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FIRST DRAFT

## **Habitus, Reflexivity and the Transformation of Self. Biographical Identities of Workers and Business People in Post-Socialist Poland**



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Systemic transformation in Poland can be perceived as continuous disintegration and reintegration of symbolic universes, social worlds and social milieus affecting daily routines and life strategies of the people involved (cf. Strauss, 1993: 157). It is usually assumed that the fall of socialist system, its specific institutions and the rules of action, had resulted in the necessity for redefining own identity (Marody, 2000: 41). The question “who I am?” became truly problematic in the situation, when the previous reference groups disappeared or changed their character, and the new ones have not been formed yet. The new ways of defining self, however, did not appear in the “social vacuum”. Being the response to institutional “bricolage” of transitional period (Stark, 1992: 300), they were the result of recombination of old habits, competences and resources with the pragmatic rationality based on accelerated learning of the ‘new game rules’ in the emerging social order. Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, defined as a set of schemes of perception, thought and action generated in accordance with an occupied social position (cf. Bourdieu, 1990: 53-55), may serve as an adequate device to explain the persistence of mental dispositions in the context of structural change. Referring to this concept we are raising a question of the extent to which the social change liberated individuals from the limitations put by their inherited resources, and of the degree to which it has created new constraints limiting the range of possible ways of identity constructions.

In our paper we are trying to reflect the above mentioned problem questioning the role of postsocialist dispositions and the impact of habitus on the ways of constructing biographical identities within two social milieus in contemporary Poland: workers and business people. On the basis of biographical accounts we would like to discuss two myths typical of transformation period: the myth of the passive and full of claims working class identified with the previous system; and the myth of business people, fully independent self-made men symbolizing an overall success and a birth of a new middle class. The notion of biographical work, understood here as a reflexive work on one’s own biography (cf. Strauss,

1993: 98) helps us to contradict one-dimensional definitions and to understand better the dialectical movement of continuity and innovation on the level of self-identity. Our position suggests that neither the identities of workers reflect the pure persistence of inherited habitus, nor the identities of business people can be reduced to socially rootless constructions.

The forthcoming empirical analysis is based on biographical interviews with workers and business people conducted in the years of 2001-2004 in Poland. The narrative interviews (cf. Schuetze 1983, 1984) were carried out within the frames of two separate PhD projects<sup>1</sup>. The categories generated in those investigations were systematically confronted to broaden their scope and density. Reflecting the analytical paths we have gone along, our paper is organized as follows. First, we will elaborate the problem of social construction of systemic change in Poland. Second, we will demonstrate how post-socialist resources are practically used by workers and business people in the course of transformation. Further, we will come to the discussion on habitus and biographical reflexivity. Finally, we will summarize differences and similarities between workers and business peoples in their ways of constructing identities.

### **Social construction of 'systemic transition' and the problem of identity**

Biographical analysis reveals that the categories used for characterizing the differences between the socialist time and the present are applied also for constituting social divisions and labelling certain ways of acting as better or worse adapted to the emerging social reality (cf. Dunn, 1999: 134). This cultural repertoire is both rooted in collective memory and filtered through personal experiences, constituting the symbolic framework of new circumstances in face of which one constructs his or her own identity. It is a stake in negotiating the sense of systemic transition and a reference point in defining own place in the emerging social reality (cf. Marody, 2000). Reducing the complexity of biographical data, we can formulate four main oppositions which are applied by workers and business people to narrate about the changes. First, the egalitarian scarcity of politically regulated society is juxtaposed to the non-egalitarian consumption incentives generated by the market-based economy. Second, the

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<sup>1</sup> Despite of substantive differences, in both PhD projects similar methodological framework has been applied (grounded theory methodology by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, cf. Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The investigation has been carried out in Silesia region (Lower Silesia, Opole Silesia and Upper Silesia) in south-western part of Poland. There were more than one hundred interviews within each of the researched milieus collected so far. Workers have been defined as the full-time employees out of the agricultural sector on the work positions localized on the lowest level of an enterprise hierarchy, performing manual work or routine tasks marked by the limited extend of decision and control. Business people have been characterized broadly as men and women owning a firm (and employing at least five people) or occupying managerial and executive positions within service and industrial enterprises, banks and other financial companies.

routinized safety characterizing the socialist period is contradicted to the opportunities and risks of innovation under conditions of radical social change. Third, the collectivised climate of everyday life in socialism is opposed to the individualization stimulated (or even forced) by the new social order. Finally, the politization of rules governing the socialist society is contradicted to the marketization and the meritocratization introduced in the course of transformation. According to the neoliberal viewpoint dominating in political discourse in Poland, the action patterns generated by the socialist rules remained the foundations of workers' identities, while the business people are those who were able to recognize better and internalize more quickly the requirements of new social circumstances. However, our analysis suggests that this kind of dichotomous stance should be rendered.

First stipulation refers to the similarities of biographical experiences of some categories of workers and business people which contradict unambiguous distinction between those two groups. On the one hand, young age, occupational mobility aimed at professional achievements, and a need for pragmatic investments in cultural capital are common characteristics shared by younger generation of the best skilled workers and managers (mainly in newly erected firms), contributing to correspondence of identity patterns within those two groups. Their biographical constructions entail more instrumental meaning of work (as a means for consumption and social advancement), greater acceptance of risk in the occupational sphere, and stronger individualism in social relations. On the other hand, older age, occupational experiences limited to one workplace or one branch, and insufficient resources of educational capital explain similarities between production oriented, lower-rank managers and skilled workers (postsocialist 'craftsmen' in industry) who in both cases occupy positions comparable to those in the socialism. Their definition of self is based on the ethos of hard work, stronger attachment to the workplace, reluctance to radical changes in personal life, and greater embedding of social actions in social bonds.

Another critical point following from biographical accounts concerns similarity of certain institutional rules defining new social order and those which were generated in socialism. Both workers and business people are facing reality which has been not invented *ex nihilo* after communism downfall in 1989 (cf. Mach, 1998), and their biographical strategies reflect this fact very clearly. The politization of transformed economy and the persistent role of 'useful' connections call into question the significance of educational merits for personal advancement and success. The network of contacts remains one of the most important means for running a business, developing an individual career, finding a job and maintaining a work position. The scope of pure individualism is also limited: emotional bonds with others

(especially with family members) are in most cases highly valued and desired, even if not fully accomplished way of minimizing dangers involved in dealing with new circumstances. The persistence thesis refers also to routinization-risk dimension. Even though transformation did introduce new kinds of market-based risk into everyday work and life, the strategies of coping with it are not always new. At least some of them were already learnt under conditions of centralized socialist economy which generated not only routine, but also unpredictability requiring a lot of invention and resourcefulness to successfully deal with it.

Despite of the mentioned similarities, resulting from comparable biographical experiences and the specificity of transformed social order, workers and business people differ in the ways of applying their past knowledge in the process of identity construction. Even if patterns of identifications seem to be comparable, the results are usually disparate because of the divergence in factors defining social position of workers and business people (i.e. habitus and the specific constellation of capital and power, cf. Bourdieu, 1998 [1984]: 114). Hence, as we argue, this is neither the internalization of socialist rules, nor the direct assimilation of capitalist principles, but unequal distribution of resources which underlies the differences of biographical identities within the researched milieus.

### **Postsocialist resources in action: an ambiguous heritage**

The identity strategies under conditions of radical change are marked by pragmatism. Since the institutional rules are unclear and changeable, they must be constantly learnt and redefined in the course of action<sup>2</sup>. In the process of working-out social change, the past experiences become the resources which are practically used in the process of the maintenance and the change of identities. In forthcoming passages, we will demonstrate how these processes appear in the narratives of workers and business people. We do not argue that the ‘postsocialist’ dispositions were generated purely by the features of previous system. However, we are convinced that even if some of them have much deeper historical origins (cf. Podgórecki, 1995), socialism has significantly contributed to their persistence despite of attempts at ‘socialist modernization’ (cf. Kupferberg, 1998; Szlachcicowa et al., 2002).

Under conditions of permanent scarcity of resources, successful coping with everyday life required smartness and shrewdness resulting in development of ‘evading’ and ‘wangling’

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<sup>2</sup> Definition of social action as shaped in interaction between reflexive actors and their environments is indicated as the core of pragmatist philosophy: “Principles guide action, but changing situations challenge us to create new

strategies to achieve own aims despite of the inertia of institutional order. Resourcefulness did not lose its significance after communism downfall in 1989. In case of workers, it is the common way of “working-out” the state of necessity created by the end of patrimonial institutions and destabilization of previously taken-for-granted work environments. Resourceful strategies entail job on sides, additional employment “after hours”, temporary work abroad or – in rare but significant cases – founding of small, family based firms.

**Arek:** “I have never earned my living from a single source, I have been always doing something more. Because, when I still worked in [a factory], when those 90s began...everybody started those business activities, so I was also running a rotisserie [firm]. I mean, only in Saturdays and Sundays, because in other days I worked in [a factory] (...) Nowadays I have also the second job, additionally... Not only in the Mill, but also a second, additional job (...) I am not like those people who sit and cry: ‘I have no work, I haven’t got this...’. This won’t help me” (A steelworker, M, 42) [W-5] <sup>3</sup>

For the business people, resourcefulness was a necessary condition to start own business at the beginning of transformation. A ‘classical’ Polish scenario assumed that a small firm could be established with minimal capital, jointly with family or friends, taking advantages of the boom in economy at the beginning of 90s. Afterwards, resourcefulness became even more important to “survive” in more and more competitive market. In order to manage “hard times”, mergers strategies, simultaneously running of a few different kinds of business and accelerated learning of honest and dishonest rules of the business field became unavoidable:

**Emil:** “Step by step, I looked for the first job, I hired four people and that’s how it began. Four, five, ten... right now we employ a hundred people. We’ve got a few business lines because we don’t want to be dependent on the market, on the upturns and downturns in the construction industry.” (An owner of construction company, M, 46) [B-78]

**Jakub:** “It’s a great job, it’s hard, but great because in the chain there are demanding and insolent partners. But it’s all about to... well, to con them... because they want to con us ((*laughter*)) so we want to con them, if it’s possible, of course. That’s how it is.” (A manager in clothing company, M, 33) [B-53]

In socialism, resourcefulness went together with instrumentalism towards institutions. The latter referred mainly to the specific situation of employees in state-owned companies (cf. Mokrzycki, 1995). Despite of dominating disbelief in official ideology, workers made use of political capital to strengthen their power in labour relations and to gain rare resources. Nowadays, the scope of such instrumentalism seems to be limited. Collective claiming of own rights is restricted to public sector (the only one in which it can be effective), resulting rather from despair than from consistent ‘attitude of claims’.

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principles” (Strauss, 1991: 10). Since systemic transformation did create those kinds of “changing situations” on a large scale, the reference to pragmatism seems to be very accurate.

<sup>3</sup> Labels of interviewees contain: (occupation, sex (M=male, F=female), age) [data base type (W=workers, B=business people), code number of interview]. All names and place indicators have been changed.

**Włodzimierz:** “We’re sorry that we, the old, adult people, have to behave like football hooligans, [that we have to] dash with these sirens all around Warsaw (...) And they still mind us, because there is still considerable number of us [left] (...) For those guys, just like for me, it’s about money, about a dignified existence (...) That we’d simply and calmly make the ends meet. And that they all get off our backs, if you’ll pardon the expression.” (A coal miner, M, 43) [W-40a]

The limited scope of instrumentalism can be to some extent explained by general disbelief in effectiveness of institutional (and especially political) solutions. Distance towards public sphere seems to reflect the phenomenon of ‘social vacuum’ in socialism which symbolized discrepancy between highly valued levels of primary groups and national community, and distrusted sphere of political representations (cf. Nowak, 1979). Despite of systemic change, politics is still perceived as immoral matter, dominated by incompetent personages who, regardless of certain exceptions, care neither about universal goals nor about group interests of researched milieus. In some cases, their “privatism” is opposed to own “work at the grassroots”: selfless engagement in trade unions for the sake of ‘saving the workplaces’ (trade union activists) or the feeling of social mission to create new jobs in the regions negatively affected by transformation (local entrepreneurs and some executives)<sup>4</sup>. More often, distance towards public sphere results in the necessity of self-reliance without counting on institutional support, as it comes out in following passages:

**Aleksandra:** “My generation won’t change anything. I used to believe in “Solidarity”, but it’s not relevant anymore, because I’ve made a mistake. Today you can believe only in yourself.” (A checkout assistant in a supermarket, F, 34) [W-58]

**Dariusz:** “People like me become resistant, they stop counting on the state, they don’t wait for help that would come from the other side, but they start themselves to take care of their own... of their own fate. (...) For sure, there’s no use to count on that someone would help you. If one needs to take it into account, he should think that someone would harm him, but not help.” (A manager in printing house, M, 33) [B-81]

Another consequence of ‘social vacuum’ in socialism was the high value of primary groups and peer groups levels (cf. Nowak, 1979), compensating general lack of trust in institutions. In the course of systemic change, family, network of friends and work milieus remain meaningful reference points, though their relative importance varies within researched milieus. Only in traditional working-class settings (long seniority, public sector, occupations based on hard physical labour), embedding in community and orientation at broadly understood social bonds were able to partially counterbalance general individualization trends. In other cases, it is first and foremost family which constitutes the reference point of primary importance. It is true especially for workers, for whom ‘familiarism’ not only helps to

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<sup>4</sup> Paradoxically, this kind of “work at grassroots” can be also explained as the side effect of socialist time, strongly rooted in Polish tradition of Romanticism (national community based on values as opposed to ‘alien’ authorities) and Positivism (selfless work for the sake of the shared national interests). Both traditions came out in “Solidarity” movement in 80s (cf. Podgórecki, 1995: 280).

maintain economic stability (in face of economic degradation), but also guarantees ontological security (in face of disembedding from well-known social worlds). In case of business people, family life is more often subordinated to professional activity. But even then, family bonds are highly valued, compensating stressful and risky professional life, guarantying emotional support and lending the sense to own hard work.

**Wanda:** “I have an asylum in my home, in my family. For me the family has the greatest authority. Unfortunately, it’s only my husband and daughter; I haven’t got parents anymore, because they died, but my father-in-law, mother-in-law, my siblings. For me they have the greatest authority (...) I’m proud of my family and I’ve got my family’s support” (A lean production worker in a chemical plant, F, 54) [W-8]

**Ewa:** “There’s nothing more important in life than home and family. If there everything is fine, if everything goes well there, then one has a great chance in life because all other things just go more easily, because family gives support.” (A bank manager, F, 48) [B-72]

Embedding in social bonds provides not only emotional security, but also social capital (in form of useful social networks, cf. Bourdieu, 1986), which can be practically used for achieving biographical goals. The socialist system undoubtedly intensified the role of connections in everyday life (cf. Podgórecki, 1995: 241-243). The informal social networks helped an individual in gaining the rare resources *beyond* the level of official institutional order. Under conditions of systemic change, the belief in connections persisted despite of diversification of its scope and character. On the one hand, those whose social position is marked by less efficient social and cultural resources (within both researched milieus) tend to criticize “cliques” which “illegitimately” accumulate power and economic capital (in contrast to “hardworking people”). Making use of their own (usually limited) social networks, they are likely to treat them as the natural way of acting in the reality determined by “connections”. On the other hand, social capital is perceived as the necessary supplement of other assets even if social position of interviewees is relatively strong. In this sense, orientation at “being recommended” and “being trusted” (a strategy commonly applied by career oriented members of both milieus), can reinforce objectively possessed cultural capital. The situation of resources scarcity comes out in the first of passages below, while the “reinforcing strategy” is observable in the second one:

**Pawel:** “This work is because of connections, my connections (...). Generally, [what counts] here in Silesia, are only connections. Only if an acquaintance recommends an acquaintance to an [another] acquaintance, this is how it works here. For now, without the connections you can not fix up anything” [A sewing machines mechanic in textile industry, M, 27) [W-25]

**Eryk:** “Perhaps it’s important to say a word about how it happened that I became a board member... in a strategic company, you know, it was the apple of their eye, it was a subject of horse-trading. (...) So, I can say that it happened because of my friendships. I was deeply politically involved, I was forming “Solidarity” as I’ve mentioned before, and then I was the underground activist all the time. (...) When the Krzaklewski’s army... got... the power in Poland, then I was simply recommended (...) They were looking for someone who had some



international experience (...) I was good not only because I knew them, but simply... I had that experience.” (A president of printing house, M, 55) [B-80]

If real socialism generated egalitarianism, it was a forced one, condemning any kind of standing out on economic level (cf. Ziółkowski, 2001: 292). The “conspicuous mediocrity” (as the opposite of Veblen’s conspicuous consumption, cf. Veblen, 1899) can be explained as one of the consequences of socialist ‘levelling down’. We have labelled by this concept an astonishing tendency among interviewees to describe themselves as the ‘average people’: not poor and not rich, having “reasonable” expectations and medium level of consumption. Since reinforced by objectively limited resources, self-identification through mediocrity is more obvious for workers. They tend to present themselves as “ordinary people” having average educational achievements and mediocre aspirations, who differ both from the lowest class (the people negatively affected by social change, less resourceful, but also unable to work as hard as workers do) and from the upper class (“the rich ones” whose wealth is not accompanied by certain moral standards). However, the same pattern is more surprising in the case of business people who, despite of much bigger assets, are likely to present their social status and lifestyle as “medium”, too. A reference point for the estimation of one’s position is upper class, described as the richest two or five percent of the society and sometimes identified with “nouveau riche”: those who have gained their fortune in a morally ambiguous way and tend to legitimize their status through “conspicuous consumption”.

**Robert:** “Anyway, my whole life goes on like...neither – nor...There is the bottom and the top, and I *non stop* dash between all those things, so to say ((more and more quite \*)). I am neither any phenomenon, nor...nor .../ I am not any...this kind of person who has problems, whom somebody must help, you know (\*). Generally, I am going all the time along this middle line. So I think that I am probably in such a, in this, that I am in this middle class. Generally... This is what I think.” (A line assembler in automotive industry, M, 30) [W-85]

**Włodzimierz:** “I’ve got a wife, only one, for... twenty nine years ((*laughter*)), I’ve got one daughter, for two years I’ve been a satisfied grandfather ((*laughter*)) (...) I’ve got a car, quite a good one, I’ve got my own semi-detached house, it’s American standard, I would say... and a decent level of life. Twice a year I go to the seaside, our sea of course, no Rimini, nothing like that, I don’t go there, I always go to the same place ((*laughter*)) I stay at the Baltic Sea. (...) This is how I live, peacefully, without fireworks. I don’t know, I’m a statistical citizen of our country.” (A co-owner of construction company, M, 54) [B-68]

Our considerations so far were aimed at documenting the tame hypothesis about the set of postsocialist dispositions, which affect biographical constructions of workers and business people in an uneven way. We have tackled only selected mental patterns which are, in our opinion, the most important ones from the vantage point of identity processes.

### **Habitus and reflexivity in the contrastive milieu settings**

Apart of dispositions marked by the impact of previous system, biographical narratives reflect also intergenerationally transmitted mental structures produced in relation to

social origins and social positions of interviewees. We have labelled them as ‘habitus’, with the reference to Bourdieu’s usage of the term (cf. Bourdieu, 1990: 60)<sup>5</sup>. The relationship between mental dispositions and social change is a twofold one. On the one hand, reflexive management of habitus, which can potentially lead to its transformation, depends itself on inherited dispositions (cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 136). On the other hand, as our analysis suggests, the greater the distance between the departure point and the attained position (defined in terms of possessed resources) and/or the less coherent inherited dispositions, the more space is left for the biographical work on internalized mental patterns. We assume here that biographical work (a work on own biography, cf. Strauss, 1993: 98) requires reflexivity which consists in “the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives” (cf. Giddens, 1995: 5). In the following paragraphs, we would like to demonstrate the differences in identity constructions of workers and business people elaborating the problem of relationship between habitus and reflexivity within investigated milieus.

In case of workers, we have reconstructed two ‘mental configurations’. The first one comes out first and foremost in case of traditional working-class communities (like miners, steelworkers), skilled workers with long seniority in one firm and those whose longstanding work positions declined in the result of the change of external circumstances. It is based on the perception of social reality as the domain of constraints, life-planning oriented towards preserving status quo and strong need for security within the frames of well-known social worlds. We have labelled the mental grounds for mentioned configuration by the categories of principialism, self-limitation and conditioned self-reliance. The principialism indicates a tendency for defining the environment in moral terms (cf. Lamont, 2000). Moral principles are universalized establishing practical divisions between ‘normal’ and ‘aberrant’, ‘allowed’ and ‘forbidden’, ‘healthy’ and ‘sick’. Their sources are the lasting community traditions giving tried-and-tested means to exercise control over own body, self and environment:

**Manfred:** “I would limit everything to the frames. You can... You can’t do anything by force, if there is a slight excess beyond those barriers...[you can] tolerate it, you know. But not if that excess is like half kilometre beyond those barriers, which are correct, healthy, not sick” (A locksmith in machine industry, M, 40) [W-94]

**Kilmek:** : “Grandfather worked in a pit, father worked in a mill, uncle worked in a pit, so what was the way for us? So it has remained: either a mill, or a pit (...). And this was somehow ingrained in us that you must work: “Pray and work”, this is what I say, you know. This how a Silesian looks like” (A coal miner, M, 44) [W-40b]

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<sup>5</sup> Habitus is defined as a durable set of perception, thought and action schemes which results from internalization of constraints bonded with experienced conditions of existence (cf. Bourdieu, 1990: 53-55).

Self-limitation, the next mentioned category, refers to the practical knowledge about limits set by possessed resources. Internalization of structural limits protects one from potential failure resulting from the attempt to ‘bite off more than one can chew’. It is usually supported by conditioned self-reliance, defined as the disposition to face the challenges of life by own means (since the other are not available). Not intentionally chosen but necessitated by the lasting experience of lack of resources, socialization to self-reliance makes the hard work the only legitimized way to secure individual ‘dignity’ and to ‘survive’ under unfavourable conditions. In case of orientation towards persistence, the action patterns required in new conditions are regarded as unavailable because of overwhelming constraints. In this case we often observe intergenerational transmission of them to children:

**Włodzimierz:** “It’s all about... that you just... must be able to handle those things. That he’d [my son] start to think... independently... [that] he’d take his decisions independently... [that] he’d have to do with other people... that he’d be able to manage it, this is how it should look like, nowadays. Because they, as I said, did us harm at one point (...) You went to work in that mining, because the work was by and large here” (A coal miner, M, 43) [W-40a]

If the configuration of persistence tends to appear in more ‘traditional’ working-class biographies, the ‘persistence in change’, as we have named the second configuration, usually goes together with more diverse professional life and intentional work mobility (often already in socialism), symbolized by occupational advancement through education, earning money on the side or, in some cases, starting small, family based firms (apart of occupational activity)<sup>6</sup>. Since the social position does not change dramatically (interviewees are still workers), the basic habitus structure remains the same, forming the basis on which new rules (enabling economic advancement) are reinterpreted within the framework of old action patterns. The need for change becomes one of the rigorously obeyed ‘principles’. Self-limitation (“the discipline of necessity”) is transformed into the discipline of investments in cultural and economic resources. Finally, self-reliance begins to be less conditioned by external factors than related to autonomous choice for ‘better life’. In all cases, reflexivity plays a central role enabling continuous reshaping of own identity without losing the feeling of biographical continuity and personal coherence.

**Adam:** “It is somehow grouped in my life, you know? Because you can measure time from a stage to a stage, can’t you? (...) And those stages, in my case, these were the stages of school. (...) All life stages, and from every stage I drew a conclusion, I passed to the next one, and – bang! – and so...this kind of career...Perhaps not from the shoeshine boy, but I have been doing something somewhere, I have understood something and

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<sup>6</sup> It is hard to definitely state why certain categories of people were able to make more pragmatic use of new circumstances than others even if they possessed exactly the same amount of resources at the departure point. We are convinced that apart of biographical experiences (like higher occupational mobility in socialism or acceptance of risk learnt during participation in “Solidarity”) and family capital (higher social status of parents, greater emphasis on education in family of origins), certain personal traits also played a significant role. This problem, however, must be still further researched.

later on this has brought me effects [...] I'll tell you, this is not this kind of brilliant career like the one of a TV-star some years ago, but, I would say, the one up to a personality, up to the possibilities, isn't it?" (A car assembler in automotive industry – proposed to a low management position, M, 25) [W-2]

Since business milieu in Poland is a new phenomena and reminds more “work in progress” than a coherent group, the habitus, as defined by Bourdieu, of Polish business people did not have enough time and favourable context to be developed yet. Those who work in private sector as owners and executives come from various social backgrounds, they followed diverse career paths, they have attained different positions, and the amount and the kinds of resources they possess also greatly differ. And the element that is common for all of them is the fact that they work in business field. That great heterogeneity also contributes to the difficulties in ascribing oneself to a certain social class or social category.

Mental dispositions of business people in Poland are like an amalgamation of different elements. In case of workers we have a frame, a hard skeleton, which because of social transformation, must be filled with some new elements. It is contrary in case of business people, where we have heterogeneous elements that need a frame, a structure that can be constructed only in the course of time. It partially explains why among workers a common tendency goes towards reflexive persistence, and for the business people more typical would be reflexive change. That difference may be also explained by the field effect (cf. Bourdieu, Wacquant, 2002: 96-120). This is the business field which is ruled by a specific logic, stressing profit, efficiency and pragmatism. These rules are not completely new in Polish context, but now they take a different form and a broader scope than before. One of the main principles of business field in Poland is its constant changeability and therefore to be able to act there one needs to learn much and very quickly. Marketization, opening a way towards entrepreneurship and private initiative, formed the grounds for a sequence: ambition – success – greater ambition, which motivated to hard work and optimistic vision of the future. A common strategy was “not to rest on one's laurels”, which meant intensive investment and taking advantage of high demand of the hungry market and legal loopholes. A downturn in the economy at the end of 90s brought disappointment because many of the previous expectations could not be satisfied. A lower demand and higher institutionalization of market rules asked for new strategies in order to survive and to work out a slow growth.

Despite the changeability of business field and diversity of individual resources, there is a commonly applied strategy, which is based on two elements: endless struggle and hard work. They do not only form a tactic to act effectively in business field, but they are also means to construct one's identity. Life stories of business people are often work narrations –

this is work that really matters and which is the main area of one's life activity, one's plans and hopes, one's successes and failures. Work structures everyday life and gives meaning to one's existence. In many cases work becomes permanent and takes over the areas previously reserved for personal and family life.

**Mirosław:** You're not at work, because you normally go to work, but you're busy all the time. I come from there and I sit down at home and I'm still at work. One who has his own business is at work twenty four hours per day." (An owner of construction company, M, 45) [B-34]

When work not only takes long hours, but also involves a full personal engagement, a strenuous effort, an attempt to achieve certain goals, even at the high price, then it becomes a struggle. One of the characteristics of business field is struggle that takes place simultaneously at many different levels: the lowest would be individual biography and the highest would be the field as a whole. We may easily distinguish "struggle against" and "struggle for". The former includes efforts towards defeating competition – especially foreign and unfair, and the fight against "over-bureaucratization" that is embodied in the tax office and the national insurance system. The latter is a general attempt to "achieve something", which means promotion in the firm's hierarchy or survival and growth of one's company.

System transformation and the field effect made it possible for many business people to change radically their social position, the amount and the kind of resources they own. When there is a great difference between the starting point and the attained position, the past becomes 'incredible' in a sense that it is difficult for an individual to believe that the past 'I' and the present 'I' is the same person. In such cases additional biographical work needs to be done in order to preserve the coherence and continuity of the self despite the deep change in external conditions.

**Irena:** "I am a person that really may be an example of someone who managed to make a name for oneself, because I was born in a countryside (...) in a family... not numerous, but rather poor, I would say, in the 50s, when we had a difficult situation at home, material situation [...] Perhaps... I'd even say that now it seems incredible to me that I used to live like that" ((*laughter*)) (A bank manager, F, 55) [B-74]

## Conclusions

We have begun our argumentation by sketching out the cultural context of transformation in order to show the ambiguity of values attached to the process of changes, which contradicts one-dimensional vision of transition and its specific actors. Developing our own explanation of identity processes within the investigated milieus, we referred to postsocialist dispositions and demonstrated relationships between the ways of their application and the resources determining social position of interviewees. Further, we have

elaborated the differences between workers and business people with regard to the problems of habitus and reflexivity. On the one hand, the continuity of social positions supports reintegration of new rules into the old action patterns within the working-class habitus. On the other hand, the diversity of social origins and the impact of business field (hence, the new social circumstances) call into question the existence of coherent habitus of business people.

In case of workers we can speak about the reflexive persistence as the main mental pattern influencing biographical identities. Workers' pragmatism, as the ability to learn and to make use of new institutional rules, is limited not only through the principles of their habitus, but also through the constraints of their social position, which became even more striking after the retreat of paternalist state. In comparison to workers, business people are much more instrumental and selective towards intergenerationally transmitted principles and the rules learnt in socialism. We can speak about the reflexive change as the basic pattern which determines their identity strategies. Taking advantages of the rules and resources which are potentially effective in the field they are acting on, they are more eager to get rid of those, which would hinder efficiency on the organizational level.

The cross-cutting similarities between certain categories of workers and business people can challenge the stereotypes of full of claims "losers" and successful "winners" of systemic transition. The inner variation in identity patterns within the milieus can be explained by the impact of comparable biographical experiences and the resources determining social position of interviewees at the present moment. Younger age combined with stronger educational resources, satisfactory living standard (economic capital) and more influential occupational positions (social and symbolic capital) tend to reinforce orientation towards social advancement, weakening the dependency on the past. This is at most the case of the new generation of business people, but it appears also in narratives of young, very well skilled and career oriented workers. And in contrary, the shared experiences from socialism within the older generation of interviewers (in both milieus), if reinforced through intergenerational transmission of comparable principles of habitus, produce some similarities in identification patterns, even though present social position of investigated people clearly differs. That is why the biographical constructions of the older members of business milieu, who step-by-step advanced from lower class milieus in socialism (usually by the means of technical education), remind more those of the skilled workers than the identities of their counterparts, either originating from the milieus of higher social status, or following more diverse career patterns. Hence, the experiences from the socialist period (connected basically with age), the effectiveness of the present resources, and the way of their acquiring (i.e. the distance

between the inherited position and the attained position) must be considered as cooperating factors. The later hypothesis, only hinted in our paper, needs to be further researched.

Our research confirms the importance of biographical approach for the development of empirically grounded theory of post-socialist transformation from the vantage point of the individuals involved (cf. Kupfenberg, 2000). In the paper we have proposed some categories and hypotheses, but our findings are sensitizing rather than definite, being the subject to further saturation and conceptual integration (cf. Glaser, 1978). The most important result says that from individual vantage point, systemic change seems to be less radical than macroanalysis suggests. This is because of biographical reflexivity which both in the case of workers and business people provides the sense of self-identity, even under ambiguous and contradictory conditions of overall transformation of social system and its institutions.

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