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Abstract of the doctoral dissertation entitled:

*“Reflexivity of mid-life women. Sociological portraits of cases of women from Radom”* supervised by Prof. Dr. Izabela Grabowska

Abstract

“**Reflexivity is a mechanism** by which people define their ultimate *concerns* in relation to nature, practise, society, giving them priority arising from them and thus working out a viable way of life for themselves, a project with the awareness of the existing possibilities and limitations. Looking at yourself and your life, placed in context, is possible thanks to the stimulated reflection. What will we do with the limitations and opportunities we face, what operating costs we are willing to pay and whether we consider it worthwhile to join others  
 in an organised effort to change or collectively defend the status quo” ( Archer 2003: x).

**The aim of the dissertation is to present the existence, significance and stimulation of reflexivity in women who are in the middle of their life and come from a post-county-capital, post-communist city**, which, as a result of the systemic transformation, have lost their industrial identity, development and investment opportunities. Thousands of jobs have been lost, especially for educated managers, which has resulted in the employment of women below their qualifications, competences and opportunities, as well as the failure to use their social, economic and cultural capital. The city of Radom had to change its industrial specialisation and return to its former, merchant identity, in which only small trade, small companies, economic activity and medium-sized enterprises are able to exist and have a chance to survive or develop. Radom is a case study of a post-voivodeship, post-communist system transition city for this doctoral dissertation.

**The doctoral dissertation presents a portrait of Polish women who have experienced their lives in the middle of its course** and experience personal and professional challenges every day. Thanks to the activated reflexivity, they are able to look retrospectively and prospectively at their life and their existence and functioning in professional and private spheres.

Mid-life women are also the largest group of women in the age pyramid of the Polish population. Due to the possibility of recruiting for the study the trial focused on the group aged 38-52.

**The choice of women living in Radom and its vicinity** is justified by the large population who, despite their education, do not find jobs in metallurgy and construction - two industries that function well in Radom or in historical industrial specialisations of production of armament and leather products. The loss of the status of a county city and the decision of the Radom authorities to join the Mazovia County resulted in the closure of industries in which women occupied a place at various levels (footwear, tailoring, tanning technology) and the lack of subsidies to save jobs for women in a long process. Currently, the Labour Office in Radom (an interview with a local expert) offers only employment to women in the service industry (trade, hairdressing, floristry, cosmetics, cleaning), looking for women with primary or secondary technical education, often for remuneration in the amount of the basic national average. Women with secondary or higher education decide to start doing their own business or join life partners or work below their qualifications, competences and education. Women from Radom run their own companies, they create support groups and networking groups to support their entrepreneurship and look for new solutions and paths of potential development.

**In theoretical terms, the mainstay and support used in this doctoral dissertation is the social ontology of Margaret S. Archer**, which shows the subjective perpetration (*agency*) within the social structure. Thanks to this approach, the dissertation shows whether and how the social structure determines the actions and activities of entities and how individuals make decisions, actions, set their goals and roles within the structure; and whether the structure, influenced by their projects, can change and transform. We are dealing with a multitude of social roles. For this purpose, an analysis of life paths, implemented projects or the lack of them, the approach to close relationships (family, work, friends) and distant relations (city, country, social locality, historical facts) in the biographical narratives of the interviewed women will be presented from Radom. An important component of subjective agency dependent on the context of the social structure is precisely the eponymous reflexivity, the concept of which was developed by Archer (2003). In its ontology, reflexivity was born and developed in the late modernity and represents the individual’s ability to see itself in relation to the social context, while at the same time looking at structural conditions, through personal lens of a human being.

**The doctoral dissertation is based on a mixed-method methodological approach**(Creswell 2013) composed of two principles: the more dominant method and the less dominant method. The second principle in the dissertation is the quantitative analysis of the data found in the publicly available dataset of *Human Capital in Poland*. The dominant core is the qualitative longitudinal study (QLS) (Neale and Flowerdew 2003, Thomson and McLeod 2015) asynchronous and synchronous (O’Connor and in. 2008; Ratislavova and Ratislav 2014 ), composed of five phases extended across a timeline. In the qualitative part, the analysis of the semantic field was also used. The construction of the qualitative in-house research was based on the use of a qualitative research technique and the presentation of a tool built for the needs of this qualitative research. An innovation in the asynchronous phase of own research will be the presentation of the process of Polish adaptation of the ICONI questionnaire established by Margaret S. Archer. The research procedure proposed in the doctoral dissertation is a form of a continuous dialogue between theory and empirical research in terms of Adaptive Theory Formation (ATF) (cf. Layder 1998), which stands halfway between the classical deductive approach, i.e. the positivist approach (Denzin and Lincoln 2005), which is about testing theories, where the researcher’s task is to confirm or deny them, and it is a well-established approach, also known as an interpretative one(Strauss 1987), which frees the researcher from the need to learn previously created and developed theories, and the researcher is to read the social world through the glasses of its participants (Znaniecki 1934). By applying the sociological practice of ATF, the researcher is halfway between one and the second method, thanks to which it has the ability to create and “shape theoretical alternatives by adapting the existing theories” in sociology (Grabowska-Lusińska 2012: 41). Derek Layder (1998) claims that a researcher must enter the research area with knowledge and be familiar with theories, but not try to forcefully prove the already existing ones, blurring the image of real and existing data in the studied area. ATF relies on both the induction and deduction of the entire research process.

**For the purposes of this doctoral dissertation, 42 longitudinal individual in-depth interviews (synchronous and asynchronous) were conducted with women aged 38–52 years,** living in Radom and its vicinity. The initial phase of the study started in the first quarter of 2016, and the last phase of the qualitative study was in the fourth quarter of 2019.

**The dissertation and the analyses contained therein are to provide answers to the following research questions and verify the following assumptions**:

* P1. What types of reflexivity do the interviewed women show in the middle of their lives? [*Supporting research questions: Which of them are dominant and which are marginal? Are there are any hybrids of types of reflexivity? What affects practicing a given mode of reflexivity?]*
* A1. Women in the middle of their life are characterised by communicative reflexivity.
* P2 How do women work in the middle of their life in various areas of life? What strategies they adopt in the indicated areas (work, family, social environment, education and self-development)?
* A2. Midway through life, women feel that they are faced with two alternative paths of further life: (i) social transparency due to age and fulfilled social roles (passive attitude) or (ii) the selection of existing opportunities and scrupulous selection of new solutions (selectively active attitude). In the context of Radom, women in the middle of their life choose social transparency due to strong social control, constraining structure of local labour market opportunities, and family conditions.
* Q3. What are the models of mid-life behaviour of women? What determines these models?
* A3. Halfway through their lives, women create types of actions and behaviours that depend on social determinants. A model of how women act in the middle of their life course, it expresses itself to personal and social determinants with varying degrees of intensity. Mid-life women who succumb to conditioning do not have a plan  
   and do not build new alternatives and life strategies for the second half of their life.

The research questions and assumptions formulated for the purposes of this dissertation concern issues focusing on the types of reflexivity, manifested in the characteristics of the studied women, and attempts to relate types or their combinations to structural conditions, thus creating new hybrids.

**The dissertation is intended to encourage further research related to the hidden and explicit capital of women in the middle of their life, as well as the expectations, opportunities and structural limitations of reaching maturity.** This dissertation also aims to show a mixed research approach that contributes to the sharpening of the lens through which we look at female entities in the social structure to its fullest extent, through their agitated and reflective agency.