



LIGHTING THE SHADOWS OF SOCIAL LIFE

Gražina Rapolienė,
Lithuanian Social Research Centre



COST is supported by the EU
Framework Programme Horizon 2020

Lessons from Interfasol TS Keele 2015

- ▣ we tend to study individuals and/or societies, leaving out of the sight the *possible mediating effect of the family*, of the influence of structures on the meso level in general (A.Sabater: impact of childrens' education on parents' health);
- ▣ **negative results** of a research might be of striking importance (T.Scharf: absent intergenerational conflict);
- ▣ to involve expert knowledge from the audience (J.Ogg, M.Mendingça).

Sociology of Nothing (Scott, 2018)

- Negatively defined phenomena as *non-identification, non-participation, non-presence*;
- Nothing is accomplished either
 - ▣ by active commission (doing/being a non-something) or
 - ▣ by passive omission (not-doing/not-being something);

4 dimensions of negative social space:

non-identity;
inactivity;
absence,
and silence.

Nothing matters – through social interaction.

Ongoing Research Projects

„Older people living alone: trends, profiles and challenges to intergenerational integration“ (contract No. GER-001/2017)

Project implementers:

- ▣ Sarmitė Mikulionienė
- ▣ Gražina Rapolienė
- ▣ Natalija Valavičienė

„Childlessness in Lithuania: socio-cultural changes and individual experiences in modern society“ (contract No. S-MOD-17-3)

Project implementers:

- ▣ Lina Šumskaitė
- ▣ Vaida Tretjakova
- ▣ Gražina Rapolienė
- ▣ Margarita Gedvilaitė-Kordušienė
- ▣ Łukasz Krzyżowski (Poland)

Absent Partners and Children

How is the **absence** dealt with?

How it is legitimated and made meaningful?

In both cases it is the zone of ambivalence floating between

- ▣ freedom of choice and loneliness,
- ▣ independence and belonging,
- ▣ childfreeness and childlessness.

Methodological Difficulties

- ▣ Rejections to give an interview;
- ▣ Rejections from the environment of potential informants (not dare to ask about a possibility to give an interview);
- ▣ **Cancellation** of informed consent - prohibition to use the collected data;
- ▣ Preferred answers **in written** instead of face-to-face interviews;
- ▣ Interviews as **inquisitions** in yes/no mode;
- ▣ Opened pain and hopelessness.

Rejections of Older People Living Alone

Collected 27 qualitative interviews – 19 rejections.

Reasons and rationalizations:

- ▣ Due to insecurity and fears (information to thieves)? (*“I never give such interviews”*); daughter came during an interview;
- ▣ Lack of interest / competence / self-confidence? (*“Oh no, I’m afraid to say nonsenses”*, *“I don’t know what to tell, better others...”*; *“I’m not interested, I don’t like to talk about myself”*);
- ▣ Too busy;
- ▣ Passive rejection after agreement: unanswered calls, not-show-up on agreed place;
- ▣ Objective reasons: sudden hospitalisation / death.

Rejections of Childless Women

Collected **11** qualitative interviews (50-69 y.o.; mainly as “personal favour to somebody”) and **11** rejections.

Reasons and rationalizations of rejections:

- ▣ Sensitive or uninteresting topic (does not have much to say and it will not be interesting);
- ▣ Do not want to talk / I have other problems;
- ▣ Indirect rejection: postpone setting of time and never answer;
- ▣ Language difficulties: not easy to talk Lithuanian (as evasion).

What's behind?

- ▣ *“Women protect themselves” (an informant about her friends);*
- ▣ *“God did not give [a child] and I don't want to scratch my own soul”;*
- ▣ *“...it has costed too much to forget everything in order to return to old painful memories. <...> I don't know women of similar destiny and can't recommend anybody.”*

- ▣ *Study participant after the interview: before the interview she started to panic, why she agreed to talk with someone unknown about herself; she could not imagine, what she will have to talk and how she will feel. Then she talked to her friend who gave her contact – she calmed that the interviewer was simple and there is no reason to be afraid of.*

In the Zone of no Talk

Tears and pain of

- ▣ someone (62 y.o.) whos top value in life is (non-created) family;
- ▣ someone (59 y.o.) mourning of last parent, who was not loving and it seems there was no love in the only known family – as emotionally deprived child herself;
- ▣ Someone (PhD, 58 y.o.) who sees own destiny as damnation which should be left silent in order not to make it worse.

Devaluing social attitudes might be supported by families and early internalized.

Dealing with the Shadows

- ▣ Ethics of the research: social benefit versus individual harm?
- ▣ Methodology: how to encourage to participate and to talk?
- ▣ Quality of research: what part of the phenomena we investigate? Shiny top of an iceberg?

Reference:

Scott, S. (2018). A Sociology of Nothing: Understanding the Unmarked. *Sociology* 52(1): 3-19.

Thank you for your attention!

g.rapoliene@gmail.com