Fritz Schütze as a Significant Participant of the Sociological Milieu in Lodz

To render a history of Fritz Schütze’s cooperation with a group of sociologists working in the Institute of Sociology of the University of Lodz, one must start with the first contacts established with him by Marek Czyżewski, a member of that group, who was invited to an international conference on new approaches to interpretive sociology, organized by Fritz Schütze in Kassel in 1981. As a result of those contacts Fritz Schütze visited the Institute of Sociology in 1986 to give a series of lectures on his own approach to the biographical method in sociology. Those lectures, as I remember them, were focused, on the one hand, on ways of doing sociology based on a conceptual scheme of biographical processes as a theoretical perspective, and, on the other, they were combined with workshop-like demonstration of how that perspective can be applied to, and explored in, a theoretical perspective, and, on the other, they were most deeply engaged in that network – has been in World War II experiences of Poles, proceeded in Magdeburg, and then the habilitation scholarship and visiting professorship in Magdeburg, took his habilitation degree in Otto-von-Guericke-Universität in Magdeburg, Katarzyna Waniek, after regular PhD studies in Magdeburg, took her PhD degree there having Fritz Schütze as professor conferring that degree. On the other hand, the habilitation of Alicja Rokuszewska-Pawełek on chaos and pressure in World War II experiences of Poles, proceeded in Lodz and based on a theoretical framework taken from Fritz Schütze’s writings, owed very much, as well, to her immediate and personal contacts with him. The same goes, with no doubt, in case of Kaja Kazmierska’s both PhD dissertation on the Polish World War II experiences and issues of ethnic and national identity in Poland’s Eastern bordersland, and habilitation on relations between biography and memory studied in the context of Shoah survivors’ biographical experiences. Finally, it may be noted that Andrzej Piotrowski’s visiting professorship in Magdeburg was an initial point in establishing a regular academic program of the European Studies both in Lodz and in Magdeburg, and sometimes students of social work, and, finally, that since 2011 they have come to form an integral part of activities within the frame of larger research projects (grants) in the universities engaged in that cooperation. The workshop organized in Magdeburg in 2011 was closely linked with the FP7 project “EUROIDENTITIES. The Evolution of
of European Identity: Using biographical methods to study the development of European Identity” (carried out in Lodz by Andrzej Piotrowski as a scientist-in-charge for the Polish team, Kaja Kazmierska, and Katarzyna Waniek), and the workshop in 2013 was connected with a Polish-German project of study (since 2012, led in Poland by Kaja Kazmierska) on “The People’s Republic of Poland and the German Democratic Republic in memory and biographical experiences of people born between 1945-55. Sociological comparison based on biographical comparison,” carried out in close collaboration of Lodz and Magdeburg.

Finally, it is just the collaboration in the large research projects that forms strong bonds between the sociologists working in Lodz and Fritz Schütze. Two of them have been already mentioned. One may add another and much earlier one (1992-1994), initially planned to carry out together, but eventually limited, for many organizational reasons, to the Polish context, namely, the project on biographical dimensions of the war experiences during World War II, in which Fritz Schütze’s theoretical and methodological perspectives both were playing a decisive role. Results of that project, which was headed by Zbigniew Bokszoński, have been published in Biography and the National Identity, a book edited by Marek Czyżewski, Andrzej Piotrowski, and Alicja Rokuszewska-Pawełek. The idea of this project was the result of discussions and shared interests in World War II. An earlier outcome of these discussions was the analysis of autobiography of Rudolf Hoss, the commandant of KL Auschwitz. Marek Czyżewski and Alicja Rokuszewska-Pawełek’s larger study on this autobiography can be considered as the first analysis based on Fritz Schütze’s approach published in Polish (Czyżewski M., Rokuszewska-Pawełek A., 1989/90, “Analiza autobiografii Rudolfa Hóssa,” Kultura i Społeczeństwo, Vol. 33, No. 2 and 3/4 and Vol. 34, No. 1). One must also point another, earlier large project within the frame of the Leonardo da Vinci program (2003-2006), “INVITE. New Ways of Biographical Counseling in Rehabilitative Vocational Training,” where Fritz Schütze cooperated with the members of the Department of General Sociology (with Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas as a scientist-in-charge in Lodz) and practitioners working in Lodz in the field of social work and related domains.

For all his merits, he was awarded by the University of Lodz in 2005, just in time for its 60th anniversary, a medal Universitatis Lodziensis Amico. Amicus is indeed a good term here. It renders much more than an academic cooperation in its formal sense. Yet, looking for another category that seems to be apt to render Fritz Schütze’s ties with a number of sociologists who work in Lodz, I propose using also the term significant participant. Both of the terms, put together, are adequate to his unusual ability to integrate all virtues of tactful and respectful intellectual mastership with a climate of genuine, non-perfunctory friendship.