



=====  
VARIA



Dorota Kowalska-Papke<sup>1</sup>

## Becoming a Retiree in the Polish People's Republic and Now: A Comparative Reconstruction of the Transition Experience Using the Example of Applying the Fritze Schütze Method of Narrative Analysis to Four Memoirs

*Perhaps we should trust fragments, as it is fragments that create constellations capable of describing more, and in a more complex way, multi-dimensionally. Our stories could refer to one another in an infinite way, and their central characters could enter into relationships with each other.*

Nobel Lecture by Olga Tokarczuk

2018 Nobel Prize in Literature laureate

[translated by Jennifer Croft and Antonia Lloyd-Jones]

### Introduction

Previous research shows that ending one's professional career and retiring is a turning point in the life of a working person, who at that point relinquishes one of their key roles and faces the task of constructing their new identity (Bullock, Garland and Coupar 2019; Krzyżowski et al. 2014; Lam et al. 2018; Staręga-Piasek and Synak 1990). They become a retiree and give their own meanings to this role. If one's work constituted an autotelic value, the pensioner may be pained by its loss (Tryfan 1990) and other losses connected to it (e.g., networks related to the work

---

<sup>1</sup> University of Gdańsk, Institute of Sociology, dkp23@wp.pl.

environment, professional status). The disorganisation of one's routine and the loss of clarity regarding one's social role and status can be similarly unpleasant. The process of finding and solidifying the meaning of a new identity can be termed the process of *becoming* (Strauss 2012) a retiree, which likely takes some time. Regardless of the specific age and physical well-being, this process is often negatively associated with ageing (Kowalska 2015; Krzyżowski et al. 2014). This is because the individual is aware of the advancing degradation of the body, the increasing likelihood of disease and multimorbidity, and the noticeable changes in cognitive functioning (Celidoni, Bianco and Weber 2017; Olszewski 2003; Pasowicz 2013).

With the end of working life, the experience of personal time changes – both on the biographical (it lengthens and shortens), and the everyday scale – a different rhythm and pace, different fixed points and points of reference. Professional affairs, which until now occupied most of one's time and organised the daily schedule, lose relevance. As far as the future is concerned, the prospect of a limited amount of time left to live may be felt acutely. At the point of retirement, this prospect becomes more real: tangible and conscious. In this context, the types of an individual's aims may change to more short-term plans, ones that are less forward-looking and growth-oriented, often of a consumerist and hedonistic nature. In the immediate view, the cessation of work usually means disrupting and changing the daily routine but it can also be seen as an incredible freeing up of time, allowing for more “time to yourself”, i.e., an increase in the amount of free time that the individual can use more or less as desired (van den Bogaard, Henkens and Kalmijn 2016; Bonk and Retowski 2013; Henkens et al. 2018). Responses can be very positive – seeing the situation as liberating, or negative – fear of emptiness and some kind of escape from freedom<sup>2</sup>. The temporary unconstrained use of time becomes limited by new obligations, dependencies on others, social norms prohibiting or inhibiting activities, institutional expectations, and finally financial and/or health conditions. Individuals often feel obligated to abandon their own plans and perform their prescribed social roles; primarily the roles of caregivers of those less independent, e.g., the roles of grandparents (Czekanowski, Brosz and Załęcki 2012; Gulin 2019; Rada Monitoringu Społecznego 2015; Synak 1987).

The unique individual human experience depends on many factors, both internal – personal, and external – cultural. The individual biographical narrative, due to the importance of the processes and circumstances outlined above, is a socially shared experience that contains common phases and process structures. Social, political, and economic conditions limit or, on the contrary, widen the range of possibilities available to an individual at this stage of life.

---

<sup>2</sup> In the sense used by Erich Fromm in *Escape from Freedom* (Fromm 2011).

Contemporary Poland and the Poland of almost half a century ago represent two different landscapes. The Polish People's Republic was a formally independent state, but according to the provisions of the Yalta Conference it lay within the Soviet sphere of influence. It was an authoritarian state ruled by the Polish Communist Party. The economy was centrally planned. There was no private property. All areas of social life were controlled. All artistic work was subject to censorship. Publications, including competition memoirs, promoted a "new type of man" and glorified labour, which constituted the highest value (Fedorowicz et al. 2011; Kosiński 2003; Palska 1997). During the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, opposition movements intensified due to the lack of prospects, unmet social aspirations, and an oppressive political system, which resulted in some limited liberalisation and – as a result – led to a change in the political system (Fedorowicz et al. 2011; Kersten 1996). In the Polish People's Republic, contrary to government propaganda, access to professional careers and social policy benefits was unequal. Privileged groups included functionaries of the power apparatus, civil servants, and skilled workers in the industrial production sector. In contrast, rural residents, unskilled workers, and recipients of welfare benefits, especially retirees, were among the poorest citizens (Polakowski and Szelewa 2015; Tarkowska 2002). In socialist Poland, social life was subject to strict norms that defined the individual's place in society, or at least limited their choices, which consequently inhibited the individual's reflexive approach to their individual independence. Fritze Schütze explained that the citizens of the socialist state did not undertake "reflective biographical work in the course of their lives" (2012: 275), because the implemented strategy of the state was to "(...) administer work by allocating jobs and apprenticeships to citizens without giving them the opportunity to consider for themselves what kind of profession would resonate best with their unique biographical identity" (2012: 275).

The Poland of the 2020s is a democratic country that has undergone systemic, economic and cultural transformation. It has shifted its geopolitical orientation westwards – becoming a member of the European Union and NATO. Poland is a member of a number of European (e.g., Council of Europe, OSCE, Three Seas Initiative) and global (e.g. UN, WTO, OECD) international organisations. There was an economic transition, which for some people was a period of gaining a high financial status, prestige, and a period of fulfilling their aspirations; for others, it was a difficult period of instability and of difficulties in finding their way in society. In the Third Polish Republic, the social policies implemented follow the activity theory and include measures to foster active ageing. This approach reinforces the inclusion within European structures as well as global trends in this field and demographic changes. The policy currently in force is the *Social Policy for Older People 2030: Safety – Participation – Solidarity*, adopted in 2018, whose name states

the focus of action and indicates the most important needs of the ageing population. The fundamental focus is to create a safe, non-exclusionary, inclusive society that does not discriminate on the basis of age.

The individual in modern society, unlike in communist Poland, is constantly faced with many choices. Social position depends almost exclusively on material status. This is because members of modern societies are under pressure to continually consume more and more new goods, while they throw away the old ones because they are reaching their “expiry date”. Human identities are subject to permanent change. (Bauman 2007: 5).

In this article, I will contrast the experiences of those who left the workforce and retired in these two very different time periods. I was interested in the commonalities in the experience of retirement; how independent is it of the social environment, the economic conditions, and of the political system? What identity transformations do individuals experience? I will attempt to find the essence of this phenomenon, which is described by individuals living and working in different historical, cultural, political, and economic conditions.

## Theoretical and methodological framework

### Theoretical perspective

For the analysis, I used the process structures developed by Fritz Schütze (2012) and specifically designed for the analysis of autobiographical narrative interviews. Spoken accounts, such as narrative interviews or free-form interviews, provide more information than do written texts, which is related to the communicative compulsions to which the narrator is subjected when spontaneously telling their story. The narrator tries to convey a coherent and comprehensible story to the interviewer, which results, among other things, in a compulsion to close the frame. This means that each time the author departs from the main plot, they try to return to it. In this way, they make their story coherent, clear and intelligible to the listener and encourage them to listen and follow it attentively. It also happens that the storyteller feels “obliged” to recount also those events from their life that they originally did not want to show to the world. This is particularly true of events and behaviours of which they are ashamed or which are inconsistent with the image they are currently constructing for themselves. In addition, a careful analysis of the interview transcript also makes it possible to notice discontinuities in the story, which may be indicative of episodes that the narrator left out because they did not want to reveal them, so-called “veiling”. These mechanisms do not operate in the case of written texts, which are subject to many revisions before they are “released

into the world". However, they are sometimes the only – and precious – account of times gone by. However, despite these potential losses in written as opposed to spoken material, diaries or memoirs constitute valuable empirical material in which the author, embedded in the social framework around them, describes their experiences, embedding them in this framework.

In the course of an individual's life, there are periods in which individuals act intentionally, meaning that they take action to realise their plans and intentions. This analytical process structure has been referred to by Schütze as the realisation of a **"biographical action scheme"** (Kaźmierska and Waniek 2020; Pośluszny and Kubicki 2019; Prawda 1989; Schütze 2012). Schütze noted that the course of an individual's life cannot be described only from the point of view of the "social action" paradigm (Schütze 1981: 88–89 after: Prawda 1989: 83). People do not always act intentionally. In the course of life, there are periods when the individual acts according to socially imposed norms, abandoning their individual goals and adopting **"institutional expectation patterns"** as determinants of their own thinking and action.

Schütze made a clear distinction between active "acting" and more passive "experiencing". At certain stages of life, when an individual starts to come under strong pressure from external factors and they are unable to act intentionally under their influence, their life is increasingly taken up by "experiencing". For this situation, Schütze uses the concept of **"trajectory"** and links it to the experience of suffering, borrowing Anselm Strauss's (2016) concept of the trajectory of illness and developing it. Schütze's concept of the trajectory of suffering not only shows the workings of independent external factors that the individual is unable to counteract and that lead to suffering and crisis in their life, but also draws attention to the individual's previous actions that led them into a winding spiral of suffering. Despite the individual's efforts-actions aimed at taking control of their own life, the actions taken lead to the opposite results, which may even result in a complete loss of control over one's life. Trajectory is the process of "experiencing" dominated by external factors and, at the same time, a sequential process in which identity is transformed and previous values lose their relevance. It is a process that leads to suffering. Trajectory describes difficult life events; both individual ones affecting the person directly, such as loss of a job, severe or long-term illness, disability, as well as collective experiences such as wars, epidemics, emigration, and political transformation (Schütze 1997, 2012, 2014; Waniek 2020). Schütze also distinguished a trajectory with an ascending line, which is usually omitted from consideration because it very rarely occurs. In this trajectory, the individual gains new opportunities.



The next process is “**metamorphosis**”. Metamorphosis is process of creative inner changes in an individual’s life that creates new opportunities for the individual to act, develop, and see themselves differently.

#### The course of cessation of professional career in terms of Schütze’s process structures

Ending one’s professional life in terms of the process structures defined by Schütze follows several patterns depending on the course of the retirement process, i.e., 1) the career path in professional life and especially that part of it before retirement (e.g., the conditions for the [non-] decision to end professional life, the freedom of this decision, the termination ceremony, the farewell), 2) the transition, and 3) the experience of life in retirement. I introduced this classification following the work of Arnold van Gennep (1960), who first categorised the various rituals of transition processes in 1908. His contemporaries praised his work (Starr 1910), which organised the various processes of transition – serving multiple needs (birth, engagement, marriage, funeral, among others), requiring dissimilar rituals and occurring in varying time frames – into three sequential parts: 1) a “preliminal” phase with rituals of separation, 2) a liminal phase with rituals of transition, and a final third 3) incorporation phase – an “postliminal” phase with rituals of inclusion.

Professional work can be the realisation of one’s own biographical plan or it can be the realisation of institutional expectations. Immediately after leaving education, an individual may decide consciously or not quite consciously to follow the expectations of significant others or cultural patterns. They abandon their career plan because they do not want to resist or because they decide that their intentions are not the best. They succumb to cultural norms voluntarily, even unknowingly, or under social pressure. Sometimes they follow their peers because they do not have a clear vision for their future.

However, it is not always the case that the individual who pursues their biographical action scheme feels fulfilled and successful and experiences satisfaction and prestige. This happens when the individual is troubled by organisational restrictions in the work environment, encounters an unfavourable atmosphere, has difficulties with interpersonal interactions, does not achieve success, experiences health-related limitations, etc. On the other hand, a person following and fulfilling institutional expectations, even though it is not their own plan, may like their job and be successful in it.

During working life, transitions occur between following one’s own biographical plan and following institutional expectation patterns, and vice versa. The breakdown of a biographical plan can occur at any time, for example when a person

loses their job, the labour market collapses and they are unable to find another job compatible with their qualifications, or health problems arise.

Retirement can be a severe shock to the individual, fostering a trajectory of suffering and feelings of uselessness, emptiness and rejection. It introduces a state of isolation and loneliness. The efforts made to take control of one's life lead to the start of a retired life, which can follow different patterns:

- the retiree who succumbs to the stereotype of being useless, old, sick, passive, complaining, lonely;
- the retiree who begins to fulfil social expectations according to the prevailing institutional norms. Most often, in the case of women, the retiree performs family roles: taking care of grandchildren, dependents. A common occupation of the elderly who are not working is caring for a garden plot. However, these activities, in many cases, constitute the implementation of a biographical plan. Classification depends on the meaning people attach to these activities;
- the retiree who regains control of their life and finds rewarding activities among the activities that older people commonly engage in and begins to realise their biographical plan;
- the retiree experiencing a metamorphosis finds new challenges, new areas of activity. They undertake the realisation of a new and rewarding biographical plan.

Another pattern of retirement is the conscious withdrawal from one's career to pursue one's plans. Such individuals look forward to the end of their work and have defined in great detail or only in outline the activities they will be engaged in when retired. When they leave their jobs, they are energised, satisfied and enjoying the new chapter of their lives. For them, retirement is an anticipated stage which they do not associate with negative stereotypes or restrictive activity patterns for older people. They begin to implement their biographical action scheme. In this case, the patterns for retirement vary depending on career history:

- if professional work has been a disliked and tiresome fulfilment of institutional expectations, retirement has the character of a metamorphosis. The individual finally breaks free of the institutional ties that constrain them, and begins a new phase of life that they have defined for themselves;
- if professional work was the realisation of a biographical plan and was rewarding, but despite this, the individual has decided to end it, it means that a new plan of activity in retirement is more appealing to them than the continuation of their previous activities. The individual gives this phase of life a high importance, which determines the decision to leave professional work. They begin to implement a new biographical plan or, in some cases, the change may have the character of a metamorphosis.

The reasons for leaving the workforce might not derive from a desire to fulfil one's plans in retirement, but could be related to deteriorating health or the need to meet family expectations. The retired individual fulfils the tasks expected of them or, in the case of pressure or difficulties in adapting to a new situation, gradually loses control over their life and enters a trajectory of suffering.

In summary, using the sequential division of transition formulated by van Genneep and Schütze's process structures, I distinguish twelve theoretical patterns of retiring (there may also be more or fewer) (Table 1).

Table 1. Theoretical patterns of retiring

	Phase (rites of separation)	Phase (rites of transition)	Phase (rites of incorporation)
I	biographical <sup>1</sup> /norm <sup>2</sup>	biographical <sup>1</sup> /norm <sup>2</sup>	biographical <sup>1</sup>
II	biographical <sup>1</sup> /norm <sup>2</sup>	biographical <sup>1</sup> /norm <sup>2</sup>	metamorphosis
III	biographical <sup>1</sup> /norm <sup>2</sup>	biographical <sup>1</sup> /norm <sup>2</sup>	trajectory
IV	biographical <sup>1</sup> /norm <sup>2</sup>	biographical <sup>1</sup> /norm <sup>2</sup>	norm <sup>2</sup>
V	biographical <sup>1</sup> /norm <sup>2</sup>	trajectory	biographical
VI	biographical <sup>1</sup> /norm <sup>2</sup>	trajectory	metamorphosis
VII	biographical <sup>1</sup> /norm <sup>2</sup>	trajectory	trajectory
VIII	biographical <sup>1</sup> /norm <sup>2</sup>	trajectory	norm
IX	trajectory	trajectory/biographical <sup>1</sup> /norm <sup>2</sup>	biographical
X	trajectory	trajectory/biographical <sup>1</sup> /norm <sup>2</sup>	metamorphosis
XI	trajectory	trajectory/biographical <sup>1</sup> /norm <sup>2</sup>	trajectory
XII	trajectory	trajectory/biographical <sup>1</sup> /norm <sup>2</sup>	norm

<sup>1</sup> biographical action scheme

<sup>2</sup> institutional expectation patterns

Source: own study.

In the author's pattern presented, in the pre-liminal phase, the realisation of the biographical action plan or institutional expectation patterns do not form separate patterns, as their distinction depends on the meaning given by the individual. Furthermore, a person's well-being, their life satisfaction, does not depend entirely on whether the individual follows their own plan or follows social expectations. In contrast, the pre-retirement period, which is associated with suffering, with loss of control over life, with passive experiencing, creates different patterns. Being in the trajectory of suffering involves biographical work, efforts to take back control of one's life and regain an active role, to move out of a state of passive experiencing.

In some cases, the transition phase lasts a long time, especially when it becomes an increasing feeling of suffering due to the loss of values that gave meaning to life. This makes incorporation into the retired population more difficult, but at the same time does not limit the possibility of constructing a positive self-definition – of entering into the process of metamorphosis, or of building and implementing a satisfying biographical action scheme, or of realising oneself by following socially expected patterns of retired behaviour.

### Research methodology

To carry out the analysis, I used diaries submitted to the *First Year in Retirement* competition announced in 1978 and memoirs written in 2018 by non-working retirees whose subject was describing the experience of leaving the workforce and retiring.

The use of diaries as empirical material has a long history beginning with the epoch-making work of Wilhelm I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. Memoirs and diaries are a valuable source of information and are a special kind of record of memories and accompanying self-reflection. They present the expression of the author's thoughts on past events (Pośluszny and Kubicki 2019). It is not a flaw that the author may be tempted to deviate from reality, veering away from depicting the truth, in order to make the recorded story a more interesting one, one that will attract and engage the attention of the potential reader and that will give more satisfaction to the narrator themselves. For sociological analysis, it is important to delve into both the narrator's subjective world and to unravel the meaning of the communicative situation in which they find themselves, and to look for the social mechanisms that influence them and those that regulate individual attitudes and actions. Stories, memoirs, and diaries provide material that would not otherwise be available (Kubera 2015; Rancew-Sikora and Skowronek 2015: 10–11).

The path to identifying universal and specific characteristics and patterns of the process of retirement and leaving professional work in contemporary Poland and during the communist period was to analyse autobiographies that dealt with one of the phases in the course of life, i.e., the phase in which the end of professional work and the transition to retirement occurred. The narratives provided a basis for examining this process to identify biographical process structures and explanations of their operation in specific cases. Focusing on the type of experiences lived – such as realising one's own biographical plans or following institutional patterns of expectations, going through a trajectory (suffering) – made it possible to see similarities and differences between the experience of becoming a retiree during the communist period and now. The adopted research strategy is based on the

assumption that autobiographical processes both reflect and create social reality (Berger and Luckmann 2010).

Studying specific cases allows one to go beyond their individual reality. On the other hand, changing circumstances can alter experience, can reveal a generational character that is unique to people born in similar periods of time, under specific socio-institutional conditions, who finish their working lives. The analysis of the stories of leaving work and retiring will therefore show, on the one hand, the biographical line and, on the other hand, the political, economic, and social conditions in which the individual's life is immersed. "The analysis of an individual's colloquial 'autobiographical productions' thus implies an attempt to get closer to reality through the recognition of 'biographically reconstructed' social phenomena" (Prawda 1989: 82). Furthermore, the authors provide information about the sequence of events as well as share the meanings they assign to them, the accrual of their knowledge and experience.

The diaries which constitute the empirical material, were submitted to a competition announced by the Związkowa Oficyna Wydawnicza publishing house and the weekly magazine "Kultura" in 1978. Twelve selected memoirs were published in a book with the same name as the competition, *First Year in Retirement* (Łapiński 1981). The organisers did not provide information on what criteria were used to select the memoirs or how many memoirs were submitted for the competition. The narratives contained in the collection, like all works published during the communist period, were subject to censorship by the Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Shows (the editorial footer shows the censor's approval: Zam. 978/80. L-14). It is not possible to say whether and how much the memoirs were altered, as the censored material was not marked in the text. The memoirs in the collection were written by four women and eight men, ranging in age from 58 to 74, mostly in their sixties. All but one had been collecting a pension for no more than five years (some were still working). The man who had previously worked as a miner had been retired for 19 years. The publication included the recollections of a nurse, a doctor, a pharmacist, a salesman, an economist, a miner, an engineer, a manager, and a director. For the analysis, I selected the memoirs of a woman doctor and a man who spent most of his working life as a director.

The memoirs from 2018 were written mainly at my request by people attending classes run by the University of the Third Age. In general, all the diarists, both those of today and those from the communist period, had a higher education. The diarists from the communist period generally belonged to a privileged class – they had higher salaries and better access to social benefits (Polakowski and Szelewa 2015). The contemporary memoirs are short descriptions, spanning a few pages, about the time of leaving the workforce and becoming a retiree. The memoirs from the communist period are longer, averaging several dozen pages.

I based my analysis on four autobiographies, two from each time period studied. I applied a strategy of maximum contrast for the liminal phase in the retirement process. On the one hand, I chose a challenging transition phase, which I define as a difficult pain-related transition that has the character of a trajectory and, on the other hand, I chose diaries describing a benign and/or expected end of career. In addition, a component of the selection of memoirs was the third phase of the process – the phase of incorporation into a new role – that of a retiree. The diarists selected for analysis, as a result of experiencing the process of transition and incorporation into a new social group, positively constructed their new identity as retirees. They have taken control of their lives in retirement. The selected memoirs illustrate the theoretical patterns: I (possibly II, which applies when the individual gives their time in retirement the meaning of metamorphosis) and V (possibly VI – *ibid.*). For obvious reasons (censorship), a diary whose author would describe work as an experience of growing suffering could not be included in a publication from the communist period. This explains the impossibility of comparing the process of leaving work of people who gave the experience of work the meaning of trajectory.

The starting point for my interpretive research was a single case study. I have assumed that each story represents a unique whole. It shows the individual dimension of events and experiences and therefore lends itself to separate interpretation. After analysing each story, identifying the process structures described in them, their consequences, and the combination of the sequence in which they occurred, the next stage was to look at what emerged as commonalities and what emerged as unique in the life stories told and analysed.

In presenting portraits of individuals, I have retained the names the writers used in their diaries.

## Portraits of diarists

### Doctor Zofia, 1978

The catastrophe of retiring. From the loss of professional identity to the  
surrender to institutional expectation patterns

*From realising a biographical plan, through a trajectory of suffering, to taking on  
unfulfilling family responsibilities*

Zofia was a doctor-internist by profession. At the time of writing her end-of-career story, she was in her second year of retirement. She had worked in her last job for 22 years, in the health service for just under 25 years. She did not want to retire.

She began her story with the moment she retired. For her, it was a “shock” (Frąckowiak 1981: 56). She experienced the end of her career as “a side-lining, a pathetic epilogue to everything that had gone before” (1981: 57). For the first few months she could not find a place for herself, she could not believe she would not go to work anymore. Her environment – acquaintances and friends – unknowingly contributed to deepening her feelings of suffering. They congratulated her on her retirement, because in their opinion being a non-working retiree was great and she should be happy to start a new phase of her life. They completely failed to understand her sense of emptiness and breaking down. The author bitterly adds information about the lowering of her financial and social status.

The experience of leaving her career was a significant turning point in the author’s life, the arrival of which she had no control over. Attempts to extend the working period or take up part-time employment had no effect and have multiplied the helplessness and the sense of injustice she felt. This intensified her suffering. In communist Poland, permission from the Employment Department (Łapiński 1981: 244) was needed to continue working past retirement age and, as the author herself repeatedly emphasised in her diary, she did not enjoy the favour of her superiors as a consequence of her uncompromising nature. A rapid trajectory of suffering began the moment she received the decision to be transferred into retirement. Sequentially occurring external events on the one hand, and a small and dwindling range of possible actions on the other, drastically reduced her scope of control over her life and gradually increased her anguish. The author found herself in a rapidly intensifying spiral of suffering and helplessness. In the narrative, she outlined the palette of emotions she felt as she transitioned into the world of retirement. She felt shame, bitterness and a diminishing of her value and social status: “I was reluctant to admit that I was no longer working, I felt a kind of shame that I was no longer needed, bitterness that I no longer needed to be reckoned with, which is – unfortunately – sometimes felt in interpersonal relations” (1981: 58). The status transition experienced by the author was both clear and significant for her and those around her. In communist Poland, work was elevated to the highest value in a person’s life. Shock workers were put on the pedestal of social life; they were the celebrities of the time. They were honoured with state decorations, received valuable awards and were promoted (Fedorowicz et al. 2011). The status of a non-worker was not high. The author was painfully affected by the system of values and the culture of the period in the Polish People’s Republic. The completing factor lowering her self-definition was the lowering of her financial status. Retirees in the People’s Republic of Poland belonged to an underprivileged social group, and were impoverished (Polakowski and Szelewa 2015; Tarkowska 2002).

Zofia began working on her new identity – that of a retiree. She began biographical work in order to take control of her life. Over time, the author adapted to her new situation. Following institutional norms, she took on the role of grandmother and carer for her grandchildren and domestic help for her adult children. The author disliked this work, which was beyond her physical strength and deprived her of “time for herself” “in peace and quiet” (1981: 61). Zofia rebelled:

Namely, I would like daily life to be easier, especially for women, so that it does not require so much effort and toil even in trivial matters, which does not result in satisfaction, but brings fatigue and an unwillingness to take care of the home. So that women are not so busy and preoccupied with domestic concerns, which leave a narrow margin for personal interests and activities that give satisfaction (1981: 70–71).

The author drew attention to the disadvantaged position of women after retirement. According to current social norms, women are required to help their children, take over the care of grandchildren or loved ones in need of care (Frąckowiak 1981; Synak 1987). The propaganda of the Polish People's Republic reinforced this norm due to the insufficient availability of institutional care for children and the sick (Polakowski and Szelewa 2015). This reflection is amusingly concluded by the author: “So why not... extend the working time of women who would like to do so, and send them into retirement earlier from... full-time domestic work?”

The author devoted the greatest part of the story to reflections on professional work. She wrote about the heartlessness of the management, about the inadequacies of the health care system. She jotted down her reflections and the resulting suggestions for improving the health care system and the organisation of work in medical facilities. These reflections confirmed that Zofia remained in the world of the health service, even though she had been pushed out of it; she still seemed – in her mind – to be stuck in it.

In summary, the decision to move Zofia into retirement began a rapid trajectory of suffering that escalated over the following few months. The trajectory began after the end of a long career as a doctor-internist, during which the diarist pursued her biographical plan. However, due to adversarial relationships with her superiors, working in her coveted medical profession was not an entirely fulfilling period for her; it was difficult in parts. After retirement, Zofia began to make efforts to adapt to her diminished social status. She tried to build a new identity as a retiree, to find new goals, to start a new biographical plan. Zofia did not have significant resources in the sense of financial, health, and energy resources. In addition, the Polish People's Republic did not offer retirees many opportunities and they were certainly not valued members of society. Zofia undertook a life conforming to



institutional norms – acting as a carer for children and taking care of disliked domestic chores. She is bound by social compulsions.

### Director Henryk, 1978

#### Privileged member of socialist society

#### *A change of satisfying biographical schemes from worker to retiree*

A different biographical profile of the stage of retirement can be found in the story of the sixty-year-old Henryk. He had worked at a number of jobs in different industries. He was a coachman and coalman, waiter and fitter, resistance soldier, prisoner of war, interpreter at the UN, foreman of tractor drivers, head of the Provincial Department of Culture, inspector of state control bodies and director, successively in two state enterprises and, at the end of his career, manager of a poultry plant. He was compulsorily retired for health reasons before the age of 60. His first heart attack took him out of work as a director. The two years of pensionable service he was missing were spent as a manager. Two more heart attacks took him out of work completely. Henryk was a university graduate (he does not specify the field of study he completed). He was a prisoner in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp (Rostkowski 1981).

Like the author of the previous story, Henryk was very committed to his professional work. It was a joy for him and gave him great satisfaction. It was the realisation of his biographical action plan. He could not imagine life without work. He wondered: "(...) what will I do 'afterwards' [in retirement]. How will I fill the hours?" (1981: 221). He was going through a pre-retirement phase forced by his health (Atchley 1985), which did not help him find his place in the future. He was concerned that life in retirement, without work, would be difficult, that nothing would fill the space that work occupied. Henryk's last two years at work were not his biographical plan; it was his illness that decided that the most important – according to him – part of his life had ended. Despite the confluence of unwelcome events in his life, the author did not fall into a trajectory of suffering. He tried to find a satisfactory solution for the rest of his life, with which he partly confirmed his self-assessment, presented in the "preamble" to his memoirs, as a mentally and physically resilient man who triumphs in difficult situations.

Henryk did not actually go through the transition phase – the liminal phase, the phase of transformation. By coincidence, just after he had finished his career, a friend asked him to help him improve his English. Henryk knew English, German and Italian. He started helping his friend, which turned into a permanent and regular occupation in his retirement. Giving English lessons became an activity he

valued, one that brought him “satisfaction and improved self-esteem” (1981: 222) and was a source of pride. His “students” achieved their planned goals, which facilitated their professional and/or personal careers.

He developed a new hobby – collecting pennants and gathering information from magazines and newspapers, which he called creating his own “encyclopaedia of knowledge”. Several people benefited from his “encyclopaedia of knowledge”. All these activities brought him much satisfaction and appreciation from those around him. He still felt needed and appreciated. The activities he performed brought him satisfaction. A good command of the English language (Henryk travelled abroad and was an interpreter at the United Nations) was a rare skill in socialist Poland, where the borders for “ordinary” citizens were closed, so people who had a need to learn English highly valued Henryk’s practical language skills. Similarly, his “encyclopaedia of knowledge” was a valuable source of information. Books were not widely available during the communist period. They were expensive. Encyclopaedic publications required sign-ups, there were long wait times and not everyone who wanted them received them. Henryk’s hobby was helpful and useful, as the author writes, to many people. Henryk felt his usefulness and prestige. He gave meaning to his activities.

The only activity he engaged in that he did not take much pleasure in was tending to a garden plot. He cultivated it together with his wife and for this reason this activity continued. Cultivating garden plots was a common hobby for retirees during the communist period (and still is today).

Retirement, in Henryk’s case, was not a sudden change. After the first stay in the hospital, he did not work for some time. However, he did not experience the period of inactivity he had feared, as he was offered the opportunity to write his life story. The book was published. When he returned to work, he was aware that he would only work for two more years at most. The time away and the change to a less demanding and less stressful position was helpful in smoothing the transition to retirement. Although the activities he engaged in during retirement were mostly incidental and not planned by him, the satisfaction felt, the fulfilment of aspirations, and the desire to continue them show that Henryk was following his biographical plan in retirement. In his case, becoming a retiree was neither a trajectory of suffering nor a metamorphosis.

In his memoirs, Henryk shared his reflections on the final matters: death (of which he was not afraid), the values that give life meaning, the future of the world. His most important values were “a steadfast and kind attitude towards people and the environment” (1981: 226), which came from his upbringing, and an appreciation of other people’s work and toil. Furthermore, he formed a conclusion about his life: “... the first, most important element was precisely the fact that I was given the opportunity to live in a period when I could fight for my homeland and lay

the foundations of the New Poland. (...) And then? The last thirty years were also a kind of struggle. With abuses, with heartlessness, waste, crime..." (1981: 228). This quote confirms Henryk's immersion in the narrative of the socialist state. The author uses the ideological language of the communist period. In this way, his memoirs were one of the many elements of the creation of a "new man" in socialist Poland (Kosiński 2003; Palska 1997).

The author found fulfilment in professional employment. After finishing his work life, he was also realising his biographical plan. Thanks to his entrenchment in the structures of socialist Poland, he was a privileged member of society, as evidenced by the successive promotions and high state awards he received, including the Order of Polonia Restituta. His life career developed without hindrance. He recalled the acknowledgements and gifts received from the Soviet Government with pride. In retirement, he felt needed, useful and appreciated. Unlike that of Zofia, Henryk's retirement was neither painfully nor clearly felt. His social status remained high. His identity was undergoing a gentle and slow change to that of a retiree who feels he is a useful and valuable member of the socialist state. Although the activities he took up in retirement were incidental and had not been planned by him, Henryk appreciated their value, derived satisfaction from them and was happy to continue and develop them.

The retirement phase was necessitated by health conditions and was not voluntary. Despite this, Henryk's memoirs do not contain descriptions of a loss of control over his own life, passive waiting or a lack of order. The author presents himself as a person who copes well with life's difficulties. His reasoning is consistent with the reported events of his life. However, it should be noted that Henry belonged to a privileged group of members of the socialist society.

### Manager Malwina, 2018

#### Painful loss of professional employment leading to metamorphosis

*The realisation of a biographical plan, a trajectory of suffering, a foreshadowing of metamorphosis*

After graduating from university, Malwina worked in various jobs. During the last years before her retirement, she worked as a director. Her retirement was compulsory – she was over the legal retirement age and her managerial contract ended and was not renewed. At the time of writing her story she had been retired for 2 years.

She was involved in professional work that she enjoyed and that gave her satisfaction and joy. Before retiring, Malwina had many interests and activities outside of work, but she did not devote much time to them as many hours were taken

up by her professional work. She enjoyed travelling, especially to faraway exotic countries. She organised some of her trips herself. She practised sports at a nearby sports club and went skiing in the mountains every year. She enjoyed walks, Nordic walking with her peers, and socialising. For the author, the period of professional employment described in her memoirs was the realisation of a biographical plan. It satisfied her aspirations and provided a sense of usefulness. The author experienced personal growth. She worked together with people with whom she carried out projects and achieved the set goals. Malwina motivated her subordinates, helped them develop and climb the career ladder. Their successes filled her with satisfaction and pride. Malwina did not describe the entire course of her professional life. She only focused on describing her work just before retirement. The language of these reflections is rich in positive descriptors, which may indicate that Malwina's professional career constituted a metamorphosis for her. The thinness of the empirical material does not make it possible to clearly identify this process structure, as there are no references to previous life stages. However, the period of professional employment before retirement was, for Malwina, definitely either a satisfying realisation of her biographical plan or a metamorphosis.

Malwina was not preparing to end her career. She wanted to work. For her, the moment of retirement came too soon and unexpectedly. She did not go through the separation phase; she did not experience the rituals of the "before" phase. Malwina did not plan for what her place in society would be after her career ended. She had not "worked through" the pre-liminal phase, which may have been one of the reasons for her suffering in the transition phase (Atchley 1985).

The liminal phase was a trajectory of suffering for Malwina. When she ended her career, she "felt angry, discouraged" (2018: 1). She felt apathy, a lack of motivation to do anything. She ceased to enjoy the activities which she had passionately pursued in her spare time while still working professionally. She lost interest in travelling. Social gatherings bored her, conversations seemed superficial to her. She was not interested in discussions about health, about recipes, about family events. She did not find peace in reading books or watching films (2018: 1). Malwina could not find ways out of the abyss of "the feeling emptiness" (2018: 1), where "I felt sad, I felt useless" (2018: 1). In her memoirs, she gives further information about what intensified her suffering. "The children were grown up and independent. What else is there to do in the world. Live to die?" (2018: 1). She continues: "Everything seemed superfluous, unnecessary, pointless" (2018: 1). A devastating sense of inertia possessed her. She could not find herself – that energetic manager – in the lost Malwina. She felt separated from herself. She undertook biographical work, which is "a reflective examination of inner states and overall personal identity" (Schütze 2012: 148). She did not give up. She looked for alternative modes of interpreting and understanding her own evolving identity. She searched for solutions, directions and potentials for

development (Schütze 2012: 148), which she did not find at the beginning of the transition phase. Her experience of the lack of exit routes compounded the spiral of suffering. The author experienced a loss of control over her life to an increasing degree. She became increasingly immersed in passive experiencing, losing active responses. As a result of the biographical work she undertook, Malwina realised that in recent times, work had given meaning to her life, which was incompatible with her ironclad conviction that children came first. Secondly, retirement made her aware of the approaching end of her life. She felt healthy and had no health-related limitations, but this thought strongly inhibited her consideration of the future and limited the actions she could take. Malwina entered a trajectory of suffering when she left employment. The trajectory of despair developed in spite of the activities she undertook, such as socialising, books, cinema, and recreational activities which were meant to counteract the feeling of emptiness. The experience of the first days and months after retirement was similar to that described by Zofia, the author of the biography from 40 years ago. Malwina did not mention financial difficulties or a decrease in income. Finances were likely not a problem for her (she held senior, generally well-paid positions). Like Zofia, in retirement, she did not feel needed. The words “living to die” (2018: 1) are a poignant indication of this. She did not see activities in which she could engage, in which she would feel fulfilled, in which she could positively construct her individual and social identity<sup>3</sup>. The context provided by the information that her children had grown up is indicative of her traditional perception of her role as a non-working woman. The feeling of not being needed that she expressed at the beginning of her memoirs, in contrast to the previous period of her life full of activity, involvement, sense of satisfaction and pride, was definitely an expression of a sense of deprivation of her value, a sense of decline and deterioration. It can be hypothesised that, despite, the absence of any account of interactions during which she was considered less important or valuable than she was when she was working, her psyche reflects a sense of inferiority. This may have been related to the unflattering stereotypes of the elderly pervading the public space: ailing, useless, ill-adapted to technological change, taking up the space of the young (Levy et al. 2014; Makita et al. 2019; Potent-Ambroziewicz 2013). Malwina did not directly mention the pejorative patterns of perceptions of the elderly – the generation to which she began to belong due to her retirement – but she included them indirectly by pointing to the lack of satisfying roles set by society for the non-working. Perhaps, however, the essence of the source of the perceived emptiness was the feeling of losing something important in her life – the loss of her professional

---

<sup>3</sup> Identity – it is a set of ideas, judgements and beliefs of a social actor (individual and/or social) about themselves. It usually refers to the sphere of self-definition. Individual (personal) identity is understood as a system of knowledge about oneself; social identity is associated with a sense of group membership.

identity – with which Malwina identified. The activities she undertook could not replace her professional work. Loss was the main determinant of her suffering.

Malwina began to work on developing her identity. Unlike the protagonist of the first story, she did not intend to follow institutional norms, but to seek her own path and find her own satisfying biographical plan. The new phase of her life, for which Malwina's memoirs only outlined the framework, could become a metamorphosis. She expressed the will and conviction that she would find sufficiently satisfying activities on which she could build her new identity. In working on herself, Malwina directed her efforts to turning trajectories into intentional activity that would put in motion an exciting biographical plan. She noted that she had previously dismissed the implementation of her plans because she felt that the projects she wanted to tackle required too much work or too much time relative to the time she potentially had left. In her biographical work, she recognised these as misconceptions about herself. She resolved to reject the notion that she was too old to take on new activities or projects. She decided it was important not to assume in advance that she would not be able to tackle them, or to calculate that they were pointless, or to take into account possible negative assessments and opinions from those around her.

### Business owner Anita, 2018

#### Planned retirement results in a satisfying role of a retired woman

##### *The realisation of a biographical plan and the metamorphosis of retirement*

The second analysed story from the 2018 collection was written by Anita, the owner of a real estate agency. Retirement was her decision. At the time of writing the memoirs, Anita had been receiving her pension for three and a half years. She ended her gainful employment later: she had been a working retiree for a year and a half, meaning that at the time of writing her story she had not been working for two years.

Anita began her recollections by describing a celebration she had organised to mark her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. It was then that she first began to reflect on the end of her work at the company. In accordance with the law in force at the time, eight months remained until Anita could apply for a pension. The author decided to end her career as soon as she had acquired her pension rights. She would then begin the life of a retiree, which she associated primarily with freeing up time “for herself”. Anita had clear plans, which she intended to start implementing. She planned to devote her free time to her favourite activities, including reading books, socialising, and going to exhibitions and the theatre. She began the work of separating herself from her previous activities, her daily routine. She was the owner of a one-person

business. For her, the decision to leave her job was tantamount to a decision to let go of the company. She considered selling it, handing it over to a relative, or liquidating the company.

Anita's work required a significant time commitment from her. She enjoyed her work, was committed to it, and took pride in it. It seems that it was only in the final period that the intensity of the work began to bother the author. Anita described it in the following words:

At eight in the morning, I am already sitting in front of the computer. The whole day is calls, making appointments, doing documentation of newly accepted properties, running between government offices. And when evening comes, instead of sitting quietly at home, I have to hit the road again for apartment showings (2018: 1).

She had a growing conviction that work was not what should take up all of her time, and a belief that she needed to find time for other activities. Approaching retirement age brought thoughts about the impending finish line of life and reflections on activities that might bring her a sense of fullness of life. Her words indicate this: "How many more years do I have to stand under these stairwells this way? And life is running out..." Anita noticed that work was not developing her and that she did not have time for the activities she enjoyed. She began to feel the need to return to activities she used to really enjoy, such as reading books, and other horizon-expanding activities that would enliven the daily monotony. The author began biographical work on developing her personal identity. She noticed that engaging in hours of paid work was the wrong life path. She built and connected her identity to her professional work, to her status as a business owner. She began to construct a plan "in order to realise and crown this development" (Schütze 2012: 149). She made the decision to stop working; she decided that she had had enough of this, as she put it, "grind" (2018: 1).

She began the implementation of a new biographical plan for the next phase of her life – her life in retirement. Anita had planned everything, she knew what she would do, what activities she would undertake. She remarked: "It's high time to finally become the mistress of my own time and do what I feel like doing, not what I have to do!" (2018: 1), and further affirmed this need: "I've been dreaming of a day that doesn't end with scheduling client meetings, but with thinking 'What do I feel like doing tomorrow?'" (2018: 2). Retiring was a planned action, taken after much thought. It was the implementation of a plan. It did not have the character of a turning point. Perhaps also because Anita was the owner of a micro-enterprise. The end of her career could not occur in the same way as for some other people – salaried employees or those employed in some other form – i.e., by leaving an organisation which continued to operate. The rituals of separation from professional

work, such as, for example, saying goodbye to co-workers and supervisors, taking one's private belongings, and cleaning one's desk and office, did not apply to her. They were different. Anita had to hand over or liquidate her company. This task took her a year and a half.

Initially, Anita wanted to sell the business but, after unsuccessful attempts, she began the process of shutting it down. Simultaneously, during this time, Anita started attending various activities designed for senior citizens. In her memoirs, Anita expressed a positive opinion of the activities for seniors offered by the local government and other organisations. She described it as interesting and extensive. She began to take part in the activities for seniors. She mentions excursions, free gymnastics classes, and attending lectures and workshops at the University of the Third Age. She commented on enrolling at the university: "And it was a hit" (2018: 2). At the university, she not only expanded her knowledge and developed her hobby (photography) but also savoured "meeting many positively eccentric people there, for whom the PESEL is just a string of silly numbers that should not prevent anyone from pursuing their passions and dreams" (2018: 2). Anita described the activities she was able to pursue in her retirement: meetings with friends, concerts, theatre performances, author's evenings, reading books. She added that some of her time is devoted to family. She occasionally looks after her grandchildren. When she was working, she did not have time for family gatherings. In retirement, she meets her grandchildren, including the one who lives in England. Anita describes her time in retirement in superlatives. She described the moment of the complete end of her career, the closure of her business: "It was a happy day. I already knew very specifically what I wanted to do with the time I still had left..." (2018: 3).

Retirement was a kind of metamorphosis for Anita. She began to notice and pursue new activities and activities she had abandoned during her working life. Reading books had always been her passion, but previously, when she was working, she would fall asleep after reading only a few lines. Anita felt satisfaction with her new identity as a person who expands her knowledge, pursues her passions, is energised, acts and builds good relationships with others. She describes new activities which fill her with joy. Thanks to activities offered to seniors and ones she organised herself, Anita has become energetic and dynamic again. She has changed her daily routine. Previously, her job had required many hours of her time at all times of the day. When her career ended, she was able to choose the time and activities with which to fill that time herself. She appreciated having time at her disposal and being able to organise it according to her individual needs.



## Discussion. Universality and uniqueness of the transition from working to non-working status

Four people, four life stories, four different experiences of the process of leaving the workforce. Although the experiences of these people today and half a century ago are rooted in different political, social, economic conditions, they contain similarities, feature a similar sequence of analytical structures, and in them one can detect analogies in the surrounding external conditions. Both generations experienced profound changes. The lives of the authors of the memoirs from the era of the Polish People's Republic were firmly rooted in the culture and ideology of the period. They lived their childhood in Sanation-era Poland. Some diarists extensively describe the poverty and unemployment that painfully affected them and their families. Their youth was marked by the horror of the Second World War. Then they experienced the change of regime and the necessity to adapt to life in an authoritarian, ideology-saturated system. Contemporary retirees experienced only a fragment of their lives in a socialist state: their childhood and youth, and the older ones also a part of their mature lives. They grew up surrounded by the ideological propaganda of the "new man" (Kosinski 2003; Palska 1997). These two generations lived through massive regime changes: the retirees of the Polish People's Republic – from Sanation Poland to socialist Poland, and the younger ones – from socialist Poland to a democratic state. They were participants in the creation of new regimes, changes in values, which may have induced in them a sense of maladjustment or incoherence, or generally a sense of anomie (Durkheim 2006; Merton 1982).

### Commitment to work

A strong commitment to work, including on an emotional level, is a common factor in the life stories of retirees today and those of half a century ago. In communist Poland, these accounts reflected the common narrative in the public space about the supreme value of work for human beings. All the authors of the memoirs liked their professional work; it constituted the main axis of their lives. They all talk about their work using similar descriptors, except that the authors from more than 40 years ago paint their work in more expressive and emotional terms. It had "the greatest value" for them, as Zofia puts it (1981: 57). Each of the four authors realised their biographical plan through their work. Their identities were constructed in relation to work. Essentially, the "before" (preliminal) phase – of the authors of the communist-era memoirs in the framework of Schütze's structures – was the realisation of their biographical action plan. Although they fol-

lowed the patterns accepted in society for this phase of life – that of a person of working age – they gave work individual meanings. They saw it as the realisation of their life plans.

### Degree of choice in the decision to stop working

Retirement can be categorised according to the reasons behind the decision to leave work. It can be, both today and in the Polish People's Republic, a volitional act with a rich spectrum of reasons, or an involuntary act, resulting from a decision by the employer or other objective reasons related or not related to the employee, such as legal or economic requirements. The decision itself depends on both external and internal factors. Internal reasons include the attitude towards work. Some people enjoy their work and most often derive satisfaction from it. They often construct their identity on the basis of professional career. Others see work as an unpleasant necessity, required to earn a living, from which they want to get away as quickly as possible. For many people nowadays, the main reason for giving up further employment is the relationship with co-workers and superiors or other components of the workplace atmosphere. In the Polish People's Republic, older workers, despite an unsatisfactory workplace atmosphere or adversarial relations with superiors, still wanted to work, as Zofia describes in detail in her diary. This difference can be explained by the ideologisation of life in the Polish People's Republic, the lack of activities offered to people of post-working age, or, finally, the stereotype of the old person. A common and important element determining the volitional retirement of contemporary retirees and retirees in the communist period is poor health.

### Retirement as loss – memoirs of Zofia and Malwina

For Zofia (the retiree from the contest memoirs) and Malwina (the contemporary retiree), the end of their careers took the form of a violent trajectory of suffering. In their cases, it became apparent that the combination of leaving work and suffering could occur despite having a wide range of interests and despite activities available to seniors (this was the case for Malwina). Work dictated the routines of their days and occupied their thoughts and time, which may explain the reason for the sense of painful loss that initiated the trajectory of suffering. Zofia and Malwina wanted to continue working. Their retirement was forced by external factors to which they had to submit. Their employment was not extended and they did not find others jobs. Even when unfavourable relations with management disrupted the satisfaction of realising their biographical plan, work continued to

be a lifelong mission which – Zofia writes about this – as a doctor, was appreciated by patients. For them, the loss of work was associated with a persistent sense of decline and uselessness.

Work is also linked to the loss of the network of contacts that are its natural consequence. Colleagues, supervisors, clients, suppliers, patients, etc. with whom the employee has daily contact suddenly disappear with the end of employment. In some cases, cordial ties with people from work remain, but they are of a different nature. They are no longer a simple daily routine that does not require the individual to put in additional effort.

### The specificity of the characterisation of the end-of-work trajectory

The end-of-work trajectory has a peculiar character. It does not build up sequentially but occurs abruptly with the moment of ending one's career. Those affected experience an acute state of anguish. Then, slowly, over time, individuals make efforts to work through their biography, to construct new, satisfying identities. Some experience a metamorphosis or realise their biographical action scheme, others take up roles conforming to social expectation patterns. Sometimes they remain in a trajectory, break down, experience loneliness, and decline in health.

Zofia and Malwina likely did not have the close personal relationships that usually facilitate transitions through difficult periods. They do not mention support from others. Zofia (a retiree of the Polish People's Republic) wrote about the loss of contact with patients who often confided in her, told her about their concerns, and with whom she formed close relationships. Their absence deepened her sense of loss and broadened her awareness of loneliness. Zofia only described her family from the perspective of its demands on the author: from the perspective of duty to the family and working to serve it. This subjective picture of post-work activity, as presented by Zofia, is certainly not appealing. She did not see any positives; she did not enjoy the freeing up of her time. She knew that the rewarding paid work that gave her good social standing would, in retirement, be replaced by unpaid, unappreciated, hard work for her family – and she was correct. Malwina (contemporary retiree) does not describe such reflections, but neither does she find any aspects of retirement that would be appealing. Both authors painfully experience the separation from their careers.

### Different dimensions of life expectations in retirement

The process of leaving employment, which represents an objective change in a person's life, is experienced subjectively in different ways. Looking at these varied

experiences, one can see that, in some cases, the process is very dramatic – it is a profound negative change experienced as a “catastrophe”, while in other cases it is an expected positive change. There is a wide range of feelings in between these two aforementioned boundaries. People are now living longer and being a retiree for a longer time. When they finish employment, they often enjoy good health. This has led to the emergence of a new term: the “third age”, which, in contrast to the “fourth age”, describes people who are active, who are seeking their place in society and finding their way in life. The population of elderly people has become an interesting target group for many businesses. New branches of the service industry are being developed for them. The term “fourth age” (Giddens 2006) refers to people who are sick and often dependent on the care of another person and/or institution. This is a relatively new phenomenon, partially because the multigenerational family model is disappearing – older people often form separate households which creates demand for institutional care services. The communist period focused on people's professional work, as it was a time of rebuilding industry, agriculture, and housing from the ruins of war. After retiring, people did not feel needed. There were no activities on offer for them (excluding garden plots). This is where one can see a clear difference retirees of the Polish People's Republic felt happy if they could continue their professional work or agitational activities. Meanwhile, today's retirees are primarily focused on activities that will develop them, that will be enjoyable. They mostly plan for consumption-related goals. This is how they understand the meaning of their further life. Bauman's (2007) fluid society is reflected in the considerations and chosen activities of contemporary retirees.

Over the years these memoirs span, social attitudes towards this final stage of a person's life – being a retiree – have changed significantly. Nowadays, many people plan to pursue their dreams precisely during this period. As a result, they want to end their working life as soon as possible and start living the active life of a happy retiree. These beliefs are widely promoted by mass media, social media and companies in industries offering services to non-working customers. In many circles, social attitudes glorify the quick cessation of professional work. An important attraction to retirement is the amount of pension benefits, the level of social security, the prevailing retirement age, the quality of health, and the diversity and availability of activities for retirees. This view of retirement is reflected in the dreams and plans of today's retirees. Tourist trips to near and far corners of the world are often the activity of choice for wealthier retirees; socialising, outdoor activities and watching films, reading books, as well as creative literary and artistic endeavours are popular. Retirees of the the Polish People's Republic period did not have this many opportunities. Retirees then belonged to the poorest strata of society (Polakowski and Szelewa 2015; Tarkowska 2002). For the most part, they lacked

financial resources and, moreover, the borders of the socialist state were open only to other countries within the Soviet sphere of influence.

### Retirement as a new rewarding stage of life

For the next two authors (Henryk and Anita), the end of working life was not associated with difficult experiences. For both Anita, retiring in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and Henryk, ending his working life almost half a century earlier, retirement was a new satisfying stage of life; in the case of Anita – planned and expected; for Henryk – forced, related to health problems. For them, retirement was a time to pursue new activities, continue hobbies, or build interpersonal relationships that they did not have time for during their working lives. Henryk, a well-established director of state-owned enterprises in socialist Poland, did not experience a lowering of social status. He did not feel a sudden change in daily routine. He was helped by his party colleagues (he did not use this term in his story) thanks to whom, immediately after leaving work, he had an interesting occupation. For Henryk, retirement was the next stage in his biographical action plan. The activities changed, their intensity decreased but they still gave him a sense of usefulness. He used his competences and skills in the activities he pursued. Henryk, who had feared a life without work, quickly adapted to his new situation.

Anita, the author of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century story, took up activities in retirement that developed and enriched her, and began to realise her plans and dreams. She chose from the opportunities that emerged from the surrounding reality. Anita experienced a positive transformation – a metamorphosis. She was full of optimism and enjoyed life and activities that she did not have time for when she was working – reading books, meeting with interesting people, learning photography.

### Women

In her diary, Zofia shares her reflections on the different situation of women as opposed to men in the Polish People's Republic. She describes her disagreement with society's normative demands on women and with the lack of opportunities to achieve the goals she aspired to. For her, retirement meant providing unpaid work for her adult children – as a nanny for her grandchildren and a housekeeper for their home. Propaganda of the Polish People's Republic, due to the inadequate care infrastructure, reinforced this pattern of identity of a retired woman (Frąckowiak 1981; Łapiński 1981; Polakowski and Szelewa 2015; Synak 1987). Despite the fact that caregiving and domestic work was physically too difficult for her, Zofia undertook it without argument. For her, accepting socially defined

responsibilities was unquestionable and obvious. She did not consider the possibility of resisting them. She unconditionally conformed to social norms, potentially leading her to enter a new trajectory of suffering in the future.

Nearly 50 years later, Anita views her post-employment family responsibilities differently. The role of a grandmother is also – like for Zofia – obvious, but in a completely different scope. She wanted to concentrate on her own needs and her self-development in retirement. And these were the activities she undertook. She limited her assistance to her adult children and prioritised her own plans. In conclusion, the women authors of the stories differ considerably in their acceptance of the responsibilities imposed on them by prevailing institutional norms. Moreover, societal expectations have changed. The social pressure on women, related to the obligation to perform work for adult children, is no longer as strong as it was in the communist era.

## Summary

In conclusion, it must be stated that citizens of the Polish People's Republic lived in a state that profoundly restricted their life choices through administrative decisions (cf. Schütze 2012). This also applied to provisions related to retirement. Nowadays, social policies implemented by the state at all administrative levels, in line with EU guidelines, support the active life of older people. Thus, the range of possible activities is broader. The end of one's professional career, i.e., the transition from working to retired status, is immersed in social reality, just as is the rest of life. As the analysis shows, political, economic and social conditions have influenced the perceptions of one's activities in retirement. Today's retirees, if they have adequate resources (including health, energy, and financial resources), design retirement as the fulfilment of their interests and dreams: tourist trips, sports, and social, civic and cultural activities. Retirees of the Polish People's Republic – the authors of the memoirs – were happy as long as they could continue working. They constructed their identity differently. They were heavily influenced by socialist ideology and infatuated with professional work. Objectively speaking, they did not have sufficient resources or opportunities to construct their self-definition in terms other than professional.

The memoirs of those for whom retirement was associated with suffering are surprisingly similar. A sense of emptiness, uselessness, confusion and loneliness, a growing feeling of the loss of control and transition from a state of active to passive feeling is shared by both diarists. The trajectory of suffering affects people regardless of the previously performed professional roles or the degree of activity in professional and private life.

Retirement is a complex, multidimensional process, felt subjectively and individually, although it affects entire age cohorts. It is one of the most important turning points in the course of a person's life. Retirement schemes are independent of the historical situation and the economic and social conditions. For the individual, retiring can constitute a metamorphosis, the realisation of a biographical action scheme or institutional expectation patterns and a trajectory of suffering. Individual ambitions and goals, as well as standards of living, are subject to change. They are shaped both by social reality and by individuals who reciprocally influence their environment. The perspective on the perceptions of this stage of life is generational, unique to people born in a similar period. It depends on the social conditions surrounding the individual but also on their own resources. Retired people want to realise their plans and find new opportunities (biographical action schemes or metamorphoses); they want to be useful to their adult children or fulfil other functions expected of them (institutional expectation patterns or biographical action scheme). In view of contemporary demographic trends which record the continuous growth of the elderly population, the issue of the perception of the role of the retiree in the individual dimension becomes important in the social dimension. The quality of the retirement process, the individual's choices of activity, in particular those that promote health and the continuation of working life, are becoming highly relevant to the health of the economies of individual states.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dorota Rancew-Sikora from the Institute of Sociology of the University of Gdańsk, and the anonymous reviewers for their stimulating comments, thanks to which I significantly improved the final text.

## References

- Atchley R.C., 1985, *Social Forces and Aging. An Introduction to Social Gerontology*, Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company Belmont.
- Bauman Z., 2007, *Płynne życie*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie.
- Berger P.L., Luckmann T., 2010, *Społeczne tworzenie rzeczywistości. Traktat z socjologii wiedzy*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- van den Bogaard L., Henkens K., Kalmijn M., 2016, *Retirement as a Relief? The Role of Physical Job Demands and Psychological Job Stress for Effects of Retirement on Self-Rated Health*, "European Sociological Review", vol. 32, no. 2, DOI: 10.1093/esr/jcv135.
- Bonk E., Retowski S., 2013, *Emerytura – ulga czy udręka? Postrzeganie emerytury na przykładzie słuchaczy Uniwersytetów Trzeciego Wieku*. "Gerontologia Polska", vol. 21, no. 1.

- Bullock K., Garland J., Coupar F., 2019, *Police Officer Transitions to Retirement in the United Kingdom: Social Identity, Social Support, and (In)justice*, "Policing and Society", vol. 30, no.10; 1–15. DOI: 10.1080/10439463.2019.1664522.
- Celidoni M., Dal Bianco C., Weber G., 2017, *Retirement and Cognitive Decline. A Longitudinal Analysis Using SHARE*, "Journal of Health Economics", vol. 56.
- Durkheim E., 2006, *Samobójstwo. Studium z socjologii*. A. Sułek, E. Tarkowska (eds.), Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa.
- Fedorowicz J., Majdak E., Talacha J., Walczak-Kowalska M., Wędrychowska A., 2011, *Życie PRL. Praca, rozrywka, ludzie. Ilustrowana encyklopedia PRL*. Warszawa: Demart SA.
- Frąckowiak Z., 1981, *Lek niezastąpiony* [in:] I. Łapiński (ed.), *Pierwszy rok na emeryturze*, Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Związków Zawodowych.
- Fromm, E., 2011, *Ucieczka od wolności*. O. Ziemilska, A. Ziemilski (eds.), Warszawa: Czytelnik.
- van Gennep A., 1960, *The Rites of Passage. A Classic Study of Cultural Celebrations*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Henkens K., van Dalen H.P., Ekerdt D.J., Hershey D.A., Hyde M., Radl J., van Solinge H., Wang M., Zacher H., 2018, *What We Need to Know About Retirement: Pressing Issues for the Coming Decade*, "The Gerontologist", vol. 58, no. 5, DOI: 10.1093/geront/gnx095.
- Każmierska K., Waniek K., 2020, *Autobiograficzny wywiad narracyjny. Metoda – technika – analiza*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.
- Kersten K., 1996, *Polska. Wstęp. Historia* [in:] *Nowa encyklopedia powszechna PWN* 5.
- Kosiński K., 2003, *Pamiętnikarstwo konkursowe jako źródło historyczne*, "Studia i Materiały", vol. 6.
- Kowalska I., 2015, *Sytuacja przejścia na emeryturę (w świetle badań diagnostycznych)*, "Edukacja Dorosłych", no. 1.
- Krzyżowski Ł., Kowalik W., Suwada K., Pawlina A., 2014, *Młodzi emeryci w Polsce. Między biernością a aktywnością*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.
- Lam B.C.P., Haslam C., Haslam S.A., Steffens N.K., Cruwys T., Jetten J., Yang J., 2018, *Multiple Social Groups Support Adjustment to Retirement across Cultures*, "Social Science & Medicine", vol. 208, DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2018.05.049.
- Levy B.R., Chung P.H., Bedford T., Navrazhina K., 2014, *Facebook as a Site for Negative Age Stereotypes*, "The Gerontologist", vol. 54, no. 2, DOI: 10.1093/geront/gns194.
- Łapiński I. (ed.), 1981, *Pierwszy rok na emeryturze*, Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Związków Zawodowych.
- Makita M., Mas-Bleda A., Stuart E., Thelwall M., 2019, *Aging, Old Age and Older Adults: Social Media Analysis of Dominant Topics and Discourses*, "Ageing & Society", vol. 41, issue 2, DOI: 10.1017/S0144686X19001016.
- Merton R.K., 1982, *Teoria socjologiczna i struktura społeczna*, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.
- Olszewski H., 2003, *Starość i witaukt psychologiczny: atrybucja rozwoju*, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego.
- Palska H., 1997, *Polskie pamiętnikarstwo konkursowe: ideologia w autobiografii, autobiografia w ideologii*, "ASK" no. 1–2 (5–6).
- Pasowicz M. (ed.), 2013, *Zdrowie i medycyna – wyzwania przyszłości*, Kraków: Krakowskie Towarzystwo Edukacyjne – Oficyna Wydawnicza AFM: Medycyna Praktyczna.



- Polakowski M., Szelewa, D., 2015, *Polityka społeczna PRL*, Warszawa: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Przedstawicielstwo w Polsce i Fundacja Międzynarodowe Centrum Badań i Analiz (ICRA).
- Posłuszny Ł.G., Kubicki P., 2019, *Trajektorie bezrobocia: rozważania teoretyczne na podstawie konkursów pamiętnikarskich*, "Studia Socjologiczne", vol. 235, no. 4.
- Potent-Ambroziewicz M., 2013, *Starość w języku młodzieży współczesnej*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS.
- Prawda M., 1989, *Biograficzne odtwarzanie rzeczywistości (o koncepcji badań biograficznych Fritza Schütze)*, "Studia socjologiczne", vol. 115, no. 4.
- Rostkowski H.W., 1981, *Przeziadka* [in:] I. Łapiński (ed.), *Pierwszy rok na emeryturze*, Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Związków Zawodowych.
- Schütze F., 2012, *Analiza autobiograficzna ugruntowana empirycznie w autobiograficznym wywiadzie narracyjnym. Jak analizować autobiograficzne wywiady narracyjne* [in:] K. Kaźmierska (ed.), *Metoda biograficzna w socjologii: Antologia tekstów*, Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy Nomos.
- Staręga-Piasek J., Synak B. (eds.), 1990, *Społeczne aspekty starzenia się i starości*, Warszawa: Centrum Medyczne Kształcenia Podyplomowego.
- Starr F., 1910, *Reviewed Work: Les Rites de Passage. by Arnold Van Gennep*, "American Journal of Sociology" vol. 15, no. 5.
- Strauss A.L., 2012, *Transformacje tożsamości* [in:] K. Kaźmierska (ed.), *Metoda biograficzna w socjologii. Antologia tekstów*, Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy Nomos.
- Strauss A.L., Fagerhaugh S., Suczek B., Wiener C., 2016, *Trajektorie choroby* [in:] K. Kaźmierska (ed.), *Metoda biograficzna w socjologii: antologia tekstów*, Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy Nomos.
- Synak B., 1987, *Młodzi emeryci*, Wyd. 1, Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Związków Zawodowych.
- Tarkowska E., 2002, *Zróźnicowanie polskiej biedy w świetle badań jakościowych*, "Problemy Polityki Społecznej: studia i dyskusje", no. 4.
- Tryfan B., 1990, *Społeczne aspekty wiejskiej starości w świetle teorii gerontologicznych* [in:] J. Staręga-Piasek and B. Synak (eds.), *Społeczne aspekty starzenia się i starości*, Warszawa: Centrum Medyczne Kształcenia Podyplomowego.