

(...) the question is whether we want to and are able to tell stories, and also whether we want to and are able to listen to other people's stories.

(Rokuszewska-Pawełek 1996)

Between Individual and Collective Experiences of the Pandemic. Analysis from the Perspective of Biographical and Collective Trajectories

Katarzyna Trawińska-Konador*

Abstract

*The article explores individual and collective experiences of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland (autumn–winter 2020) through the sociological concepts of biographical and collective trajectories. The study applies a biographical-narrative method to analyse a diary awarded first place in the competition *Everyday Life in the Time of Coronavirus*, organised by the Institute of Social Economy of the SGH Warsaw School of Economics in cooperation with Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń and the University of Wrocław. The article aims to demonstrate the interrelations between an individual narrative of loss and mourning and the collective processes of disorganization, chaos, and attempts to reconstruct meaning that constitute the shared*

* SGH Warsaw School of Economics, ktrawin@sgh.waw.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-4782-6921

experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. The theoretical framework refers to the work of Fritz Schütze and its Polish developments and reinterpretations by Alicja Rokuszewska-Pawełek, Amelia Krawczyk-Bocian, and Krystyna Barłóg. In a broader perspective, the article draws on the long tradition of diary research conducted at the Institute of Social Economy, initiated by Ludwik Krzywicki in the 1930s. The author argues that contemporary diary competitions serve not only as a valuable source of sociological knowledge about societies in crisis but also as a space for self-therapy and social dialogue on suffering.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, biographical trajectory, collective trajectory, diary, personal document, biographical research

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, which affected the world at the turn of 2019–2020, will undoubtedly go down in history as one of the key social experiences of the twenty-first century. Its second wave, which in Poland fell in the autumn and winter of 2020, brought not only an increase in infections and deaths, but also a profound existential and social crisis. Faced with isolation, the loss of loved ones, economic uncertainty and the disruption of everyday life, many people turned to writing – attempting to understand and put their experiences in order.

At that time, initiatives to document experiences related to the pandemic were launched by academic and journalistic circles as well as cultural institutions. Interest in autobiography, diaries and open letters formed part of a broader current of so-called *pandemiography*, whose aim was to capture the experience of crisis from the individual perspective (Gumuła et al. 2023; Łukianow&Orchowska 2023).

One of the most important projects documenting the experiences of the second wave of the pandemic was the competition *Życie codzienne w czasach koronawirusa* (Everyday Life in the Time of Coronavirus), organised by the Institute of Social Economy (Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego, IGS) at the SGH Warsaw School of Economics in cooperation with Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń and the

University of Wrocław. This project continued the several-decades-long tradition of diary research conducted at IGS – a tradition going back to the time of Ludwik Krzywicki, who in the 1930s initiated a competition for diaries of the unemployed. His approach, combining the analysis of autobiographical accounts with field studies and survey research, consolidated the method of personal documents in Polish sociology and gave rise to an original empirical tradition of research into social experience (Herlth 2023; Kaźmierska 2012; Krzywicki & Mazur 2023).

The Institute returned to this tradition many times, organising subsequent editions of the competition for diaries of the unemployed in 2001 and 2017 – each time adapting the method to changing social realities (Posłuszny et al. 2020). In 2020, researchers at IGS decided to apply this well-tested formula to a new, exceptional situation: the COVID-19 pandemic.

The competition *Życie codzienne w czasach koronawirusa* was announced in mid-November 2020 and submissions were accepted until April 2021. The organisers aimed to find out how people in Poland coped with the challenges of everyday life during the second wave of the pandemic: how family relationships, work and emotional situations changed, and what adaptive strategies households developed. The competition received broad institutional support – among its partners were, among others, *Gazeta Sołecka*, the National Association of Village Leaders (Krajowe Stowarzyszenie Sołtysów) and the Polish Teachers' Union (Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego). A total of 260 diaries were submitted from across Poland, representing a remarkable diversity of perspectives – from brief everyday notes to extensive autobiographies and reflective essays.

The diary analysed in this article, awarded first prize, stands out for the coherence of its narrative, its emotional depth and its exceptional ability to link an individual experience of mourning with reflection on the communal dimension of the pandemic.

This project forms part of a broader stream of initiatives aimed at preserving individual and collective experiences of the pandemic. Its success showed that the diary method, rooted in the Polish sociological tradition, remains an extremely effective tool for studying everyday life and the emotional dimensions of social existence. Inspiring other academic and cultural institutions, the IGS competition contributed to a renewed interest in the personal document as a form of social knowledge.

The competition was not the only project of this kind at the time. In April 2020, a similar initiative was launched jointly by the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Sociology of the University of Warsaw and the Institute of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw, under the title *Pamiętniki*.

ki Pandemii (The Pandemic Diaries) (Łukianow et al. 2021; Łukianow& Mazzini 2020; Łukianow-Tukalo et al. 2022). Around the same time, Instytut Literatury announced a literary competition *Dziennik pandemiczny* (The Pandemic Journal). Here too, the works were to focus on everyday life under pandemic conditions. The diaries in that project covered the period from March to June 2020 (Gumuła 2021). Many libraries and cultural centres also created local pandemic archives, which makes this period an exceptional moment for the revival of the personal document in Poland.

Such a broad social response to diary initiatives shows that the pandemic triggered a need not only to document everyday life but also to organise experience through narrative. Writing about the pandemic became a way of understanding and giving meaning to what was sudden, unpredictable and often traumatic. These diaries can be treated as a form of “social self-analysis”, in which authors processed the experience of a collective crisis while searching for individual meaning within it. The diaries submitted to the competitions now constitute a unique archive of social experience – a collection of texts that combine a personal and a communal dimension. Their analysis enables a sociological reading of the entanglement of the biography of the individual and the biography of society, that is, of what Fritz Schütze defined by the concepts of the biographical and collective trajectory.

The aim of this article is therefore to show how, in the diary *Pacynka w pudełku osobności* (The puppet in a box of privacy), the dynamics of these two dimensions – individual and collective – are revealed. The analysis carried out makes it possible to answer the following questions:

1. What phases of a biographical trajectory can be distinguished in the autobiographical text under analysis?
2. In what way does the individual narrative reflect the collective trajectory of the pandemic?
3. How do the dimensions of *I* and *we* permeate one another and how are they linked?

The article is divided into three parts. The first outlines the theoretical foundations of the concepts of biographical and collective trajectories, the second presents the methodological assumptions and the analysis of the diary, and the third part summarises the findings in the context of the sociology of experience and research on collective memory.

Theoretical background – concepts of the biographical trajectory

The concept of a trajectory was introduced into sociology by Anselm Strauss (1987) in the context of research on the organisation of medical work and the experience of patients suffering from chronic illnesses. Strauss defined a trajectory as a process of losing control over one's own life and having to adapt to external forces whose course is unpredictable. This concept was further developed by Fritz Schütze, who gave it both a biographical and a social dimension. In his classic text "Trajektorie cierpienia jako przedmiot badań socjologii interpretatywnej" (1997), Schütze points out that trajectories may concern not only individual biographies but also entire communities. He therefore distinguishes between a biographical trajectory and a collective trajectory, showing the mechanisms through which the two remain closely interlinked. A biographical trajectory has a microsocial character and concerns situations in which an individual loses the ability to control her own life, entering a phase of undergoing rather than acting. It is a time when a person becomes "someone who experiences rather than acts" (Schütze 1997: 17). At its root lies the breakdown of the existing biographical order, the loss of predictability and meaning.

A collective trajectory, by contrast, refers to processes of disorder affecting entire social communities. In such situations – whether during war, disaster or pandemic – society as a whole experiences the disintegration of norms, values and forms of interaction. Schütze writes about "anomie processes of social suffering" (1997: 13), which may be understood as collective trajectories. In such moments, the social reality undergoes an anomie rupture in which the everyday order of meanings ceases to apply and individuals and groups lose their bearings as to "how one ought to act" (1997: 15).

A collective trajectory can thus be understood as a kind of framework into which individual biographies are inscribed. Individual stories of suffering and disorganisation form part of larger social processes. As Schütze emphasises, "individual suffering and social disorder overlap, creating shared spaces of meaning" (1997: 15). Trajectories in this sense reveal the coupling between social structure and biographical experience: what is collective permeates what is individual, and vice versa. From this perspective, phenomena such as war, economic crisis or the COVID-19 pandemic may be interpreted as collective trajectories in which individual biographies reflect processes of social disorganisation and the reconstruction of social order. The suffering of individuals then becomes a sociological "symptom" of the suffering of the community.

The concept of the collective trajectory was further developed in Polish sociology by Alicja Rokuszewska-Pawełek (2016), who in her research on wartime experiences of Poles drew attention to the mutual interpenetration of the individual and social dimensions. She analysed how the biographical narratives of participants in the September Campaign or the occupation reflect processes of collective disorganisation and reconstruction. In her perspective, biographical trajectories constitute micro-reflections of collective trajectories – the experiences of communities passing through periods of chaos and loss, followed by attempts to restore order and meaning. Rokuszewska-Pawełek emphasised that the individual does not experience suffering in isolation: “biographical and collective trajectories are mutually interpenetrating processes in which the individual’s drama is inscribed in the drama of the community” (2016: 104).

Unlike Schütze, who focused primarily on the structure and dynamics of the process itself, Rokuszewska-Pawełek also analysed its axiological dimension – the values that enable survival and the reconstruction of identity after crisis. In this sense, her approach develops Schütze’s reflections, introducing a cultural and historical dimension.

The question of the meaning of suffering and contemporary approaches to the trajectory are complemented by the reflections of Viktor E. Frankl (1984), who stressed that suffering – although unavoidable – can become a source of meaning. The human being, as homo patiens, retains freedom in the way she relates to pain and loss. It is this attribution of meaning to suffering that becomes the condition of survival – not by denying pain, but by reinterpreting it.

Contemporary scholars – Amelia Krawczyk-Bocian (2012), Krystyna Barłóg (2015) and Dagmara Górecka (2025) – indicate in their work that trajectory processes have a developmental dimension: they lead from destruction towards the reconstruction of identity. Krawczyk-Bocian describes the course of a trajectory in five phases: symptoms, crossing the threshold, breakdown, coping strategies and working-through. Barłóg depicts the trajectory as a path of struggling with the loss of ability and of searching for the value of suffering, while Górecka emphasises the process in which suffering becomes a factor in constructing identity.

All these approaches – from Schütze to contemporary reinterpretations – make it possible to treat the COVID-19 pandemic as a complex trajectory process: biographical in the individual dimension and collective in the social dimension. It is precisely the interlocking of these two levels – I and we – that is key to understanding the pandemic experience described in the diary under analysis.

Research methodology

The second wave of the pandemic in Poland constituted a critical moment in the collective dimension. It was a period of growing informational chaos, an overloaded healthcare system and a sense of powerlessness and social disorientation. Karwacki and Leszczyński (2022) point out that the pandemic revealed the disintegration of the communal rhythm – the usual forms of contact and religious and neighbourly rituals. In the public sphere, emotions of anxiety and weariness dominated. Analyses of discourse in social media show that the language of the pandemic was based on metaphors of war, isolation and blame, which contributed to deepening the sense of threat (Wicke, Bolognesi 2020). In this sense, the second wave constituted a collective trajectory – a diffuse yet shared experience encompassing loss of control, a crisis of meaning and the need to reconstruct the symbolic order.

The concepts of biographical and collective trajectories outlined above constitute not only a theoretical background but also an analytical tool useful in studying contemporary crisis experiences. In accordance with Schütze's assumptions, every narrative of suffering and the disorganisation of life contains an internal structure of a trajectory process, which can be elicited through an analysis of the sequence of events and the ways in which they are interpreted. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the trajectory perspective makes it possible to grasp both the individual dimension of experience – recorded in diaries and autobiographies – and the collective dimension, expressed in processes of social chaos and adaptation. These two levels – biographical and collective – permeate one another in the empirical material analysed here, making it an excellent example of a contemporary narrative of crisis and meaning.

In the further part of the article, a biographical-narrative analysis was adopted, in line with Schütze's assumptions, aimed at identifying trajectory structures in the text under examination. The empirical material consists of the diary *Pacynka w pułku osobności*, a competition entry containing a record of the experiences of a forty-four-year-old woman who, during the pandemic, loses her husband and, plunged into mourning, confronts a new situation both in the personal dimension and in the social dimension. This duality is suggested by the awareness – voiced in her notes – of the similarity between her own experiences and those of her fellow citizens.

The analytical approach adopted by the author of this article assumes reading the autobiographical text as a process of revealing meanings – in line with the assumption

that every narrative is not only an account of the past but also a form of interpretation and self-therapy (Kaźmierska 2012). The author therefore applied the research steps described by Schütze: (1) the formal delineation of biographical sequences, (2) the identification of turning points, (3) the analysis of the phases and mechanisms of the trajectory, and (4) the interpretation of meanings and coping strategies.

Throughout the work on this article, the author was acutely aware of the particular importance of ethical challenges in working with diary texts. As Łukianow and Orchowska (2023) point out, such documents are at once private and public texts – they are both testimony and acts of expression, and their interpretation requires respect for the emotional autonomy of the author.

Analysis of the diary *Pacynka w pudełku osobności*

The narrative of the diary under analysis reveals a clear trajectory dynamic. In the author's experience, recorded in the form of a reflective journal, five main phases can be distinguished: symptoms and the build-up of trajectory potential, crossing the threshold, breakdown of life organisation, coping strategies, and working-through. Each of these stages discloses a different way of experiencing and interpreting both the pandemic reality and the mourning following the loss of a close person.

Phase I – Symptoms and the build-up of trajectory potential

The opening fragments of the diary are written in a tone of anxiety and suspension. The author records the first symptoms of the disintegration of everyday life and the growing emotional tension:

I cannot fall asleep because of thoughts about the future; terrible visions of what is to come flash before my eyes. (...) I drag myself from one day to the next, all deflated, moving with a sluggish step, like a helpless little puppet of the pandemic era. A puppet widow, a widow marionette. A Mrs Nobody...

This stage may be read as the phase of trajectory precursors, in which – as Schütze (1997) notes – “tension grows between the routine of everyday life and an experienced sense of chaos.” The author uses the metaphor of a puppet, which introduces an

element of self-irony, but at the same time reveals a deep crisis of subjectivity – the sense that one's own life is being directed by external forces.

In the same passage, a clear motif of fear about the future and helplessness in the face of a changing world appears: „Because nothing is certain anymore. Not health, not work, not even whether someone will knock on the door tomorrow with bad news.” This moment can be interpreted as the beginning of a process of losing control over one's biography. In Rokuszewska-Pawełek's (1997) terms, it is a situation in which a broader collective trajectory – the chaos and disorientation affecting society as a whole – begins to manifest itself in individual experience. The author also records the first signs of loosening social ties: „Once upon a time, a walk was enough to feel part of the world. Today, even people in stores avoid each other like ghosts. It is unclear who is sick and who is just afraid.” Here the pandemic becomes a metaphor of the disintegration of community – an experience which, in Schütze's (1997) view, constitutes the starting point for a collective trajectory: the loss of a shared order and of rules of interaction.

Phase II – Crossing the threshold

The turning point – the crossing of the trajectory threshold – is the death of the author's husband, which she describes with her characteristic irony and dark humour: “Today my husband makes his debut. (...) Not even two months ago he left this world and moved to the supposedly better one. And I have been left a young widow.” This passage marks a clear biographical rupture – an experience that forces the reorganisation of life as it has been lived so far. As Krawczyk-Bocian (2012) points out, crossing the threshold is the moment when “the trajectory becomes irreversible – the individual loses the capacity to restore the former order.” The author also records the sense of unreality and detachment from the world that accompanies this experience: “The world goes on, and I am stuck in a place where time has stopped. (...) I still wait to hear his footsteps, to hear him ask for tea.” This scene is a vivid illustration of what Schütze calls the transformation of “lived time” – the moment when a biography ceases to develop in a linear way and becomes looped around the moment of loss.

During this period, the author also reveals the first signs of anger and rebellion against the situation in which she has found herself: „People are dying like leaves, and those in power are arguing about masks and tests. Can no one see that this is about our lives?” This statement goes beyond the personal dimension and touches upon the

public sphere – thus inscribing itself in the collective trajectory, in which individual emotions acquire social significance.

Phase III – Breakdown of life organization

In the third phase, disorganisation and a sense of lost meaning become dominant. The author directly describes the chaos of everyday life and her inability to find any rhythm: „Does a widow live in an ocean of free time? Rather in an ocean of fear. (...) Idleness breeds memories, and they breed despair.” This quotation exemplifies the experience Schütze refers to as the “bottom of the trajectory”: the moment when the individual moves from acting to complete passivity. The narrative takes the form of monotonous repetitions and fragmentation, which in narrative analysis is interpreted as the breakdown of temporal identity (Kaźmierska 2012).

The diarist seems to become self-aware of this state: „I do everything slowly, as if I had forgotten the instructions for operating my own life. (...) Sometimes I sit at the table and stare at the mug that still stands on his side.” These words not only convey emotion but also materialise emptiness. The empty mug is a symbol of absence. Such symbolic elements – props, everyday objects – in a biographical trajectory constitute “anchoring points of suffering” (Rokuszewska-Pawełek 1996).

In the stage described, the motif of pandemic isolation also appears, intensifying the feeling of loneliness: „Everything has been closed. Offices, cemeteries, churches. Even mourning now wears a mask.” The powerful, dramatic metaphor used here provides sociological evidence of the pandemic as a collective deprivation of rituals – communal forms of experiencing death which, under normal circumstances, often have the power to alleviate suffering.

Phase IV – Coping strategies

After the period of breakdown, the first symptoms of adaptation and of searching for new sources of meaning appear. The diarist finds solace in religious rituals:

In churches, there are Rorate Masses, atmospheric Latin chants, and the glow of candles in the darkness. I can quietly cry without any restrictions, and no one notices. (...) Such is my burnt offering.

Religiosity here performs the function of a meaning-making frame that enables a symbolic taming of suffering. As Frankl (1984) notes, meaning does not arise from avoiding

pain but from adopting a particular attitude towards it – enduring it with dignity.

At the same time, the author attempts to return to family life and to regain the joy that comes from small things: „But at least the sledges gave them a moment of care-free joy. Yes, I am writing it correctly: joy. And why not – is one not allowed to experience moments of joy in mourning?” In this passage, we can discern a micro-strategy for breaking the trajectory – moments of spontaneous action that restore a sense of agency. The author moves from passive endurance towards actively attributing meaning to the activities she undertakes.

An important motif is also the contact with nature, which has a therapeutic function: „I took them for a walk many kilometres away from the city, into safe forest backroads – all of us, even the dog, finally felt free from the coronavirus.” This statement can be seen as an example of a liminal space: a temporary release from pressure and a symbolic “breath” in which the individual regains emotional balance.

Phase V – Theoretical working-through

The final parts of the diary take on a reflective and synthesising character. The author looks at her experience from a distance, reinterpreting past events:

The entire Internet, and especially Facebook, is their refuge during the pandemic. There they can forget for a moment about all this madness of earthly life, about everyday stress, recommendations for social distancing and other restrictions. (...) Thanks to this, now, in the time of the pandemic, they do not flounder in everyday life as if in a cage.

This quotation may be seen as evidence of a shift from the level of I suffering to the level of we observing. The author no longer focuses solely on herself; she begins to perceive the broader social dimension of the crisis. In Schütze’s terms, this is the moment when the trajectory is worked through and integrated into the narrative of the self – the individual regains biographical coherence.

In the author’s account, a dimension of spiritual growth also appears: „I understood that mourning is not a punishment but a trial. And a trial can be the beginning of something new, even if that cannot yet be seen.” This statement may be read as the climax of meaning reconstruction – the symbolic closure of the trajectory. Suffering, which previously was chaos, is transformed into an experience that gives a new structure to life.

The narrative ends in a tone of reconciliation and calm: „I am no longer afraid of silence. I have learned to listen in it.” At this point, the author’s biographical trajectory appears to be fully integrated with the collective trajectory of the pandemic. Under-

standing her own experience becomes part of a wider social process of learning how to endure suffering (Barlög 2015; Górecka 2025).

Relationships between biographical and collective trajectories – conclusions from the analysis

The analysis of the diary *Pacynka w pudełku osobności* shows that the pandemic was, for its author, an experience of a dual character – personal and communal – located at the intersection between an individual biography and collective history. In this sense, one may speak of a double trajectory: a biographical one, encompassing personal mourning, fear, and the reconstruction of meaning, and a collective one, expressed in the description of social chaos, the loss of ties, and attempts to rebuild community.

The pandemic as the collective background to a biography

From the very beginning of her narrative, the diarist situates her own experiences in a wider context than the purely private. Even in moments of deepest despair, she writes not only about herself but also about “us” – about people who “are afraid to go out”, “live in suspension”, “wait for this to end”. Already in the first sentences of the diary she expresses a sense of participating in a shared fate in which “we are all a little like puppets in boxes of solitude”. This metaphorical phrase is key to understanding the whole narrative: the pandemic is presented as a state of collective imprisonment and powerlessness.

Such an approach confirms Schütze’s thesis that collective trajectories are revealed in moments of social disorganisation, when institutions cease to function as guarantors of meaning and individuals begin to seek new forms of orientation. This is visible in the diary in the description of the breakdown of rituals and everyday relationships:

You cannot visit your parents, children learn through screens, neighbours have stopped saying good morning to one another. (...) As if we had all gone underground and were pretending to be alive.

The picture sketched here corresponds to the process that Schütze describes as *interactional anomie* – the breakdown of a shared communicative and normative order. The author does not comment on this explicitly in sociological terms, but her descriptions form an authentic testimony of the collective experience of disorganisation.

From “I” to “we” – the mechanism of embedding biography in a collective narrative

As the diary develops, we observe how the individual story of mourning becomes embedded within a narrative of a communal nature. This process unfolds gradually: from introspection, through identification with other sufferers, to an attempt to understand the meaning of the pandemic as a specifically human experience.

In one passage, the author writes:

The media show death statistics every day, but behind every number there is someone's name. (...) These are not anonymous dead; they are our mothers, husbands, friends.

The transition from *I* to *we* – from individual suffering towards empathy and an awareness of shared fate – is a key moment in integrating the biographical and collective trajectories. As Rokuszewska-Pawełek (1996) notes, in times of social crisis the individual often discovers the communal dimension of her own suffering and begins to think of herself as part of a larger whole. This process corresponds to what Frankl (1984) called meaning-making self-transcendence: transcending one's own pain by relating it to communal or spiritual values. In the diary, it appears in reflections on solidarity and the need for shared feeling:

I think we all feel the same pain now, only each of us carries it in our own way. (...) When a stranger says “cheers” to me on the street, I feel that it is more than just a greeting – it is like a spell for survival.

This quotation perfectly illustrates what Karwacki and Lepczyński (2022) call *micro-forms of emotional community*: fleeting bonds that arise despite isolation and fear, and that give the pandemic the dimension of collective empathy.

Suffering as a medium of community

In Schütze's and Rokuszewska-Pawełek's perspective, a key function of the collective trajectory is the emergence of new forms of solidarity based on shared suffering. The

diary Pacynka w pudełku osobności seems to confirm this observation. The author of the text repeatedly emphasises that her own mourning only acquires meaning once she realises that “she is not the only one”:

Sometimes it seems to me that we are all crying in the same rhythm. (...) The world has become one big house of mourning.

This evocative image is profoundly moving. The pandemic appears as a community of suffering in which the boundaries between biographies become blurred. As Rokuszewska-Pawełek writes, in such moments “the drama of the individual is inscribed in the drama of the community” (1996: 14).

The diarist uses this perspective to give meaning to her own experience: „Perhaps it is no coincidence that it has fallen to me to go through this now. (...) Perhaps someone else will also find a little solace in my words.” This is a passage in which the narrator attempts a symbolic “reaching out to others” – typical of the final phase of a trajectory, when suffering becomes a point of reference for social action. In this way, the individual biography is transformed into a testimony, and the diary becomes an instrument for communal processing of trauma (Barłóg 2015).

Reconstruction of meaning and a new community of sense

In the concluding fragments of the diary, the author adopts a tone of reconciliation and reflection, indicating a process of inner transformation but also of a new form of social bond: „We have learnt to speak less and listen more. (...) One look is enough to know that the other person is as afraid as I am.” This form of solidarity – quiet, empathetic, devoid of heroism – is characteristic of the later phase of a collective trajectory, when the community moves from fear to mutual understanding. As Górecka (2025: 53) observes, in such processes suffering becomes “a factor in the construction of a new social and moral identity”.

The author of Pacynka... reconstructs the meaning of her experience by inscribing it into the moral order of the community: suffering ceases to be a punishment and becomes a “trial” through which the relationship with others can be redefined. This is the moment at which the biographical and collective trajectories meet in the space of meanings – in the recognition that the individual overcoming of chaos has social significance, and that social crisis is understood through an individual biography.

The relationship between biographical and collective trajectories in the analysed diary shows the intertwining of individual and community experiences. The author moves from a sense of isolation and loss towards shared experiencing and moral co-feeling. In her narrative, the pandemic becomes a metaphor of the human condition – a space in which personal suffering finds an echo in the fates of others. Thus the diary is transformed into a form of social dialogue and a testimony to the collective trajectory of the pandemic.

Conclusions

The analysis of the diary *Pacynka w pudełku osobności* makes it possible to read the COVID-19 pandemic as a trajectory experience in a double sense – biographical and collective. In Schütze's (1997) terms, a trajectory is not merely a sequence of events but a process of meaning disorganisation in which the individual experiences a loss of control over her own life, and society undergoes a loosening of the existing interaction order. In the context of the pandemic, this loosening took the form of a global "stopping of the world", a situation in which everyday life ceased to be self-evident and required the re-grounding of meanings.

By describing her own mourning and isolation, the diarist inscribes herself into the structure Schütze calls a trajectory of suffering – a process in which a biography is dominated by an external event (illness, loss, crisis), and the person moves from acting to undergoing. Yet – and this is the key interpretive moment – in the later part of the diary this same individual begins to reconstruct the order of her world, searching for meaning in suffering and discovering a communal dimension to pain. In this way, her experience ceases to be exclusively biographical and becomes socially communicable, corresponding to the transition from an individual to a collective trajectory.

Rokuszewska-Pawełek, analysing wartime experiences of Poles, pointed out that individual biographies often constitute a microscopic reflection of social trajectories. In *Pacynka w pudełku osobności*, the process unfolds in a similar way: the author's private mourning intertwines with social mourning for the loss of the former world. In both cases, we are dealing with a borderline situation – war and pandemic create a space in which the established rules of action cease to apply and people are forced to devise new ways of coping with uncertainty.

What distinguishes the pandemic from war – and makes it a new type of collective trajectory – is its dispersed, non-heroic character. As Karwacki and Lepczyński

(2022) note, the experience of the pandemic has no clear heroes or spectacular gestures; instead, it unfolds in the realm of everyday micro-practices: in loneliness, silence, repetition. It is precisely these micro-practices – a walk in the forest, an online conversation, sharing emotions on social media – that become the foundation of a new communal. In *Pacynka...*, this transition from isolation to community takes place in language, in words, in the very act of writing.

From this perspective, the pandemic appears not only as a destructive process but also as a meaning-making one. Frankl (1984) wrote that suffering acquires meaning when a person is able to find a purpose in it. In the diary analysed here, this is very evident: the author discovers that mourning can be a “trial”, and solitude – a space for learning to listen to herself and to others. Suffering is woven into a new order of meaning, and the pandemic itself becomes a turning point in biographical maturation.

It is worth noting that similar meaning-making mechanisms have been observed by the researchers involved in the *Pamiętniki Pandemii* project. As Łukianow and Orchowska (2023) argue, pandemic diaries are not only empirical material but also a form of social working-through of trauma – a space where people learn to attribute meaning to chaos. In this sense, writing becomes both an act of self-analysis and a communal practice.

At the societal level, the pandemic initiated – as Posłuszny et al. (2020) suggest – a process of “reconfiguration of communal”. Fear, isolation, and physical distancing paradoxically strengthened the need for solidarity and co-feeling. In this sense, the diary *Pacynka...* can be read as a miniature laboratory of this transformation: from alienation to co-presence, from private to shared mourning.

From the perspective of trajectory theory, it is precisely this passage from an individual to a collective meaning of suffering that marks the end of the trajectory process. Schütze indicates that the moment of exiting a trajectory lies not so much in overcoming pain as in integrating it with one’s identity. In the case of the author of the diary, this integration takes place through language – through the act of writing, which unites the personal and the social in a single communicative experience.

In the context of research on collective memory, one may therefore speak of the emergence of a new form of memory – an “intimate-public” memory in which biographical testimonies of individuals become part of a common history. *Pacynka w pudelku osobności* is one of many voices of this epoch, but its significance goes beyond the individual story. It is a narrative about how meaning emerges from chaos, community from solitude, and reflection on the essence of being human from suffering.

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