

Culturally Mobile Academics? The Experience of Upward Mobility in The Narrative Perspective

Project goal

The study is focused on the “narratives of upward mobility” (Robbins 2007) of scholars employed by Polish universities. The main aim of the study is to analyze the professional career paths of working-class individuals who succeeded in becoming university professors and assistant professors. The central research question is how the culture of origin (family, early socialization) and culture of destination (shaped by current social circles) affects the practices we are involved in, goods we consume, or cultural values we believe in.

In this project, cultural practices are understood as set of behaviors related to use of artifacts, ideas and other human creations in private life and in the academic workplace. In particular, the project is focused on the selected subtypes of cultural practices:

- Cultural individual practices directed by the individual to himself or herself (his/her body or soul), e.g. taking care of the body or outfit,
- Cultural collective practices, e.g. social life and its forms, recreation, mass events, visiting institutions of culture (theatres, cinemas),
- Individual consumption patterns (buying and using objects),
- Class-based patterns of collegial relations in academia.

Description of research

The project is based on a triangulation of two main research techniques: biographical narrative interviews based on the Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) and in-depth interviews (IDI). The use of life histories to investigate careers is a widespread strategy in case of careers in different market sectors, including in the academic context. All in all, the project is based on 80 interviews: 20 core biographical narratives, 30 IDIs with parents, and 30 IDIs with friends of interviewees.

Reasons for attempting a particular research topic

The issue of inter-class cultural mobility of academics in Poland, unlike Western Europe and the US, suffers from the scarcity of empirically and theoretically oriented papers that aim to inform the classical sociological theory of social reproduction. This proposal contributes to an emerging body of scholarly literature on the relationships between upward mobility on the one hand, and cultural taste (values) and cultural practices (behavior), on the other.

Substantial results expected

The detailed outcomes of the project are intended to be published as an English-language monograph, but the strategy of dissemination of results is based on the idea of publishing four papers in internationally and nationally recognized journals and an English–language book.