

Identity transformation

Towards identification

Summary

The book *Identity transformation. Towards identification* presents the analysis of changes in the understanding and expression of identity, which occurred in three major forms of social life: traditional society, modern society and postmodern/late-modern society. The analysis has yielded conclusions regarding the changes in identity, starting from a formula where the primary identity determinant is the drive towards uniformity (traditional society), through the drive towards individuality (modern society), to the search for similarity (postmodern/late-modern society). These transformations are accompanied by changes in the role of an individual in shaping identity (which is a derivative from changes in relations between the individual and society), starting from passive acceptance/acquisition of identity, through making relatively autonomous identity choices, to the ability to self-create identity.

The book comprises five chapters. The detailed discussion on the course and characteristics of changes in identity is found in the first four of them. The first three chapters are devoted to the analysis of changes in identity in various forms of social order. Each of them follows a similar analytical scheme, describing changes in the understanding of subjectivity, which reflects the relations between the individual and society thus specifying the individual's scope of autonomy and agency in shaping identity, as well as the major social and cultural determinants that influence the characteristics of identity in various types of society.

The idea of identity in traditional society is discussed throughout the major part of the first chapter. It starts with a short description of the most significant modern dilemmas and controversies related to identity and presents the primary assumptions used in the analytical process. The discussion of the traditional identity covers sociocultural factors, which the

authors considered the most significant: individuals functioning almost exclusively as a collective society, which results in stability and persistence of identity, indistinguishability, as well as an overlap of biographical and social time, leading to continuity and relative coherence of the identity formula; the economy, authority and culture functioning as fairly simple structures based on ascription and tradition, conducive to shaping identity as a formula created by society; the mechanism of acquiring identity i.e. the socialisation process which is usually a process of adopting a ready-made and socially specified pattern of identity. In the analysis of traditional society, the role of subjectivity is not discussed as this form of reflection is absent in social functioning of individuals.

The second chapter is devoted to the analysis of the modern identity and starts with the description of changes in worldview, especially regarding the role and place of the individual in society, which date back to the Enlightenment and the Romanticism. It accentuates the factors which influence the growing importance of subjectivity and independence of individuals, also regarding their autonomy and freedom in shaping identity. From all sociocultural determinants affecting the change in the understanding and shaping of identity, the following were considered the most important: connection between identity shaping and social role (in the context of abandoning ascription); socialisation process understood as a mechanism allowing for passing from ascribed identity to acquired identity; temporal character of identity affected by the vision of the future dominant in modernity and the question of intensification of dissimilarity, which is the basis for the formation of identity uniqueness.

The third chapter focuses on the analysis of factors affecting the shaping of late-modern, self-creation formula of identity. This part presents some aspects of the postmodern thought, especially those referring to the metaphor of an end (also including the end of the subject) and accentuating the creative capability and agency of the subject which combined translate into a corresponding type of action with regard to shaping identity. The analysis of changes in identity also includes the intensity and complexity of modern transformations related to globalisation, and uses them as a context to focus on: the importance and consequences of the individualisation process in shaping modern identity; the tendency to remodel traditional forms of group life, the revival of communities and creation of new group forms, as well as on the growing role of consumption, replacing culture as a social integrator.

The fourth chapter discusses the postmodern/late-modern axis of shaping identity in which past determinants i.e. coherence, continuity and persistence should be replaced with the need and ability to form relationships, the ability to reflect and fluidity. The analysis of these categories found in various concepts of the present-day identity shows how they allow to preserve continuity, coherence and relative persistence of identity in a way specific to the present.

Deliberations on changes in identity and the growing number of its definitions found in postmodern/late-modern society are concluded in chapter five with a proposal to introduce the notion of *identification* into the analysis, which is related to identity (but separate from it) and allows for solving some of the dilemmas related to using the term identity (especially at the analytical level). The description of the term also includes the components of the act of identification, refers to its relation with the categorisation process and covers the issues related to identification in the context of group membership. Also presented are those aspects of identity analyses in which the use of the term identification is particularly useful. Using the term allows for e.g. avoiding the search for the essence of identity, retaining the certainty of its stability and persistence due to the instability and transience of identification, noticing the complexity of individuals' functioning in social life expressed through diversity and multiplicity of identification forms while at the same time maintaining identity coherence.