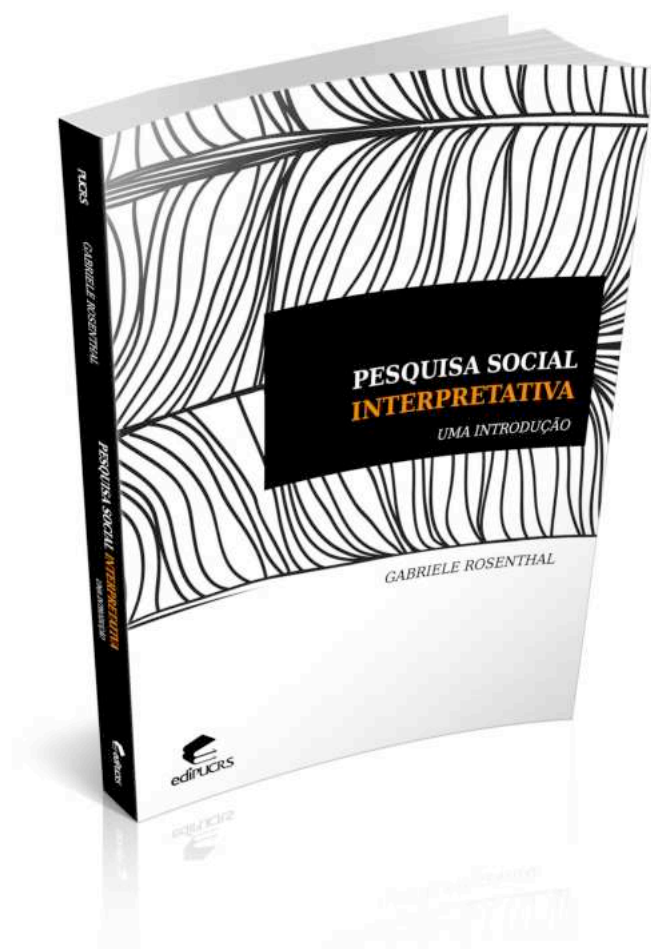
Contact information: Professeure Catherine Delcroix, Laboratoire « Dynamiques Européennes » (DE), UFR des Sciences Sociales, Pratiques Sociales et Développement (S.S.P.S.D.), Université de Strasbourg, Email: [cadelcroix@wanadoo.fr](mailto:cadelcroix@wanadoo.fr) and Prof. Dr. Lena Inowlocki, Cornelia Goethe Center for Women's and Gender Studies (CGC), Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, Email: [inowlocki@soz.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:inowlocki@soz.uni-frankfurt.de)

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

**Civitas, dossier Narratives – theories and methods**

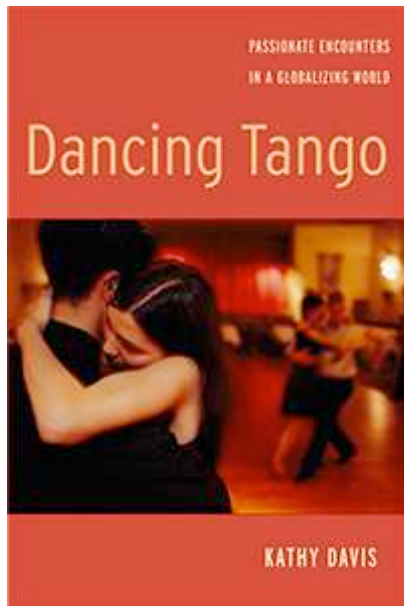
*Civitas* – Social Science Journal, edited by the Social Science Department of PUCRS, Porto Alegre, Brazil, published a special edition on narrative research in sociology organized by Hermilio Santos (PUCRS, Brazil), Bettina Völter (Alice Salomon Hochschule Berlin, Germany) and Wivian Weller (UnB, Brazil). The original articles in German, English and French were translated into Portuguese. The main objective of this dossier is to present to the Brazilian reader part of the diversity of approaches in the narrative and biographical research. Among other authors, this special volume publishes articles from Fritz Schütze, Daniel Bertaux, Gabriele Rosenthal, and Roswitha Breckner. Besides the seminal article “Sociological and linguistic analysis of narratives”, by Fritz Schütze, Bettina Völter and Michaela Köttig publish a biographical interview with the author, in which the German sociologist reports the origins of his interest for narratives and how his biographical narrative approach was formulated. From Gabriele Rosenthal the dossier publishes a translation of the article “Life history and life story – The interrelation between experience, remembering and narrating”, in which the author synthesised the main aspects of her approach to the analysis of biographical narratives. From Daniel Bertaux, one of the founders of the RC 38 and its first President, there is an article on the major contribution of narratives for sociological research in general, which is to delineate the life course of the subject. Roswitha Breckner proposes in her article to combine the analysis of biographical interviews with the analysis of family photo albums and their way of self-presentation. All articles published in this volume are available for free download under <http://revistaseletronicas.pucrs.br/ojs/index.php/civitas/issue/view/832>.

*Pesquisa Social Interpretativa – Uma Introdução*, Portuguese translation of the book *Interpretative Sozialforschung – Eine Einführung*, by Gabriele Rosenthal



The book *Interpretative Sozialforschung – Eine Einführung*, by Gabriele Rosenthal, is now available also in Portuguese. Translated by Tomás da Costa and published by Edipucrs (Porto Alegre, Brazil), the book may play an important role for the discussion of interpretative approaches, especially for the dissemination of biographical narrative in Brazil and in the Portuguese-speaking academic communities. The approach proposed by Rosenthal, a member of the board and former president of the RC 38 (2002-2006 and 2007-2010), permits to make explicit important elements for the comprehension of different types of social actions in specific historical contexts. Her analytical approach has been used in research exploring several social phenomena over the last two decades.

***Dancing Tango – Passionate Encounters in a Globalizing World, by Kathy Davis***



Kathy Davis, who acted as RC 38 President for two periods (1995-1998 and 1999-2002), conducted interviews and ethnographical research in Buenos Aires and Amsterdam and “shows why a dance from another era and another place appeals to men and women from different parts of the world and what happens to them as they become caught up in the tango salon culture. She shows how they negotiate the ambivalences, contradictions, and hierarchies of gender, sexuality, and global relations of power between North and South in which Argentinean tango is – and has always been – embroiled” (from NYU Press advertising).



## CONFERENCES

### **Symposium Biographies of Belonging**

**VU University, Amsterdam, Netherlands**

**10-11 March 2015**

**Cost: €100 (€50 for students and PhD candidates)**

We are proud to announce a two-day international symposium, to be held at the VU University in Amsterdam, organized by the research group Identities, Diversity, and Inclusion of the Sociology Department, in collaboration with the Research Committee 38 'Biography & Society' of the International Sociological Association. The focus of the symposium is on the experience and narratives of belonging and what it means in people's lives. Where and when do they feel 'at home' and how has this experience changed in the course of their lives? What kinds of 'spaces' (e.g. cultural, geographical, imaginary) engender a sense of belonging and which do not? What are the features of contexts that are conducive to the people feeling that they 'belong'? What stories do they tell about feeling 'at home' or 'not at home' and how can these stories help us to understand the social parameters of conditions of inclusion and exclusion? Which niches for social change can be found in people's everyday experiences of belonging and not belonging?

We are also particularly interested in addressing methodological questions that arise in studying biographies of belonging: for example, how can we investigate belonging as an embodied, sensual, affective experience? What does belonging (or not belonging) actually 'feel' like? What kinds of interactional practices produce, facilitate or undermine an experience of belonging? What do people do in order to 'include' or 'exclude' others in a particular setting? How do individuals make sense of processes of inclusion or exclusion? What kinds of discourses and cultural narratives are available for talking about exclusion and inclusion?

#### **Topics for possible sessions (not exhaustive):**

Spaces and places of belonging  
Imagined belonging  
Exclusion and inclusion in organizational/institutional settings  
Transversal connections; virtual communities  
Unexpected sources of belonging  
Histories of belonging and othering  
Mobility and belonging  
Belonging and everyday life  
Belonging and civic engagement

#### **Keynote speakers:**

- Professor Katherine Pratt Ewing (Center for the Study of Religion and Sexuality, South Asia Institute, Columbia University, USA)
- Professor Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe (African and African American Studies, Duke University, Durham, USA)

We are looking forward to welcoming you in Amsterdam: Halleh Ghorashi, Kathy Davis, Peer Smets, Melanie Eijbarts, Ewa Karolina Szepletowska (organizing committee)

**For further information, please contact Ewa Szepletowska under: [ewa.karolina@gmail.com](mailto:ewa.karolina@gmail.com)**

**CALL FOR PAPERS**

**Differences, inequalities and sociological imagination**  
**12<sup>th</sup> Conference of the European Sociological Association**  
**RN 03 Biographical Perspectives on European Societies**  
**Prague, 25-28th August 2015**

The ESA's call for papers for Prague August 2015 highlights the profound challenges that the social sciences, and sociology in particular, are facing in current times. The "extraordinary acceleration of global processes of social and cultural change," the "exponential increase in social inequalities," the need to "recognise and acknowledging the multiple expressions of difference – such as gender, social class, age, ethnic background, religion, and sexual orientation... as vital when it comes to gaining insight into the 'multiple positioning' that characterises contemporary individuals." Moreover, the "threat to the very existence of democracy" exacerbated by international economic crises "calls for the construction of forms of social analysis which are strongly connected to the arena of public policy." The ESA conference theme 'Differences, inequalities and sociological imagination' suggests the need for the sociological imagination as a tool to accomplish important sociological research and analysis. Indeed the sociological imagination is offered as a means of "offering communities and individuals knowledge and insight that can help to stem the tide of fatalism and apathy."

RN03 Biographical Perspectives on European Societies responds to this call by examining: the relationship between the theoretical and methodological basis of biographical research; empirical exploration of everyday lives - how 'lived' lives are connected to history and culture; and the ethical and practical application of biographical research. What are the contemporary experiences across Europe and beyond? How might individual stories and experiences connect to issues of differences, inequalities, democracy and social justice? What does the biographical sociological imagination look like? The Prague 2015 conference sessions will offer rich platform for sharing understanding, experience and application of the biographical sociological imagination.

As RN03 Members (and prospective members) please send me your thoughts, reflections and suggestions for panels in good time.

**The following panels were suggested at the Business Meeting at Durham at the recent Interim Conference.**

1. Marginality and Social exclusion
2. Performing Biographies
3. Sporting Biographies
4. Working Lives
5. Cultural Memories
6. Arts and Biography
7. Research Ethics in Biographical Research
8. Young people and Social Change
9. Sexual Stories
10. Method and Imagination-applying biographical methods

We hope you will stay in touch and send us your news!

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Prof. Kaja Kazmierska ([kajakaz@uni.lodz.pl](mailto:kajakaz@uni.lodz.pl))

## NEWS FROM ISA ACTIVITIES



The preparation for the next Forum Conference in Vienna will start in January with a **CALL FOR SESSIONS** which will be **open from 15 January to 15 February 2015**. Our RC probably will be able to propose 12 sessions, including Joint Sessions hosted by us as well as a Business Meeting. We would like to encourage all who are interested in setting up a Session or Joint Session to **submit a title and a short abstract** (150 words) to the program coordinators Roswitha Breckner and Lena Inowlocki via the **email-address** [biography-and-society@gmx.de](mailto:biography-and-society@gmx.de) and [roswitha.breckner@univie.ac.at](mailto:roswitha.breckner@univie.ac.at) until February 15, 2015 at the latest.

**Other relevant DATES TO BE NOTED:**

**7 April 2015** the **Call for Papers** will be posted on the Forum website and distributed in different contexts.

**3 June – 30 September 2015 24:00 GMT: Abstracts submission** via the electronic system, available at that time on the conference webpage <http://www.isa-sociology.org/forum-2016/>.

**4 October – 24 November: Abstracts selection** by session organizers.

**30 November 2015: Notification letters.**

**26 January 2016: Sessions schedule** will be available.

**April 1, 2016: Registration deadline for presenters.**

**April 14 – May 1, 2016 24:00 GMT: Final modifications** of the program **by session organizers**, based on withdrawal of non-registered presenters. Chairs and discussants are assigned from among the registered participants.

## ELECTIONS IN YOKOHAMA 2014

1. **RC 38 ELECTIONS.** A new Presidency-Team (President, Vice-Presidents, Secretary/Treasurer, Board) was voted by a large majority of about 30 participating members in the business meeting in Yokohama.

**Roswitha Breckner** (University of Vienna, Austria) was voted as **president** for another four years.



I am Associate Professor at the University of Vienna, and joined the RC 38 at the World Congress in Montreal in 1998. Before I met this group, I was already involved in biographical research in Germany for a while. During my studies in sociology and history at the Free University of Berlin in the 1980s, I started to deal with the aftermath of the Nazi-past in Germany, and later on also in Austria. During the 1990s I focused on research on the biographical meaning of migration in the lives of people who moved from the East to the West of Europe during the Cold War, and on biographical approaches to Social Policy. In the last fifteen years I enlarged my methodological repertoire by developing Visual Segment Analysis as a way to understand and interpret the pictorial meaning of images. Currently, I am interested in the biographical implications of communicating with different kinds of photos in the so-called Social Media.

**Lena Inowlocki** (Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, Germany) was voted as **vice-president** and takes co-responsibilities for developing the program at RC conferences.



My membership in RC 38 goes back a long way and I look forward to being more involved in the planning process. In Frankfurt, I'm professor at the University of Applied Sciences and also (extra- ordinary) at Goethe University. In biographical research, I started out in Germany with life stories of drug users and then did research on how young people became involved in Neo-Nazi groups. When I moved to the Netherlands, I worked with a group of psychotherapists and psychiatrists on the generational transmission of trauma in different groups of the population. My own research then was on intergenerational processes, biographical constructions and different kinds of knowledge among three generations of women in families of Jewish Displaced Persons. Based in Frankfurt again, my research focused on biographical research with individuals and families with different migration histories. I also participated in a EU project on the evolution of European identities. I joined a group of psychotherapists and psychiatrists – once again –, this time to study processes of institutional change, through participant observation and narrative expert interviews. Most recent is a bi-national project on the biographical evaluation of language and migration policy in France and Germany.

**Hermilio Santos** (PUCRS, Porto Alegre, Brazil) was voted as **vice-president** and takes responsibilities for the Newsletter.



I am Professor at PUCRS, Brazil, where I supervise Master, PhD. and Post-Doctoral students and researchers in biographical narrative approach. Currently I am conducting a research on the engagement of women in violent actions, based on biographical narratives. I just finished a research on the experience of violence of children in *favelas* from Rio de Janeiro, Recife and São Paulo using seven different instruments of data collection, conducted by a multidisciplinary research team. I am also interested in the connections between the biographical narrative approaches with the sociology of Alfred Schutz. I took my PhD. in Political Science at the Free University of Berlin and in 2013-2014 I spend eight months as Visiting Researcher at the Centre of Methods in Social Sciences of the University of Göttingen, invited by Prof. Gabriele Rosenthal. Before joining the RC 38 I was active in the RC 14 (Sociology of Communication, Knowledge and Culture).

**Maria Pohn-Lauggas** (University of Vienna, Austria) was voted as **Secretary/Treasurer** and takes responsibility for tasks necessary to manage the RC.



Currently, I run a research project at the University of Vienna, in which I am firstly interested in intergenerational forms of transmission of acts of resistance against National Socialism and connected experiences in Austrian families. Secondly, I focus on a methodical and methodological combination of the approaches of biographical case reconstruction and image analysis. I completed my PhD in the field of biographical research and discourse analysis. In my doctoral thesis I was interested in biographical self-constructions of Viennese women who were not persecuted by the Nazis but fully integrated in Nazi society. A central question for me was in which way the gendered discourse of victimization was part of their self-construction.

### RC 38 Board

According to the new Statutes, the number of board members is limited to 19 altogether, and includes the presidents as well as the secretary/treasurer. The following colleagues were voted as board members in addition to the presidency:

Ursula Apitzsch  
 Susan Bell  
 Julia Bernstein  
 Thea Boldt  
 Kathy Davis  
 Kaja Kazmierska  
 Tazuko Kobayashi  
 Michaela Köttig  
 Feiwei Kupferberg  
 Henning Salling Olesen  
 Gabriele Rosenthal  
 Victoria Semenova  
 Irimi Siouti  
 Julia Vajda  
 Hee Young Yee

2. **ISA-ELECTIONS.** During the Conference, a new President (the first female one in the history of the ISA!), Vice-Presidents, Executive Committee were elected. These are the results:

<b>President</b>	<b>Margaret ABRAHAM</b> , Hofstra University, USA
<b>Vice-President Research</b>	<b>Markus SCHULZ</b> , University of Illinois, USA
<b>Vice-President National Associations</b>	<b>Sari HANAFI</b> , American University of Beirut, Lebanon
<b>Vice-President Publications</b>	<b>Vineeta SINHA</b> , National University, Singapore
<b>Vice-President Finance and Membership</b>	<b>Benjamin TEJERINA</b> , University of the Basque Country, Spain
<b>Members of the Executive Committee</b>	<b>Rosemary BARBERET</b> , City University of New York, USA
	<b>Dilek CINDOGLU</b> , Mardin Artuklu University, Turkey
	<b>Filomin GUTIERREZ</b> , University of the Philippines Diliman, Philippines
	<b>John HOLMWOOD</b> , University of Birmingham, UK
	<b>Guillermina JASSO</b> , New York University, USA
	<b>Kalpana KANNABIRAN</b> , Council for Social Development, Hyderabad, India
	<b>Marina KURKCHIYAN</b> , University of Oxford, UK
	<b>Simon MAPADIMENG</b> , North-West University, South Africa
	<b>Ayşe SAKTANBER</b> , Middle East Technical University, Turkey
	<b>Celi SCALON</b> , Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
	<b>Sawako SHIRAHASE</b> , University of Tokyo, Japan
	<b>Grazyna SKAPSKA</b> , Jagiellonian University, Poland
	<b>Evangelia TASTSOGLU</b> , Saint Mary's University, Canada
	<b>Chin-Chun YI</b> , Academia Sinica, Taiwan
	<b>Elena ZDRAVOMYSLOVA</b> , European University St. Petersburg, Russia
<b>Executive Secretary</b>	<b>Izabela Barlinska</b> , Poland



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