

JEFFREY DAVID TURK & ADAM MROZOWICKI (EDS)



**REALIST
BIOGRAPHY
AND**

**EUROPEAN
POLICY**

***An Innovative
Approach
to European
Policy Studies***

LEUVEN UNIVERSITY PRESS

Reprint form Realist Biography and European Policy - ISBN 978 90 5867 971 0 - © Leuven University Press 2013

Realist Biography and European Policy

An Innovative Approach
to European Policy Studies

edited by

Jeffrey David Turk

and

Adam Mrozowicki

LEUVEN UNIVERSITY PRESS

© 2013 by Leuven University Press / Universitaire Pers Leuven / Presses Universitaires de Louvain. Minderbroedersstraat 4, B-3000 Leuven (Belgium).

All rights reserved. Except in those cases expressly determined by law, no part of this publication may be multiplied, saved in an automated datafile or made public in any way whatsoever without the express prior written consent of the publishers.

ISBN 978 90 5867 971 0

D / 2013 / 1869 / 67

NUR: 754

Design: Jurgen Leemans

Cover design: Griet Van Haute

Cover illustration: Velázquez, *La Fábula de Aracne o Las Hilanderas* (Museo del Prado, 1657-58).



1. Introduction: the Need for Realist Biography in European Policy Studies

Adam Mrozowicki, Jeffrey David Turk & Markieta Domecka

This introductory chapter discusses the motivation for and use of realist biography in European policy studies, laying out the general framework for the rest of the book. It provides an introductory melding of the ideas of some of the key proponents of Critical Realism/Realist Social Theory and biographical methods and demonstrates how they can be developed leading to a toolbox for practical research in European policy studies and in the social sciences more generally. Both biographical methodology, as advanced by Schütze (1983) and Rosenthal (1995), and critical realism, in particular its variety proposed by Archer (2007), share common roots in philosophical pragmatism and sociological humanism, common interests in work stories and life stories, and similar analytical concepts, for instance biographical work and the processing of experience that takes the form of an internal conversation. For Archer,

“a full understanding of how actors reflexively make their way through the world, dealing as they must with at least some of its social properties and powers, requires an exploration of their life and work histories.” (Archer, 2007: 98)

This theoretical assertion offers a natural link with the tradition of biographical research, which has not been explored so far in the literature. While there are many books on the market which separately deal with biographical methods and methodological issues related to critical realism, no book so far has attempted to bring together these two theoretical traditions. The main goal of this collective volume is to fill this gap and demonstrate that the combination of critical realism and biographical methods is not only possible, but it can also be very beneficial for the exploration of newly emerging research fields at the European level.

One of the key features of this book is thus to place biographical research in an explicitly realist framework. Accordingly, we distinguish three component levels of science: (1) real world, (2) data and (3) our models and beliefs about the world that can emerge from and be grounded in empirical analysis, and which the data are used to check. Our task is to provide sufficient information

to convince a presumed research community employing a similar realist framework that our findings about the data we collect and consider go beyond mere data-correlations, but can advance to having explanatory power at the level of the real world (Turk, 2009). Key to this approach is the problem of the perception of the subject matter under study – the issue of data acquisition for theory-checking in realist social science.

In order to firmly ground our models and beliefs in the real lived social world, we have to have an approach to data acquisition that makes this possible. We thus start with the hypothesis that there is an internal conversation (Archer, 2003) – people talking to themselves about their relation to society – that acts as a real causal mechanism mediating between social structures and human agency. It is this mediating mechanism in action that we wish to probe as accurately as possible as an important explanatory source for social dynamics at the various levels where it comes into play in European Union policy processes.

Inspired by the work of Schütze (1977; (2005 [1984]; 2008a; 2008b), as followed by Rosenthal (1995) and Wengraf (2001), we take the spontaneous, minimally directed autobiographical narratives from our informants as perhaps reflecting (not perfectly, but with some degree of accuracy) their internal conversations at play during the experiences they narrate. The notion of realist biography assumes that the actual life course influences the way that events and perceptions are recounted in the story, while the way the personal story is constructed is a reflection of the internal conversation (Archer, 2007), which in turn has real impact back on the world in which that person operates and on their action in that world. In other words, the realist biography concept suggests that life stories are something more than continuously fluid and situational narrative constructions. They offer a privileged way to reconstruct a real causal mechanism of reflexivity that influences human practices and processes in the real world.

This introductory chapter progresses in three parts:

- The first part separates the two terms “realism” and “biography” and shows how they fit together. First realism is argued as being a preferable philosophical framework as compared to the two competitors: empiricism and postmodernism. Then we show how biographical methods can work within a realist framework for social research. This section relates closely to the arguments entailed in the chapters by Carter (chapter 2) and Wengraf and Chamberlayne (chapter 3) in this book.
- In the second part we argue that the fields of European integration and European policy studies are ideal for the use of realist biography. We substantiate this thesis by addressing the need for further developing an actor-centred perspective in European studies that emerges both from existing literature in

the field and from chapters 3-8 in this volume. These chapters are explicit examples of the use of biographical methods.

- In the brief third section we address the content of the book and how the chapters of this volume contribute to a methodological toolbox for use in realist social science.

What is the realist framework, and why adopt it?

The problem we address here is not specific to European studies, but is a more general problem in the social sciences. However, because of the nature of the processes of European integration, the field of European policy studies is one particular area where the strengths of the approach espoused here can be expected to be particularly appropriate. Our approach is to combine the methods of biographical research with a solid realist foundation as a rigorous platform for social research. As noted by Carter (chapter 2 in this book), one of the strengths of realist sociology is precisely that it enables the formulation of clear methodological principles to inform social research. Substantiating this claim, we proceed in the following way: first we address the problem of realism (or the lack of it) in the social sciences. Then we consider why realist approaches are necessary. We then discuss biographical methods and show how they can be (and to what extent they are) compatible with a realist (social) science framework. Finally, in the last part we discuss some of the characteristics of European policy processes as they unfold in the real contemporary European context and we explain how and why realist biographical methods are particularly suitable for research in this area.

The first part of our task is to stake out the differences between the two main approaches to science (realism and empiricism) and between them and other approaches (such as postmodernism/radical constructivism) that radically challenge the very need for the development of a coherent and adequate scientific knowledge. We thus cluster science into three major types, but note that the postmodernist or radical constructivist type questions science altogether (while surreptitiously benefiting from it and exploiting its prestige). To help in this clustering, we use the exemplar fields of particle physics during the twentieth century for the realist (physical) science and economics during the same period for empiricist science. We do not engage much with the third type, since almost by definition it cannot lead to improved understanding of the social world, which is our purpose here.

In our explanation we will draw on the terminology of Searle (2010:17-18) for distinguishing ontological objectivity and subjectivity from epistemic objectivity and subjectivity. Ontological objectivity/subjectivity refers to the mode of

existence of entities whereas epistemic objectivity/subjectivity refers to knowledge claims about those entities. Money is money through people collectively recognising it as money. While the bits of metal and water-marked sheets of paper do have ontologically objective existence as material objects, their status and functioning as money in human social systems is ontologically subjective. Money has subjective ontology but is epistemically objective.

All but the most extreme constructivists would probably agree that there is an objective reality that is the social world. But we have to be more specific. It is an epistemically objective reality whose mode of existence depends on people believing or at least tacitly accepting it. David Cameron is currently (2013) the (epistemically objective and therefore real) prime minister of the UK, not because of any ontologically objective properties inherent in his person, but because that is the status he is generally recognised as having through collectively recognised election procedures. Cameron's status as prime minister is very much different from the mass of an electron, which has ontological objectiveness independently of how that mass is understood or conventionally recognised by any particular group.

A very important and subtle point that will be developed below is that because of that difference in the mode of existence, the realist measurement techniques used in the physical sciences (particle physics in particular) are not possible and that the empiricist form of measurement used in the social sciences is unsatisfactory. So what does that leave us with? We do want to probe the socially real; so what measurement techniques do we think actually can be used? The answer we explore in this book is the following: the reason realist measurement techniques as used in physics are not appropriate for the social sciences is that those techniques are used for physical entities with given (ontologically objective) properties to be measured independently of how people think about them or act them out. Socially real phenomena do not have properties in the same way. We therefore do not try to measure the properties of social entities directly. We are limited to probing how people act them out – a probing which we do claim is possible. Socially real phenomena can be probed – we claim – but not using the same realist measurement techniques appropriate for physical entities.

What concerns us as realists is the danger of fleeing from realism altogether into high theory and empiricist methods. We would argue that this is more than just a possible outcome: it has already happened and is the current state of most social science, particularly economics.

What we are trying to do is bring realism back in, not through inappropriate measurement techniques, but through techniques appropriate to the entities we study. We hold that these are the types of techniques that biographical researchers use implicitly. Our basic supposition is that biographical methods allow us to probe in an epistemically objective way how real people act out an ontologically

subjective social world. This is the principle goal of the book and the realist biography project in general.

To be very clear on this point: as opposed to the realist measurement methods of physics (where we measure ontologically objective properties) or empiricist measurement methods (which are unsatisfactory watered-down versions of the former that try to make measurement independent of ontological considerations so that the same techniques can be used in both physical and social science) we are arguing in favour of realist biographical methods (where we probe how people act out their ontologically subjective world). We argue that these latter methods offer an appropriate approach for epistemically objective social science with subjective ontology.

An important clarification is essential here. In no way do we argue that statistical techniques are inappropriate for the social sciences. This is not our target. What we criticise are empiricist techniques that do not go beyond mere data correlations. Statistics are essential for placing information, such as interview data, into broader perspective. It is essential for highlighting problems, such as increased mortality for certain social groups. What we are against is the systematic bias against data incorporating first person information in explaining outcomes in favour of social hydraulics type of modelling with statistical data (Archer, 2007) that is not traceable back to the ontologically subjective social world we study. We want to know how things happen at the level of what real people think and do. We have no a priori reasons for discarding numerical data. It just happens to be the case that people are language-using beings, which simply must be taken into account at some level – as realist biography clearly does – if we are to remain consistent with realism. Nevertheless descriptive statistics are essential in giving the context and are a necessary component of most biographical research in practice.

In order to help follow the argument, let us spell it out by bullet point and then expand it in more detail.

Realist biography as a scientific method: key assumptions

1. Our task is to put forth an approach for realist social science, which can provide us with improved understanding of how real people do things in this real world. We begin with particle physics as a solid model for a realist (physical) science that studies real things in the real world. Particle physics uses realist measurement as a reality check on theory.
2. Realist measurement requires the assumption that properties measured exist with true values. Measurement is the one key

domain that separates empiricism from realism. Realist measurement takes into explicit account the systematic uncertainty of a measurement, while empiricist measurement does not, which makes it a weaker form of measurement.

3. In order to estimate the systematic uncertainty of a measurement, the property measured must be assumed to have (and be consistent with having) a true value: the phenomena measured must be assumed to have intrinsic properties. The systematic uncertainty of a measurement is an estimate of how well a measurement with zero statistical uncertainty might still deviate from the true value of the measurand; and thus requires an analysis of the data acquisition process: a realist measurement cannot be ontologically (or epistemically) neutral.
4. Phenomena of social ontology do not have intrinsic properties – their properties derive from the social systems in which they emerge and are acted out. In Searle's (2010: 17-18) terms they are ontologically subjective, unlike the ontologically objective entities studied in physical science.
5. Therefore economics cannot and does not use realist measurement as a reality check on theory. Mainstream economics for instance (an important exemplar of social science) as a programme of abstract mathematical modelling without adequate concern for the data acquisition process (the relationship between data and real things in the world) is thus forced into empiricist measurement. But we do not need to give up on realism, just on an excessive reliance on mathematical models requiring quantitative measurement when such measurement is not possible under the constraints of realism.
6. Under a realist approach, the nature of phenomena with social ontology dictates that they be studied through the way they are acted out by real people in order to obtain a reality check on tentative knowledge claims. Realist biography is one such approach. Realist biography therefore requires attention to the real human phenomenon of collective intentionality because it underpins social ontology.

First we note that physics is not a good model for social science, but it does allow for a realist understanding of science. The main purpose here is thus not to show how social science should somehow use the methods of physics, but to show the difference between the empiricism of economics, which as the “queen of the social sciences” has spearheaded empiricism in social research as compared to the realism of physics as an archetypical natural science. The comparison highlights the importance of realist data acquisition as a prerequisite for realist social science – even though the different natures of the physical and social require different forms of data acquisition tuned to the respective subject matters.

As our primary source for explaining the difference between realist and empiricist approaches to measurement we use the text *Measurement in Economics: a Handbook* (Boumans, 2007). This book (hereinafter: *The Handbook*) claims to be “the first book that takes measurement in economics as its central focus” and “provides comprehensive and up-to-date surveys of recent developments in economic measurement”. In his chapter of *The Handbook*, Mari gives a description as to what is involved in empiricist measurement, the point of which is to make measurement independent of the ontology of any particular research tradition:

“...it is precisely the fact that measurement can be characterized in a purely structural way, therefore not considering any requirement on the usage of physical devices, that leaves the issue of measurability open to both physical and non-physical properties. Accordingly, measurement is *ontologically-agnostic*: in particular, it does not require measurands to have a ‘true value’, however this concept is defined, although it does not prevent and is usually compatible with this hypothesis.” (Mari, 2007: 48; emphasis in the original)

In a telling footnote Mari explains:

“My opinion is that Measurement Science is currently living a transition phase in which the historically dominant truth-based view is being more and more criticized and the model-based view is getting more and more support by the younger researchers. On the other hand, the truth-based view is a paradigm that benefits from a long tradition: the scientists and the technicians who spent their whole life [sic.] thinking and talking in terms of true values and errors are fiercely opposing the change.” (Mari, 2007: 64)

Note that Mari uses the terms “truth-based” and “model-based” for what are in this introduction termed the “realist” and “empiricist” approaches to measurement, respectively.

As noted elsewhere in greater detail (Turk, 2005; 2009; 2011a), realist measurement (in Mari’s terms “truth-based”) is alive and well in particle physics. The allusion to empiricist (“model-based”) measurement is rather his way of allowing for measurement in the social sciences, where he tries to circumvent the fact that realist measurement is not possible there due to the nature of the phenomena studied.

Note also that our criticism of what Mari terms “model-based” measurement can in no way be construed as a criticism of the use of models, which we consider essential in any science. It would perhaps be clearer to contrast “truth-based” approaches with “non-truth-based” approaches. Here the uncertainty of measurement is either taken as how close we estimate the measured value to be with respect to the true value (truth-based) or it is not. The former only works in the physical sciences where the entities measured are consistent with having true (ontologically objective) values. Again, this is not the case with the ontologically subjective entities of social science, so some other approach, such as realist biography, is required.

Therefore, contra Mari, we argue that social scientists should join with physicists in resisting the change away from realism towards empiricism, an undesirable change. Instead we present a rigorous approach for realist social science tuned to the underlying social ontology.

Accordingly we must deal with the fact that we cannot directly measure quantities of social ontology, since their properties are ontologically subjective and therefore lack the true values physical phenomena normally have. Instead we can only study the way these phenomena are acted out in a given social setting. Instead of asking what the properties of a given social phenomenon are and how it functions, we can only ask how that given phenomenon is acted out by the participants involved. Our method of realist biography is a way of doing just that using a realist conceptualisation of science. It is our way of dealing with the same question Searle (2010: 18) contributes to answering: “How can there be an epistemically objective set of statements about a reality which is ontologically subjective?”

We make use of the diagram of Figure 1.1, adapted from Turk (2009), to help illustrate the argument. The problem we address here is that of comparing tentative knowledge claims to what actually happens in the world. Since there is no direct knowledge about the world without perception, the issue of data and data acquisition is important. The diagram illustrates a realist conceptualisation of science. In empiricist approaches the issue of the procedures and methodologies of data acquisition is downplayed and models are only checked against

data in an ontologically-neutral way. On the other hand, postmodernist/radical constructivist approaches only consider the top layer of the diagram, which is the top epistemic level, and claim that the rest is merely the social construction of the scientists, meaning that knowledge produced has little bearing on any hypothetical world beyond that constructed by the social scientists. We of course argue that all components of the diagram are necessary for realist science.

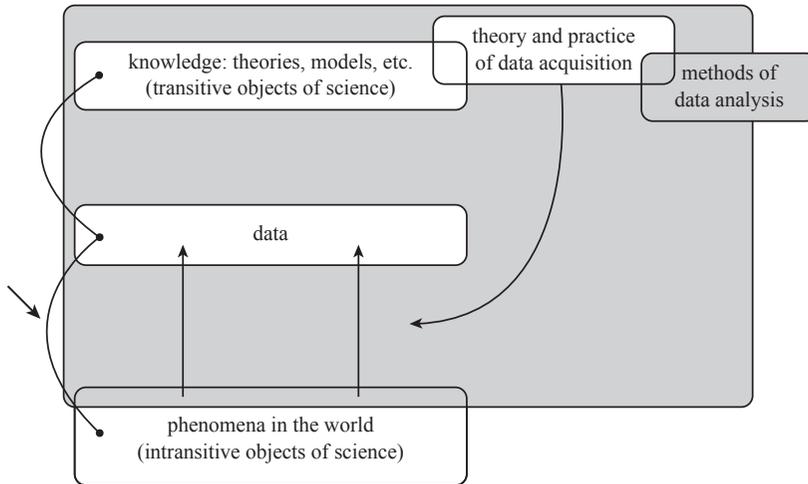


Figure 1.1 Realist science: checking knowledge against the world

Source: Modification of diagram from Turk (2009).

For the remainder of this introductory chapter, we mainly focus on the link between phenomena in the social world and the acquisition of data from those phenomena within a realist framework. First we stress the difference between data and world. Data depend on the theory of data acquisition employed in their acquisition. Phenomena even in the social world, while ontologically subjective on the part of the participants involved, are independent of any theory of data acquisition to be used. The specific (primary) tool we use to acquire data from an ontologically subjective real world is to make use of the real human attributes of the participants in the social phenomena in providing narratives that (in combination with each other and other available sources of information) allow us to check our tentative and improving knowledge against what happens in the real world as made tangible through those narratives.

This observation is consistent with the method of abduction introduced by Peirce (1974/1979) and discussed in the context of biographical method by Rosenthal (2004). Abduction enables us to explain unexpected facts through

re-arranging our knowledge and making new connections between ideas. As noted by Kelle:

“in making abductive inference, researchers depend on previous knowledge that provides them with the necessary categorical framework for the interpretation, description and explanation of the empirical world under study (...) The framework which guides empirical investigations should be modified, rebuilt and reshaped on the basis of empirical material.” (Kelle, 2005: 31)

To help in understanding our data acquisition techniques, we introduce some further realist concepts from Searle (1995; 2001; 2010) and Archer (1995; 2003; 2007). Searle posits the existence of an agent-self as the only mechanism capable of turning reasons into actions. The agent-self operates within a gap in which actions taken are insufficiently predetermined by the given causes. The crucial point for Searle is that for an adequate explanation of action an agent-self is required that can select the reasons upon which it acts:

“There is a special logical feature of rational action explanations. Construed as causal explanations, they do not work. The causes are typically not sufficient to explain the action. Yet they are perfectly adequate as they stand. Their intelligibility requires that we think of them not as citing causes that determine an event, but as citing the reasons that a conscious rational agent acted on. That agent is a self. Agency plus the apparatus of rationality equals selfhood.” (Searle, 2001: 92)

For Searle (2001: 95), there are several necessary properties of these real human agent-selves. They are 1) conscious; 2) persist through time; 3) operate with reasons, under the constraints of rationality; 4) operating with reasons, are capable of deciding, initiating and carrying out actions, under the presupposition of freedom; and 5) are responsible for at least some of their behaviour. Note that Searle’s understanding of practical human rationality as discussed above is in absolute opposition to the type of cost-benefit analysis usually associated with the term “rationality” such as in rational actor theory. Searle’s version of practical human rationality is a reflexive deliberative process, which is squarely at odds with a simple exercise of instrumental rationality, which Searle describes as the “classical model” of rationality (Searle, 2001: 5).

One last concept we take from Searle is that of “collective intentionality”. This is a very common form of first-person plural intentionality found among real people and exemplified in such statements as “We are doing such and such,” “We

intend to do such and such,” and “We believe such and such (Searle, 2010: 43).” The important point Searle makes about collective intentionality is that:

“...it cannot be required of each individual’s intentionality that he know what the intentionality on the part of others is. In complex forms of teamwork or collective behavior, one typically does not know what the others are doing in detail. All one needs to believe is that they share one’s collective goal and intend to do their part in achieving the goal.” (Searle, 2010: 45)

The reason that this is important for realist biography is that there are two crucial settings of collective intentionality in our data acquisition procedure. The first setting is in the real collective intentional world in which the phenomenon we study is situated. The second is in the separate interview setting where a participant from the first setting gives a sensible account of her actions according to her understanding of her part in the common undertaking of the interview.

It is in going from the first setting of collective intentionality to the second that Searle’s above five properties of agent-selves come into play. It is these properties of real people that allow us to acquire data in the second setting that allow us to probe the first. It is thus through data acquired in such a fashion that we can cross-check our tentative knowledge claims with real phenomena in the social world, which is sustained through collective intentionality.

We find Searle’s analysis of the reflexive practical rationality of real human agent-selves compatible with the operation of reflexivity in Archer’s (1995; 2003; 2007) realist social theory. For Archer (2000: 7), reflexivity is a personal emergent power, irreducible to a social and cultural context, and is causally co-responsible for human conduct. It is embedded in our continuous sense of the self, resulting from our embodied practices in the world that are held to be constitutive for our sociality. The main properties of reflexivity are its interiority, its first-person perspective, and its causal efficacy vis-à-vis social forms (Archer, 2007: 63-64). The modality through which reflexivity is exercised is the internal conversation. By means of an inner dialogue with themselves, people delineate and prioritise their concerns, survey objective circumstances, and make judgements about courses of action (Archer, 2003: 142). The mediating role of reflexivity in the relationship between agency and social structures is well illustrated by the three-stage model of human action proposed by Archer (2007). The model asserts that:

“(1) Structural and cultural properties objectively shape the situations that agents confront involuntarily, and inter alia possess generative powers of constraint and enablement in relation to (2)

subjects' own constellation of concerns, as subjectively defined in relation to three orders of natural reality: nature, practice and the social. (3) Courses of action are produced through the reflexive deliberations of subjects who subjectively determine their practical projects in relation to their objective circumstances.” (Archer, 2007: 17; emphasis in the original)

Thus according to Archer:

“[The] final stage of mediation is indispensable because, without it, we have no explanatory purchase on what exactly agents do. The absence of this purchase means settling for empirical generalisations about what ‘most of the people do most of the time’. Sociologists often settle for even less: ‘Under circumstance x, a statistically significant number of agents do y.’ This spells a return to a quest for Humean constant conjunctions and, in consequence, a resignation to being *unable* to adduce a causal mechanism.” (Archer, 2007: 21; emphasis in the original)

Both authors are thus very useful for grounding the process of data acquisition in realist biography. Certainly, we cannot uncover “real” social structures by interviewing people in-depth about them. Yet, in accordance with the critical realist stance, we do need such (fallible) people’s accounts to understand the powers of agency in mitigating structural and cultural conditionings. An epistemological consequence of this stance was clearly stated by Bhaskar (1998a: xvi), who claimed that for critical realists

“in contrast to the hermeneutical perspective...actors’ accounts are both corrigible and limited by the existence of unacknowledged conditions, unintended consequences, tacit skills and unconscious motivations; but in opposition to the positivist view, actors’ accounts form the indispensable starting point of social inquiry.” Bhaskar (1998a: xvi)

A key issue in realist accounts is the focus on real causal mechanisms, which may lie dormant and become expressed only in certain circumstances. They may thus not always be expressed as a universal phenomenon in all cases. Therefore a process-oriented type of methodology (Maxwell, 2004) that infers from narrative interviews the constraints and enablements that actors perceive they work under. Thus with interview data, we can use a form of process-tracing (Bennett, 2010; Checkel, 2008; George and Bennett, 2005) to reach and test results. Here

the causal processes involved in individual cases are probed, rather than looking for statistical correlations between large numbers of cases.

One trap we would like to note and avoid is that we do not wish to bypass the intentionality of our informants, making direct inferences between the narrative data collected and phenomena in the world. Since the social phenomena we study are manifested through human intentionality, should we try to remove human intentionality from the phenomenon, there would be no phenomenon left to study. Therefore, while we follow a form of process-tracing in analysing causal chains from inputs to outcomes, part of that analysis follows the rational processes available in the logic of the story-telling of the informants.

In typical process-tracing, '[t]he researcher looks for the observable implications of hypothesized explanations, often examining evidence at a finer level of detail or a lower level of analysis than that initially posited in the relevant theory. The goal is to establish whether the events or processes within the case fit those predicted by alternative explanations' (Bennett, 2010: 208).

Arguably, the tradition of biographical approach offers a privileged, but still largely unexplored link between the ontological assumptions of critical realism and the practice of empirical research. Of course there is a long history of biographical research even without the explicitly realist framework presented here (Chamberlayne, Bornat, and Wengraf, 2000; Miller, 2005). Our neglect of that body of research so far in this analysis does not in any way imply that the scientific foundations of that work have been erroneous, weak or misguided. Our purpose was rather first to provide a solid realist framework for social science and then show how the solid corpus of biographical research already seems at home within it. It is not our intent to criticize one body of research on the grounds of another, but rather show the close affinities between the two. By developing a perspective of realist biography, we hope to contribute to a long-established epistemological discussion in the field of biographical studies. Important threads of this discussion are presented in detail in the chapter by Wengraf and Chamberlayne (chapter 3) in this book, which both address problems involved in "empiricist" and "constructivist" reading of biographical accounts.

Biographical approaches, having their roots in early Chicago School tradition¹, in the epistemological, ontological and also in the practical sense of

¹ Starting in the 1920s with *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* by Thomas and Znaniecki biographical research was then developed in the work by Ernest W. Burgess, Robert E. Park, Clifford R. Shaw and others. In Europe biographical approach was established through the great input by Florian Znaniecki and Józef Chałasiński in Poland, Fritz Schütze and his collaborators in Germany, Daniel Bertaux in France, and many others. There have been also some efforts aimed at institutionalising this stream of research. In 1978 Daniel Bertaux initiated "Biography and Society" group within the International Sociological Association and in 1979 Martin Kohli and others founded the German working group "Biographieforschung", which was later accepted by the German Sociological Association.

Robert Park's advice for sociologists to get their hands dirty in the real world (cf. Becker, 1999: 3), during the last three decades have become increasingly prevalent in the social sciences as a way of addressing the dynamics of social change from the perspectives of those affected (cf. Chamberlayne et al., 2000). Broadly understood biographical methods are mainly concerned about the subjective perspective of the individuals under study and the interaction between individual actions and broader social processes. Firstly, these are individual actions, strategies, experiences, meanings and interpretations, which are treated as a starting point for the construction of theoretical generalizations. Secondly, a great significance is ascribed to the role of the individual, human agency, reflexivity and subjectivity in social processes, which is connected with the conviction that sociological analysis cannot be reduced only to macro sociological regularities. Biographical analysis is focused first on the course of individual life as a fragment of social reality and then on the way the story of one's life is constructed and re-constructed. The aim is to discover patterns in life courses, to understand both individual actions and social processes, to explain the interdependence between human agency and social structures. On the one hand, the researcher reconstructs the course of events, as narrated, that forms the individual life history, and on the other hand, s/he takes into account the subjective interpretation of those events. The individual experience of structural influences is only one part of the focus. Equal importance is given to the agential power exercised by individuals over the structures. According to Schütze, social reality is not only experienced and bestowed with meaning by individuals, but "it is produced, is supported and kept in force, is endured with pain and suffered, is protested at and turned over or even destroyed as well as it is gradually changed by individual actors with their personal life histories and involved biographical development" (Schütze, 2008b: 2). Thus, the analysis of people's autobiographical narrations is not only a way to understand the subjective, but it is also a way to shed light on the working of structures and their interaction.

Early sociological analyses of spoken biographies, exemplified best by Shaw's (1930) research on a delinquent boy "The Jack-Roller", have been criticised for maintaining an assumption "that accurate, truthful, valid, consistent interpretations of events can be given" (Denzin, 1992: 37). Addressing this criticism, the question of the relationship between life accounts (told stories) and subject's experiences (lived lives) arose as one of the main concerns in methodological debates within the biographical approach (Bertaux, 2005; Kochuyt, 2005; Rosenthal, 2004). On the one hand, Bertaux (2003: 45) assumed that life stories can give us an access to realities irreducible to representations, "made up of signs and subjective meanings as much as of material or structural realities". Bertaux (2005: 130) called his approach "realist", since it was based on the assumption that "socio-historical realities existed independently of the

conscious minds of actors and that it was possible to obtain relatively objective knowledge about them.” However, he also argued that:

“through multiple testimonies and a cumulative intersubjectivity, we could arrive at objective knowledge concerning the social phenomena being studied, as the exterior reality of subjects: events, facts, situations, interaction, actions and practices concretely encountered” (Bertaux, 2005: 133)

Instead of the realist notion of casual mechanism, Bertaux seems to defend here the Humean conjunction of observable phenomena as the key to the “real”. Obviously, this is not compatible with a critical realist stance. Importantly, also on the grounds of biographical sociology the approach by Bertaux (2005), JP Ross (2000) and other ‘biographical realists’, or rather ‘biographical empiricists’, claiming that biography reflects **directly** people’s thoughts, plans and actions was repeatedly criticised. According to Schütze, the assumption that narratives would simply depict social and personal reality like a mirror leads to some misunderstanding regarding the empirical grounding of biographical analysis (Schütze, 2008a: 12). Even more problematic is an approach that emerged in the wake of a more general constructivist turn in biographical research. According to Riessman (2002), as one of the proponents of the constructivist stance, biographies are performative products, deeply conditioned by interview’s situation in which narrators “do not ‘reveal’ an essential self as much as they perform a preferred self, selected from the multiplicity of selves” (Riessman, 2002). However, from a critical realist perspective, it is unconvincing to reduce the questions about mechanisms generating biographical processes and the ways of narrating about them to epistemological questions. As argued by Bhaskar (1998a: 27), to assert otherwise would be to fall into “epistemic fallacy” which “consists in the view that statements about being can be reduced to or analysed in terms of statements about knowledge.”

Arguably, life stories are indeed socially embedded constructions about past life events, selected from the present perspective of informants. However, since “the present arises out of the past and the future” (Rosenthal, 2004: 50) not all biographical reconstructions are admissible. Moreover, assuming that the production of a narrative is just a performance, which varies according to changing interview situation deprives autobiographical narration its pivotal epistemic power (cf. Schütze, 2008a: 12). Therefore, autobiographical story telling “should not be seen just as a freewheeling and flexible course of textual invention of the narrator” (Schütze, 2008a: 14). It does not mean, however, that there are no performative aspects in the autobiographical narration. Undoubtedly, we can find some attempts of presenting oneself in the most favourable light or

avoiding a detailed account of painful experiences, but such attempts can be identified during the interview and further during the analysis and taken into account in the interpretation. An argument against the ‘freewheeling narrator’ comes also from critical realism with its focus on human concerns and reflexivity. As Margaret Archer convincingly demonstrated, we are not subjectively free to make what we want of the past, constructing our biographies along such story lines we please. “We bring to the present the objective results of our previous commitments. The ‘deposited’ features are real and impose serious limitations upon narrative freedom because any re-telling of the past has to account for them” (Archer, 2003: 126).

The approach, which fits much better into the perspective defended in this book than the “empiricist” and “constructivist” alternatives illustrated by the positions of Bertaux and Riessman, arises then from the pioneering work of Schütze (1977, 1983). According to Schütze, a spontaneously told life story is a sequential ordering of process structures (Schütze, 1983: 284) that describes the storytellers’ attitudes towards the most important parts of their life. Life stories cannot be reinvented all over again, because the narrator cannot tell them in a completely free manner. On the interactive level, s/he is subjected to communicative constraints which guarantee a mutual understanding between the speaker and listener: specifically a constraint (or drive) to condense (i.e. to focus life story on its overall logic), a constraint to close the narrative forms once tackled in life account, and a constraint to go into details (Kallmeyer and Schütze, 1977). On the level of content, the freedom of self-presentation is limited by the cognitive figures of improvised narrative story, safeguarding the life story from interactive influences (Schütze, 2005 [1984]). For instance, every biographical story must include its subject, the subjects of presented experiences, the chains of narration connecting events and experiences, and the social frames (situations, social milieux and social worlds) of their presentation. Additionally, the overall form of a biography expresses the tangle of process structures to which narrators refer presenting their life stories (*ibidem*).

The autobiographical narrative interview, the tool used by various biographical approaches, starts with a single eliciting question that is designed to encourage an interviewee to tell the history of his or her life. When the narrative starts, the researcher does not intervene, but provides only non-committal, mostly non-verbal responses. In most cases we can observe how the narrator becomes guided by his/her own recollections, re-living past experiences, changing the past tense into present, indirect to direct speech performing whole dialogues and describing in great detail relevant people, places, and situations. The researcher waits with additional questions till the end of the narrative part of the interview. It has been observed that asking some questions earlier often breaks the red thread of narration and brings argumentation instead. It needs to be emphasised

at the beginning of the interview that this is the interviewee's life history which is the core interest for the researcher. Although some questions will be asked later, they are not more relevant than the life history itself. When the narrative part is finished with a coda, which may take a following form: "That's it, this is my life", some questions are asked in relation to topics already introduced by the narrator. At this point, the aim is to exhaust the additional narrative potential. It is only in the third, more probing stage that the researcher explicitly asks questions on issues relating to the core of his study. S/he may activate the communicative scheme of description asking about the social frames, routines, and structural conditions. Only at the very last phase of the interview the argumentative 'why' questions are asked, which activate the self-theoretical reflections.

Biographical analysis as developed by Fritz Schütze and his collaborators involves the reconstruction of the subjective perspective of actors, the objectifiable courses of action, and the interplay between both. For the analysis of biographical data Schütze proposes "pragmatic refraction" (Schütze, 2008a) which means that verbal expressions are not taken at face value but they are "analytically related to their contexts of experiential background, their context of production and use as well as to their contexts of later application, social function and meaningful overall (biographical or actional) structure" (Schütze, 2008a: 14). The analysis begins with text sort differentiation, which examines how the autobiographical text has been produced interactively (Schütze, 2008b: 15). The narrative, descriptive, and argumentative parts are identified. Moreover, different types of restrictions, communicative mistakes and mutual misunderstandings involved in the production of autobiographical materials are taken into account (Schütze, 2008b: 16). Sequential structural description is the next analytical step. It focuses on formal features, especially presentation and demonstration markers, of the main narrative. The careful analysis of formal features gives a picture of the biographical processes and the identity development involved (Schütze, 2008b: 18-19). Importantly, through the textual and socio-biographical contextualization it is possible to depict analytically even unnoticed, faded-out, ambivalent or enigmatic social and biographical processes (Schütze, 2008b: 20). A sub-step of structural description consists of putting together the pieces of information extracted from different parts of interview dealing with the same event and the same process of identity change. In this way it is possible to fill the "gaps" of difficult experiences initially faded out in the main story line, and then referred to in the questioning part, as in case of background constructions (Schütze, 2008b: 22). The next step of analysis consists of distinguishing elementary biographical process structures, such as biographical and institutional action schemes, trajectories of suffering and metamorphoses. Through biographical action schemes individuals attempt to actively shape the courses of their lives and on the basis of institutional action schemes people

follow normatively defined courses of life, such as organisational career patterns, family life cycles and others. Trajectories of suffering describe the process in which people are not capable of actively shaping their lives as they are under a strong influence of several destabilising conditions (described also as “cumulative mess”). It is possible, however, to overcome the trajectories through biographical work. It becomes possible then to enter the process of metamorphosis, by which a new important, often unexpected, inner development starts in one’s biography (Schütze, 2008a: 26-27). The reconstruction of the overall biographical structuring, the *gestalt*, as a sequence of biographical process structures is a part of analytical abstraction. It also focuses on the interlink of biographical processes and other social phenomena and collective changes as revealed in the case. Some of these interlinks engender agency and the autonomous development of personal identity, and others support it (cf. Schütze, 2008b: 24). At this stage also the self-theoretical insights and rationalisations of the narrator are taken into account, as realised through argumentative strings of text: commentaries to narrative presentations, turning point experiences, pre-coda evaluations, etc. (Schütze, 2008b: 42). An attempt is also made to detect what is “case distinctive” and what are general features, which are theoretically remarkable (Schütze, 2008b: 24). As a result of analytical abstraction a grid structure of analytical categories is developed.

Biographical analysis as developed by Rosenthal (2004), named biographical case reconstruction, starts with a sequential approach to biographical data aimed at the reconstruction of the sequences of live events independently of narrator’s interpretations. Thematic analysis, which follows, is focused on the reconstruction of the mechanism governing the selection of the narrated biographical themes. In the third step, the reconstruction of the lived life as experienced by a subject takes place, and is centred on the microanalysis of selected text segments. After which, the results of the sequential analysis are confronted with narrator’s own interpretations. A similar approach is taken by the Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM; cf. Wengraf, 2001), which explicitly separates two strands of analysis: 1) the actual unfolding of the biographical trajectory of the participant-interviewee (the living of the lived life) and 2) the way that the narrative is told (the telling of the told story) (see chapter 3 by Wengraf and Chamberlayne in this book). It then analyses the influences of the two parts on each other for the complete case. This is useful for our purposes in that it makes highlights the distinction between the narrative as data and an actual life in the social world. While these are clearly not the same things, there is a close analytically accessible relationship between them. Such approaches are particularly appealing for realist biography. Firstly, because they put great emphasis on the self-reflexive biographical work. Secondly, subjectivity is given great importance there but at the actual core of analysis is the embeddedness of

the autobiographical histories in the broader social structures. And thirdly, people's perspectives, concerns and interpretations are taken seriously and become incorporated into researcher's own interpretations and conceptualisations. The two concepts linking critical realism and biographical approach are those of reflexivity and biographical work. Reflexivity, as understood by Archer, is an intrinsic property of human beings. It is the exercise of mental ability shared by all people to consider themselves in relation to their social contexts and vice versa (Archer, 2007: 4). It is "the mental activity which, in private, leads to self-knowledge: about what to do, what to think and what to say" (Archer, 2003: 26). Both concepts, reflexivity and biographical work in the sense of Anselm Strauss (1993), can be translated substantively into descriptive language such as "thinking over", "struggling with", "fighting out with himself", and "finally getting a new slant on himself" (cf. Strauss, 1993: 98). Implicit in the pragmatist theoretical action scheme, shared by the biographical approach and critical realism, there is the idea of work – imagining, trying out, assessing actions or lines of action involves "working things out" to use a common phrase. Work is entailed in the process of unblocking the blocked action, and moving along into the future (Strauss, 1993: 52). However, in the sense given to reflexivity by Archer, there is one more dimension to it: a causal power. Through reflexivity people exercise their causal powers and determine their future courses of action. In other words, reflexivity is the means by which people make their way through the world (Archer, 2007: 5). It is reflexivity which enables transformation of actors into "active agents" who are able to exercise some governance in their lives; who develop and define their ultimate concerns, elaborate projects and attempt to accomplish them in order to advance or protect what they care about most (Archer, 2007: 7). Any attempt to pursue a project entails two sets of causal powers: those pertaining to agents, and those pertaining to surrounding reality: objects, artefacts, structural and cultural properties. Once the causal powers are activated by the projects, they will obstruct or facilitate their accomplishment. Importantly, the actual outcomes are matters of secondary determination, governed by people's inner deliberations about existing enablements and constraints (Archer, 2007: 7-8). "Reflexivity needs not to be consigned to the free-form construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of life narratives; it can be examined as the causally powerful relationship between deliberation and action in people's social lives" (Archer, 2007: 37).

Biographical work means biographical reorientation: a reflective reconsidering of one's inner states and one's overall personal identity (Schütze, 2008a: 6). It is this type of work which is done by autobiographical recollection and reflection about alternative interpretations of one's life course. These are self-critical attempts of understanding one's own misconceptions of oneself and self-erected impediments as well as the impediments superimposed by others and by

structural conditions. Biographical work also involves imagining future courses of action that support the overall *gestalt* of the unfolding biographical identity (Schütze, 2008a: 6). It is basically an inner activity of the mind constituted by conversation with significant others and oneself (Schütze, 2008a: 7); and as such goes hand in hand with reflexivity and internal conversation as defined by Archer (2003; 2007). However, there is one important difference between these notions. Whereas reflexivity remains first of all a cognitive concept, biographical work is both a cognitive and emotional (even psychoanalytical) process including doubt, fear, anguish, suffering or relief². In smoothly ongoing life situations biographical work is just a quick deliberation and recollection connected to the focus on other activities. In crisis situations, biographical work may become the explicit and central action scheme of cognitively and emotionally ordering one's own life (Schütze, 2008a: 7). Biographical work is carried out in the service of an actor's biography, including its review, maintenance, repair, and alteration (Strauss, 1993: 98). Doing biographical work involves seeing oneself as a developing entity that matters (Schütze, 2008b: 43). The power of reflexivity and biographical work allow maintaining a continuous sense of self: knowing oneself to be oneself over time, despite different life experiences and life contexts. Both the biographical approach and critical realism have it clear that this continuous sense of self cannot be eliminated as "phenomenological froth" (Archer, 2003: 46). The subjective powers of reflexivity and biographical work are a condition for development of a self-directed agent as they mediate the role objective structural powers play in influencing social action.

A final topic we discuss in this section on realism and methods is validity. As part of any work of science – social or otherwise – the analysis does not end with an explanation of the procedure followed by a report of the results, but the validity of the results should also be evaluated (Adcock and Collier, 2001; Maxwell, 2012: chapter 8). Any methodology chosen is bound to have shortcomings; and its use will require some defending. On the other hand, social science itself is pointless if the methods are indefensible or if the results of the method chosen cannot be demonstrated to have some relevance to the social world studied. We associate this relevance with "validity". In their seminal work, Shadish, Cook and Campbell (2002: 513) broadly define validity as the "truth of, or correctness of, or degree of support for an inference." Rather than leave it to the reader to judge the validity of the reported results, it is the responsibility of social scientists to provide an honest assessment of the validity of their own work, which then aids readers in reaching their own conclusions as well as providing a basis for comparison to other research. It is therefore necessary to

² We would like to thank Antonella Spanò for turning our attention to this important difference.

provide some analysis of the possible shortcomings of the results – sources and magnitudes of threats to validity (Maxwell, 2005: 106-109).

We take as our starting point Adcock and Collier's (2001) foundational plea for a shared standard of validity for qualitative and quantitative research. Our contribution is intended to help in this standardisation. Drawing on Searle's (2010: 17-18) distinction between objective and subjective ontology, our view of validity is that it is a gauge of the epistemic objectivity of our results in relation to the ontologically subjective social phenomena we study. In other words, the intentionality-relative nature of the phenomena limits the outcome to epistemically valid statements about the ontologically subjective world. The trick is thus to have an epistemically objective methodology that has purchase in the ontologically subjective world we study. Our question here is then: How valid (epistemically objective) are our results in that limited context?

Referring back to the article of Adcock and Collier (2001: 531-532) and to our discussion of measurement above, validity is normally associated with measurement error and reliability. Measurement error is separated into statistical and systematic components, where the statistical component is associated with reliability of a measurement. The two ways of associating validity and reliability are that (1) validity can be exclusively thought of in terms of bias, in which case it corresponds to systematic uncertainty. Alternatively, (2) validity can be an encompassing term to include both systematic and statistical components of uncertainty. We prefer the second usage for the following reasons: Clearly, if we are concerned with epistemically objective statements about phenomena that are ontologically subjective, we cannot associate validity with bias from an ontologically objective value. However, since that is the standard of measurement in the physical sciences (where ontological objectivity can be assumed), it is better to avoid the confusion by not using the uncertainty approach to validity in the social sciences. Instead, we define validity as the encompassing term of epistemic objectivity relative to the collective intentional system of the social system under study. In this case it will be difficult to tease out statistical and systematic components with reference to ontologically subjective values, since grounding ourselves in ontological subjectivity will normally itself be the largest source of uncertainty. Discerning what an epistemically objective value of something is with respect to the multiple subjectivities involved makes the task severely complicated. Nevertheless, this is the task we have.

Furthermore, we are dealing with a small set of overlapping subjectivities in what we study. In this case, it does not make sense to make too much of an issue of the separation of statistical and systematic components, since our concern with teasing out epistemically objective statements relative to the subjectivities involved overrides such secondary issues. Instead we prefer to follow Maxwell's (2012: chapter 8) alternative example of breaking validity down

into the three overlapping categories of descriptive, interpretive and theoretical validity in social research. (Bajuk Senčar and Turk show an example of this in chapter 7 of this volume.) In this case, validity remains an encompassing term which takes into account all of the different possible threats to it from the various sources. This remains an important issue that should be taken up as a strong point of realist social research as compared to either empiricist or post-modernist approaches, which either could not (in the case of empiricism) or would not even try to reach the same standards.

Why is realist biography useful for European policy studies?

The sui generis nature of the institutions of the European Union (EU) and their unique processes of policy making and implementation make the political processes of the European Union an ideal area for the use of realist biography. Indeed, the integration process and the development of the institutions of the European Union are already receiving increased attention, particularly in light of the latest three enlargements that nearly doubled the number of member states and brought in an enormous diversity of historical backgrounds (Best, Christiansen, and Settembri, 2008; Shore, 2000; Stevens and Stevens, 2001; Thedvall, 2006; Checkel, 2007; Wiener and Diez, 2004; Rosamond, 2000). One of the peculiar features of European Union decision-making is the unique system of “comitology” that has emerged whereby legislative powers are shared through a collection of different committees (Bergström, 2005; Christiansen and Larsson, 2007; Blom-Hansen and Brandsma, 2009). Recent scholarship has indeed noted the remarkable resilience of this institutional framework to the shock of enlargement:

“In light of this challenge, the ability of the system not only to cope, but to continue to function in a largely unchanged manner, is remarkable. But perhaps it should not come as a surprise – the very purpose of *institutionalizing* cooperation among states in the way practised by the EU is to create a decision-making system that is flexible enough to respond to change, while being stable enough to persist in face of ‘external shocks’. By this standard, not only is it evident that enlargement is one of the most successful experiences of the EU, but indeed so is the institutional adaptation that has occurred alongside it” (Christiansen, Best, and Settembri, 2008: 244; emphasis in the original).

The actual functioning and continuity of these types of institutions under rapid development with new actors continuously coming in are ideal situations for

the use of realist biography. In order to explore the “Europe in the making”, it is necessary to acknowledge that not only the institutions shape actors, but also the biographies of the actors leave their imprint on the institutions within which they operate (Eyal, Szelenyi, Townsley 2000: 15). To assert that “biographies matter” can fill the existing gaps in the dominant practice in European studies. Existing research has been predominantly focused on the question of how the actions of social actors are affected and co-determined by the effects of European Union policies. Much less explored has been the problem of how the emergence, reproduction and change of institutional arrangements in Europe are influenced by the actions and interactions of variety of European social actors. The latter actor-sensitive research agenda emerges very clearly from recent discussions in the fields of organisation theory and comparative institutional analysis, which inspires much of European policy studies. As noted by Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca (2009: 1), “institutional approaches to organisation theory have traditionally focused attention on the relationship between among organizations and the fields in which they operate, providing strong accounts of the processes through which institutions govern actions”. Instead, they propose to focus attention on “institutional work” defined as “the practical actions through which institutions are created, maintained, and disrupted” (ibid). The need for an actor-centred perspective is also clear in recent publications in comparative institutional analysis. In their *Handbook of Comparative Institutional Analysis*, Morgan et al. openly suggest that:

“...institutions are now less likely to be discussed as exogenous constraints on actors and more as resources, which actors can draw on depending on the context. Further, it is increasingly clear that institutions in a society may offer different resources that seem dominant at a particular time and it is through combining and reorganising institutional resources that the possibility for institutional change and experimentation arises.” (Morgan et al., 2010:5)

These authors acknowledge the need to “understand how actors can be both the products of structures and the origin of changes in structure” (Morgan et al., 2010: 5). However, they do not propose a coherent methodological approach to explore the influence of social actors on the emergence of institutions and social structures. In this respect, the notion of realist biography can provide a valid supplement to the existing methodological approaches in research inspired by institutional theories.

Similarly, but from the perspective of European research on welfare regimes, Stubbs emphasises limited attention paid by existing literature to:

“... an emerging ‘cultural’ perspective on welfare, which focuses much more on the social relations of welfare; the role of biographies, subjectivities and memories; and the need for forms of reflexivity and attention to the minutiae of everyday life constructed within, and itself constructive of, ‘welfare’ as a lived experience” (Stubbs, 2002: 326)

More generally, the chapters in this book demonstrate that an analysis focused on the effects of European-level policies is insufficient to understand why so many of them fail in bringing about expected changes at the level of both European institutions and the social consciousness of Europeans. For instance, Wengraf and Chamberlayne (chapter 3) observe that centrally-driven welfare policies adopted at the European Union level “overlook and bypass” resources that are embedded in biographical experiences of European citizens. Similarly, a clear finding of the Euroidentities project, discussed by Spanò, Perone and Domecka (chapter 4), is that human reflexivity must be taken into account in order to understand how the new opportunities for transnational experience in the European Union can lead to personal entrapment instead of flourishing. In her chapter (chapter 5), Lyudmila Nurse shows that quantitative studies that lack the information available through biographical research can miss key aspects of fluid identities under transformation, and thus policies based on macro-level quantitative indicators can be misguided. The usefulness of realist biography concept for understanding the dynamics of career patterns and developing more adequate policy tools in the areas of labour market policies and occupational counselling in Europe is a central theme of the chapter by Domecka and Mrozowicki (chapter 8).

Reflecting such criticisms, the realist biography approach advanced in this book explicitly places social actors in the centre of empirical analysis of European-level processes and practices. It assumes that the degree of success in formulating, negotiating and implementing European policies cannot be assessed without hearing the voices of those responsible for managing these policies and the addressees of these management practices. The need to develop an actor-centred approach in the European studies has been recently emphasised by Georgakakis and Weisbein:

“focusing on people involved in EU processes can take us beyond classical dichotomies, such as structure/agency, individual/ collective, rational/unconscious in order to understand what social agents involved in EU processes think and do considering their position in wider structures of interaction and domination” (Georgakakis and Weisbein, 2010:93).

The actor-centred perspective can be particularly useful to study not only how the “varieties of capitalism” (Hall and Soskice, 2001) in Europe are created from above by policy-makers, but also how the properties of differentiated capitalist regimes are negotiated, maintained and resisted in the variety of local practices by European citizens and, more generally, those affected by European Union policies. A similar conclusion arises from Pulignano and Kluge’s chapter (chapter 6) in this book. Advocating the need to go beyond one-sided institutionalist analysis of European social dialogue, they argue that it is necessary to “examine more deeply the dynamics which have historically contributed to characterize its evolution through the narratives of its protagonists.” To this end, the realist biography concept and associated methodology can aid in understanding the actual practices of social actors that underlie institutional dynamics in contemporary Europe.

Furthermore, the notion of realist biography makes it possible to address some of the emergent methodological problems in the field of European studies. One of the key debates in this field, and indeed the focus of one particular book (Christiansen, Jørgensen, and Wiener, 2001), is the introduction of the social constructivism debate from international relations theory into the study of the European Union. Accordingly we argue that the nature of human social systems demands serious attention to methodological issues concerning the roles of the immediate participants to the policy processes under study, which is why we propose rigorously grounded realist biography as a research tool. Again, in order to avoid either slipping into empiricism or letting moderate constructivism fall off into postmodernism, we insist on the realist framework in our approach. Chapter 7 by Bajuk Senčar and Turk takes such an approach to the study of a focal group of participants involved in the drafting of EU policy at a unique historical juncture between the enlargement of the European Union and its global engagement as an actor in the fight against climate change.

The outline of the book: towards a methodological toolbox

This book emerged out of the international workshop “Realist biography and European policy” held at the Catholic University of Leuven on 16-18 April 2010. It comprises eight chapters connecting the themes of realism, biographical methods and European studies. This first introductory chapter and the second chapter by Bob Carter provide an overview of the critical realism’s ontological assumptions and their methodological consequences. Carter reviews the core ideas of a realist approach – analytical dualism, causal mechanisms, stratified social ontology and emergence. He argues that all of them entail important methodological commitments which, whilst not restricting realist research to particular research methods, do compel a distinctive view of such methods and a critical approach to

their customary application. He substantiates his claims by examining examples of realist research: in the development of case study approaches; in the analysis of biographical interviews using corpus linguistic analysis; and in the refinement of theoretical concepts in researching ethnicity and race.

Chapters 3-5 discuss the examples of three European projects (Sostris, Euroidentities and ENRI-EAST) which successfully adopted biographical framework to analyse European level phenomena, processes and practices, enabling the reader to understand better practical challenges and heuristic advantages connected with biographical research. The chapter written by Tom Wengraf and Prue Chamberlayne describes a significant part of the history of the UK biographical methods connected with the “Sostris” project, which was a landmark study in the use of biographical methods for policy-related research funded by the European Commission as a mainstream pan-European project. The contribution by Spanò, Perone and Domecka derives from the most recent application of biographical methods to the analysis of the European identity development, the “Euroidentities” project. They focus on the different scenarios of transnational mobility, as a strategy actively promoted and facilitated by European legislation, and show how they are connected with the amount and composition of resources held and type of reflexivity practised. In addition, the chapter by Lyudmila Nurse is based on work carried out within the FP7 ENRI-EAST: Interplay of European, National and Regional identities project.

The remaining three chapters demonstrate how a critical realist framework and biographical methodologies can be combined into innovative heuristic tools to explore the current dynamics of the “Europe in the making”. In their contribution, Pulignano and Kluge identify the need for an agency-centred perspective in the analysis of European industrial relations. Reviewing a complex history of the European social dialogue and existing research in the field, they argue that in order to understand more clearly what social dialogue is in concrete in Europe it is necessary to make sense of the meaning attributed to it by the social actors operating at the European Union level (in particular employers and trade unions). How European studies can benefit from the realist biography framework is illustrated in the contribution of Bajuk Senčar and Turk, which presents the results of the project “Anthropology of European Integration” that adopted the proposed framework. The project examines the Slovene officials involved in European environmental policy negotiations during the Slovenian Presidency of the European Union. This chapter further elaborates on the measurement and validity issue raised earlier in this Introduction as important in realist research, particularly in historically-situated realist biography. Lastly, Domecka and Mrozowicki analyse reflexivity and the career paths of workers and managers under the sweeping changes in Poland and develop a generic typology of career patterns showing its (European) policy implications.

These chapters demonstrate the utility of biographical methods and how they can be made to work within an explicitly realist framework. The examples from policy-oriented studies clearly demonstrate the usefulness of the realist biography concept for European policy studies. Along with background articles, the chapters offer practical guidelines for researchers involved in actor-centred and biographical research on the European level. Thus, we are convinced that together they contribute greatly towards the development of a coherent methodological toolbox for realist social research.

On the basis of biographical analysis we can understand not only what happened and what kind of changes were experienced, but also how a coherent and continuous sense of self has been maintained despite all the changes. According to Atkinson, “in the telling of a life story, we get a good sense of how and why the various parts of a life are connected and what gives the person meaning in life. There may be no better way to answer the question of how people get from where they began to where they are now in life than through their life stories” (Atkinson, 1998: 20).

Acknowledgement

This chapter has been greatly improved through discussions with Tom Wengraf. We are also thankful to Valeria Pulignano for her very useful comments on the first draft of this text.

Works Cited

- Adcock, R., and Collier, D. (2001). ‘Measurement validity: A shared standard for qualitative and quantitative research’. *American Political Science Review*, 95 (3), 529-546.
- Archer, M. S. (1995). *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Archer, M. S. (2003). *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Archer, M. S. (2007). *Making Our Way Through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Atkinson, R. (1998) *The Life Story Interview*, Qualitative Research Methods, Vol. 44, SAGE Publications.
- Becker, H. (1999) ‘The Chicago School, So-Called’, *Qualitative Sociology*, Vol. 22 (1): 3-12.
- Bennett, A. (2010). ‘Process-tracing and causal inference’. In H. Brady, and D. Collier (eds.), *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards* (2nd ed., pp. 207-219). Lanham, MD, USA: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bergström, C. F. (2005). *Comitology: Delegation of Powers in the European Union and the Committee System*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Bertaux, D. (2003). 'The usefulness of life stories for a realist and meaningful sociology'. In R. Humphrey, R. Miller, and E. Zdravomyslova (eds.), *Biographical Research in Eastern Europe. Altered Lives and Broken Biographies* (pp. 39-51). Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate.
- Bertaux, D. (2005). "A response to Thierry Kochuyt's 'Biographical and empiricist illusions: A reply to recent criticism'". In R. Miller (ed.), *Biographical Research Methods* (pp. 129-139). London: Sage Publications.
- Best, E., Christiansen, T., and Settembri, P. (eds.) (2008). *The Institutions of the Enlarged European Union*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- Bhaskar, R. (1998a). 'General introduction'. In M. Archer, R. Bhaskar, A. Collier, T. Lawson, and A. Norrie (eds.), *Critical Realism. Essential Readings*. (p. ix-xxiv). London and New York: Routledge.
- Bhaskar, R. (1998b [1975]). 'Philosophy and scientific realism' (from 'A realist theory of science'). In M. Archer, R. Bhaskar, A. Collier, T. Lawson, and A. Norrie (eds.), *Critical Realism. Essential Readings*. (pp. 16-47). London and New York: Routledge.
- Blom-Hansen, J., and Brandsma, G. J. (2009). 'The EU comitology system: Intergovernmental bargaining and deliberative supranationalism?' *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 47 (4), 719-740.
- Boumans, M. (ed.) (2007). *Measurement in Economics: a Handbook*. London: Elsevier.
- Chamberlayne, P., Bornat, J., and Wengraf, T. (eds.) (2000). *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science*. London: Routledge.
- Checkel, J. T. (ed.) (2007). *International Institutions and Socialization in Europe*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Checkel, J. T. (2008). 'Process tracing'. In A. Klotz, and D. Prakash (eds.), *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide* (pp. 114-127). Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Christiansen, T., and Larsson, T. (eds.) (2007). *The Role of Committees in the Policy-Process of the European Union*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- Christiansen, T., Best, E., and Settembri, P. (2008). 'Conclusion'. In E. Best, T. Christiansen, and P. Settembri (eds.), *The Institutions of the Enlarged European Union* (pp. 243-252). Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- Christiansen, T., Jørgensen, K. E., and Wiener, A. (eds.) (2001). *The Social Construction of Europe*. London: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K. (1992). *Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Studies*. Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Eyal, G., Szelényi, I., and Townsley, E. (2000). *Making Capitalism Without Capitalists. The New Ruling Elites in Eastern Europe*. London, New York: Verso.
- Fischer-Rosenthal, W. (2000). 'Biographical work and biographical structuring in present-day societies'. In P. Chamberlayne, J. Bornat, and T. Wengraf (eds.) *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science*. London: Routledge.
- Georgakakis, D., and Weisbein, J. (2010). 'From above and from below: A political sociology of European actors'. *Comparative European Politics* 8 (1): 93-109.
- George, A., and Bennett, A. (2005). *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA, USA: MIT Press.
- Hall, P. A., and Soskice, D. (2001). 'An Introduction to Varieties of Capitalism'. In P. A. Hall, and D. Soskice (eds.), *Varieties of Capitalism. The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage* (pp. 1-68). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Kallmeyer, W., and Schütze, F. (1977). 'Zur Konstitution von Kommunikationsschemata der Sachverheldarstellung'. In D. Wegner (ed.), *Gesprächsanalyse* (pp. 159-274). Hamburg: Buske Verlag.
- Kelle, U. (2005). "'Emergence" vs. "forcing" of empirical data? A crucial problem of "grounded theory" Reconsidered'. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* [On-Line Journal], 6(2).
- Kochuyt, T. (2005). 'Biographical and empiricist illusions: A reply to recent criticism'. In R. Miller (ed.), *Biographical Research Methods* (pp. 125-128). London: Sage Publications.
- Lawrence, T. B., Suddaby, R., Leca, B. (2009). *Institutional Work. Actors and Agency in Institutional Studies of Organizations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mari, L. (2007). 'Measurability'. In M. Boumans (ed.), *Measurement in Economics: a Handbook* (pp. 41-77). Amsterdam: Academic Press.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2004). 'Causal explanation, qualitative research, and scientific inquiry in education'. *Educational Researcher*, 33 (2), pp. 3–11.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *A Realist Approach for Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Miller, R. L. (ed.) (2005). *Biographical Research Methods* (Vols. I-IV). London, UK: Sage.
- Morgan, G., Campbell, J.L, Crouch, C., Pedersen, O.K., Whitley, R. (2010). *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Institutional Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Peirce, C. S. (1974/1979). *Collected Papers*. Published by Charles Hartshore, Paul Weiss and Arthur Burks. Cambridge (Mass.): The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Rosamond, B. (2000). *Theories of European Integration*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Riessman, C. K. (2002). 'Analysis of personal narratives'. In J. F. Gubrium, and J. A. Holstein (eds.), *The Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. London: Sage.
- Rosenthal, G. (1995). *Erlebte und erzählte Lebensgeschichte. Gestalt und Struktur biographischer Selbstbeschreibungen*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus
- Rosenthal, G. (2004). 'Biographical research'. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. F. Gubrium, and D. Silverman (eds.), *Qualitative Research Practice* (pp. 48-64). London: Sage.
- Ross, J. P. (2000) 'Reality or nothing! False and repressed memories and autobiography'. In Chamberlain, M. ed. *Trauma and Life Story. Memory and Narrative*, 2. <http://www.valt.helsinki.fi/staff/jproos/falsememory.htm> [available on 20/08/2013].
- Schütze, F. (1983). 'Biographieforschung und narratives Interview'. *Neue Praxis*, 3, 283-294.
- Schütze, F. (1977). 'Die Technik des narrativen Interviews in Interaktionsfeldstudien'. *Arbeitsberichte und Forschungsmaterialien* Nr. 1 der Universität Bielefeld, Fakultät für Soziologie.
- Schütze, F. (2005 [1984]). 'Cognitive Figures of Autobiographical Extempore Narration'. In R. Miller (ed.), *Biographical Research Methods* (pp. 289-338). SAGE Publications.
- Schütze, F. (2008a) 'Biography Analysis on the Empirical Base of the Autobiographical Narratives: How to Analyse Autobiographical Narrative Interviews', Part I, INVITE – Biographical Counselling in Rehabilitative Vocational Training. Further Educational Curriculum. EU Leonardo da Vinci Programme. <http://www.uni-magdeburg.de/zsm/projekt/biographical/1/B2.1.pdf> [available on 20/08/2013].
- Schütze, F. (2008b) 'Biography Analysis on the Empirical Base of the Autobiographical Narratives: How to Analyse Autobiographical Narrative Interviews', Part II, INVITE – Biographical Counselling in Rehabilitative Vocational Training. Further

- Educational Curriculum. EU Leonardo da Vinci Programme. www.uni-magdeburg.de/zsm/projekt/biographical/1/B2.2.pdf [available on 20/08/2013].
- Searle, J. R. (2010). *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Searle, J. R. (2001). *Rationality in Action*. Cambridge, MA, USA: MIT Press.
- Searle, J. R. (1995). *The Construction of Social Reality*. New York: The Free Press.
- Shadish, W., Cook, T., and Campbell, D. (2002). *Experimental and Quasi Experimental Designs for Generalized Causal Inference*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Shaw, C. R. (1930). *The Jack-Roller: A Delinquent Boy's Own Story*: Phoenix Books.
- Shore, C. (2000). *Building Europe: the Cultural Politics of European Integration*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Stevens, A., and Stevens, H. (2001). *Brussels Bureaucrats? the Administration of the European Union*. New York: Palgrave Press.
- Stubbs, P. (2002). 'Globalisation, memory and welfare regimes in transition: Towards an anthropology of transnational policy transfers'. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 11(4), pp. 321-330.
- Theodvall, R. (2006). *Eurocrats at Work: Negotiating Transparency in Postnational Employment Policy*. Stockholm: Intellecta Docusys.
- Turk, J. D. (2005). 'The non-treatment of systematic uncertainty in economics'. In M. Moussa, and G. Brown (eds.), *Engaging Realism: Proceedings of the International Association for Critical Realism 2005 Annual Conference*. Universities of Wollongong and Western Sydney. ISBN No. 1-74108-130-1.
- Turk, J. D. (2009). 'Traction in the world: economics and narrative interviews'. *International Journal of Green Economics*, 3 (1), 77-92.
- Turk, J. D. (2011). 'Science is measurement: muons, money and the Nobel Prize'. *International Journal of Pluralism and Economics Education*, 2(3): pp. 291-305.
- Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative Research Interviewing: Biographic Narratives And Semi-Structured Methods*. London: Sage.
- Wiener, A., and Diez, T. (eds.) (2004). *Theories of European integration*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.