

The Theory of Microhistory in the Scientific Discourse As a Potential Fighting Tool In Hybrid War

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The article presents the theory of microhistory, taking into account its development, criticism and importance in the field of scientific research. The authors present an analysis of contemporary discourse in the social sciences and humanities, which consists in indicating the need to use methodologies related to the implementation of research on a specific place, process, object. The role of microhistory is to ask big questions in small places, which allows general conclusions to be drawn through the inductive procedure. The authors inscribed this in the context of the hybrid war into which the Ukrainian state was drawn. The authors confirm that getting to know the theory of microhistory, its thorough analysis, and, above all, its practical use in the scientific discourse, through the implementation of research in small Ukrainian towns, will allow you to learn about authentic social moods. From the perspective of events in the eastern regions of Ukraine, the application of scientific achievements (microhistory) will allow us to learn the actual state of the state taking into account all the smallest details, because this is the main goal of the theory of microhistory.

Keywords: microhistory, future studies, research methodology for civilization development, discourse studies, hybrid warfare.

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Introduction

In the 1970s, a tendency in research on globalization processes appeared in the research discourse. Technological development, including information and transport networks, has contributed to an unprecedented scale of social mobility. Man has been detached from the place where he was born and grew up, the place where his habits, views and values were shaped. However, not only man but his entire environment began to rapidly homogenize and unify. The transnational nature of large corporations and the standards they implement have had a decisive influence on the shape of social interactions and ties between people and a specific place. In this context, the place was increasingly pejorative, especially in the field of research. For these focused primarily on complex structures that were global in nature. It was the words “global,” “international,” “supranational,” “world” that began to dictate the conditions for the development of scientific discourse. Processes related to “global warming,” issues related to the functioning of “international financial institutions,” or issues related to “transnational corporations” are the area of interest of many researchers today.

The departure from the problem of place resulted in the appearance of numerous works on this subject. A classic work in this area is the work by Edward Relpha *Place and Placelessness*, in which the author argues that the homogenization of culture, as well as the development of technology and mass culture, affect the shape of the surrounding environment, making specific places lose their importance, at the same time losing their axiological and semantic values (Relph, 1976: 37-41). Marc Auge, on the other hand, in his work *Non-places. An Introduction to Supermodernity* postulated the theory that non-places are unified products of the capitalist world which, despite their likeness, are independent of the country and region in which they are located (Auge, 1995: 21-24). Manuel Castells also emphasizes the theory about the decline of the importance of place. The author claims that the contemporary globalized world is a space of communication networks, not specific locations. Moreover, as Castells claims, ordinary people still live in specific places, but this fact does not play a significant role in the process of shaping the processes that are decisive for the development of the world (Castells, 2009: 82-84).

However, in the context of a scientific discourse that rejects the meaning of a place, paradoxically, as Maria Lewicka claims, one can notice a completely opposite tendency, consisting in emphasizing the importance of a place. It results directly from the number of publications concerning the place created in recent years. As the professor from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń points out, since 2000, social sensitivity has grown mainly to specific places (Lewicka, 2012: 20-21). The reason for this is that people “burn out” as a *persona mundi* and slow down their life to the point where they can regenerate. In this regard, Edward S. Casey postulates that the unification of world patterns, which often makes people lose the sense of the uniqueness of a place, causes a longing for the diversification of places, for the diversity that has been lost in the world monoculture, currently based on Western economic and political paradigms. The place contains all the elements that have been eliminated by uniformization: character, identity, tradition, and above all – uniqueness (Casey, 1997: 22-26).

Emphasizing the importance of a place in the scientific discourse directly influenced the better understanding of political, economic, social and cultural processes. The erroneous generalization of these processes and the attribution of features to a specific object, resulting from a wide range of studied objects, was avoided. Inductive drawing of conclusions has become important in this context. The authors of this article put forward the thesis that learning about complex structures should take place in points, because this type of scientific reasoning

allows us to know the actual state of the object or process under study. Focusing on one small place, on one small thing, also makes it possible to get to know the complex context, which is a kind of external envelope. Of course, it is worth emphasizing that this type of reasoning is possible primarily in social sciences, because exact sciences in this area are guided by a completely different logic and methodology.

Therefore, the aim of this article is to analyze the contemporary discourse in the social sciences and humanities, which consists in indicating the need to use methodologies related to a specific place, process, and subject. In this respect, the theory of microhistory is of great importance. Therefore, the authors will focus their attention primarily on the development of this method, its criticism, and its importance in contemporary scientific research. The theory of microhistory directly correlates with the research processes of the place. Therefore, it is important to emphasize this theory in the field of research methodology of social sciences and humanities

Microhistory is a historiographic practice involving the historical description of small territorial and temporal spaces (Magnússon, 2017: 560). From the perspective of a country like Ukraine, it is an extremely important theory that may contribute to explaining significant political and social processes from the perspective of small towns located mainly in eastern regions. The hybrid war into which Kyiv was drawn into, and it is not worth setting a time census here based on 2014, because Moscow had much earlier influenced the way in which Ukraine operated through various instruments, it is a factor destabilizing the state from within. Due to its linguistic, religious and cultural diversity, Ukraine may seem like an easy target in the context of hybrid rivalry with Russia. Nevertheless, the efforts of the rulers to date still allow the state to be kept under the jurisdiction of Kyiv. However, this is not the main goal of this article. Therefore this issue is only signaled to describe the wider context of the events. Thus, microhistory should not be underestimated by the scientific community. Analyzing the history and fate of simple families will serve to understand the authenticity of the state. This is essential to know the real mood of society. In the future, this will allow conclusions to be drawn regarding the political, economic and social conditions in which most of the inhabitants of Ukraine live, because the Ukrainian state is not only large urban agglomerations, but above all hundreds of small towns, scattered all over the territory, inhabited by ordinary Ukrainian families, struggling with the daily routine and problems.

Therefore, it is worth considering what the theory of microhistory is, what its strengths and weaknesses in the context of other theoretical approaches that shape contemporary scientific discourse.

Development of The Theory of Microhistory

Microhistory as a research practice has its origins in Italy at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s. At that time, two research workers, Carlo Ginzburg and Giovanni Levi, take part in the publication of the series of works *Microhistories* by the left-wing publishing house Einaudi. The context of the Italian state with its age-old political and cultural breakdown was of great importance in the process of developing the theory of microhistory. At that time, there was a need to formulate the methodological and theoretical principles of the so-called “little stories”, which related to the study of the peculiarities and uniqueness of specific places, specific people, or specific phenomena. Microhistory is, in a sense, an extension of local history, at the same time having a more inclusive character.

A classic example of work based on the theory of microhistory is *Il formaggio e i vermi* by Carlo Ginzburg. This work describes the life of a simple miller Domenico Scandelli of Friuli. Nevertheless, this work, in addition to its usual description, is also an excellent analysis of the folk culture and customs of the 16th-century Italian province. Carlo Ginzburg's assumption was to show real events and the uniqueness of a given community. However, the context of these considerations also referred to the wider political and social situation in the region, which emphasized the inclusive nature of *Il formaggio e i vermi* (Serna & Pons, 2020: 316-318).

The works of Carlo Ginzburg, as well as other representatives of the Italian school of microhistory, constituted a kind of opposition to the then-prevailing trends in interpreting history, such as the structuralist or quantitative approach presented mainly by the Annales community. Italian researchers found it important to include the individual in the general historical context and to consider complex political and social structures from his perspective. This was an attempt to rediscover what would have been missed if classical quantitative methods had been used. The fundamental difference in this approach also consisted in the fact that an attempt was made to deduce a detailed fact from the general fact, and vice versa – the detail was used to argue the construction of a general fact. The aim was to reconstruct the history of the “bottom-up” in strict reference to anthropological research. In the research process, he was against historical determinism, quantitative history, teleological history and the interpretation of society using the key of the class structure (Gregorowicz, 2014).

The precursors of microhistory also attempted to teach history as a discipline. This is mainly due to the way it is defined. Giovanni Levi postulated that microhistory is a kind of historiographic practice, and its idea is not to sacrifice a specific element for generalization, while trying not to abandon abstraction, because individual cases may prove to be key to showing more general phenomena (Lanaro, 2011: 7-8). The representatives of the Italian school of microhistory deny stereotypical thinking about the infallibility of historical research. Carlo Ginzburg, in his works, deals with the issue of the relationship between history and rhetoric, which is a kind of reaction to the linguistic turn that reduces historiography to the dimension of text and narrative research in relation to the document (Serna & Pons, 2020: 321-323). It is therefore worth emphasizing that the Italian school was of considerable importance in the development of the theory of microhistory.

It should not be forgotten that microhistory developed not only on the Apennine Peninsula. In France, this theory was also popular mainly thanks to the representatives of the Annales school – Jacques Le Goff, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Georges Duby. In these research works, one can read a clear opposition to the existing paradigms and historical concepts. They referred to the achievements of ethnology, sociology and anthropology, describing the lives of specific individuals and places, while implementing their considerations in a wider social and political context. The representatives of the Annales school also referred to the discourse of Michel Foucault, which was associated with poststructuralism and postmodernism. Moreover, this French philosopher also referred to political historicism, which means that the most credible witnesses of the past are the victims of the dominant power and the forgotten subjects of the historical narrative that is being formed (Vinale, 2018: 679-680). In the context of deliberations on the development of microhistory in France, one cannot ignore the achievements of anthropology presented by Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Anthropological research has drawn the attention of historians to the existence of simple structures in the form of small communities located in specific places, emphasizing the uniqueness of these communities with their history, tradition and culture. In the deliberations of Claude Lévi-Strauss, one can find,

for example, issues related to myths – their meaning, reading and constructive role in specific communities (Lévi-Strauss, 2013: 9-11). It is a constant practice of anthropologists to refer to specific, small things and use them to describe more complex things.

Microhistory was also developed in the field of research by German historians. Gustav Droysen, an outstanding German researcher of antiquity, was skeptical about the established theories in history, believing that even the most advanced research allows to capture only a fragment of history. In this regard, he emphasized that it is worth focusing your attention on small things that will help explain reality with all its internal variations. Hans Medick emphasizes, for example, that the main cognitive benefit of a microhistoric approach is the ability to thoroughly examine historical details of a given community and a given area, and in perspective, there is also a perception of the mutual relations between these details, making up the wider whole and context (Medick, 2016: 241-242).

In the United States, on the other hand, microhistory was developed by the outstanding researcher-anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who in his works often referred to the achievements of German historiography, in particular to the works of Max Weber and Martin Heidegger. Clifford Geertz is one of the precursors of the so-called interpretative anthropology, which was a kind of critical response to positivism and structuralism in the ethnography of the 1960s and 1970s. However, due to the fact that his solutions were created in the late 1960s and 1970s, they constitute one of the earliest semiotic and interpretative concepts of culture – a concept parallel to the concepts of ambiguity of meaning and differentiation introduced by Jacques Derrida (Geertz, 2001: 27-28). In addition, Clifford Geertz referred in his considerations to the linguistic phrase, the creator of which was another eminent American philosopher, Richard Rorty. He presented the linguistic turn as a process initiated in the 1960s, which puts language understood as a discourse and a sign and its meaning at the center of reflection on culture or the social world. In this breakthrough, according to Rorty, there are three consecutive turns: the linguistic turn, the interpretative turn and the rhetorical turn. As a consequence of these turns, language, i.e., systems of signs, meanings and symbols, is adopted by the humanities and social sciences as the basic way of understanding social and cultural reality (Koopman, 2011: 78-81). On the other hand, Clifford Geertz, referring to Rorty's thought, understood the whole notion of culture through language. He argued that each culture constitutes a language with different meanings, that is, a different integrated symbolic system or a signifier system. For culture can be defined directly in relation to systems of meanings that are encoded into symbolic forms and linked together into specific networks of meanings (Geertz, 2017: 27-29). The linguistic turn and interpretive anthropology largely refer to microhistory, primarily using the possibility of explaining complex structures through simple structures.

It follows from the above considerations that microhistory has a rich tradition. Nevertheless, there are criticisms of this discourse in research, resulting mainly from the context of the globalizing world and the need to present conclusions and analyzes on a macro scale. The critique of microhistory appeared almost simultaneously with its entry into the scientific discourse at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s. Therefore, in the next part, it is worth considering two main accusations made by critics of microhistory, which concern the "meticulousness" of microhistory, i.e., focusing on small, even insignificant things, and the inability to examine complex structures by referring to the whole rather than considering its structure from the perspective of the parts it is composed of. The latter objection is a direct reference to the question of research on great international entities, which, in the globalized world, started to play a decisive role in the international arena precisely from the 1970s.

Criticism Against the Theory of Microhistory

Microhistory, despite its wide application in anthropological, sociological and cultural discourses, met with critical comments, especially from representatives of German historiography. Jürgen Kocka, an outstanding German historian, then chairman of the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, together with Heinz-Gerhard Haupt in their work *Comparative and Transnational History* presented studies of international comparative history important from the point of view of the development of German historiography. This work was the result of empirical research on social history. These researchers were able to conduct a thorough analysis of comparative history and reflect on its methodological and theoretical assumptions. In their deliberations, however, they referred to the postulate that in the 1980s and 1990s, comparative historical studies encountered methodological obstacles in their development. On the one hand, the problem resulted from the cultural-historical approach, which emphasized micro-history and the construction of cultural transfer. On the other hand, from the concept of global history and transnational approaches that emphasized related history (Haupt & Kocka, 2012: 18-21). In the context of the work of these German historians, microhistory is regarded as a method of “detailed” history that does not allow the examination of broad historical views and processes that went beyond the local nature of the research process. Haupt and Kocka argued that referring to microhistory disturbs the perception of phenomena that had a much wider significance in history than it was presented from the perspective of microhistoric research.

Georg G. Iggers’ *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* also contains a critique of the microhistoric approach. This author presents the basic assumptions on which historical research was based and how the emerging social sciences, taking into account the period from the early 1950s, have transformed traditional historiography. Like Haupt and Kocka, he points out that in the 1970s and 1980s, postmodern ideas forced a reevaluation of historians’ attitudes towards the object and questioned the very possibility of an objective history. Iggers sees contemporary historiography as a hybrid, departing from the classical, macro-historical approach to microhistory, cultural history and the history of everyday life (Iggers, 2012: 31-35). This hybridization was critically viewed by Iggers because he believed, it introduces a methodological “admixture” from other disciplines into the research process, which is not necessarily good for the advancement of historiographic research.

The critique of microhistory referring to the “meticulousness” of its interest also correlates with another accusation that concerns the examination of complex social and political structures. Microhistory, according to the critics of this theory, does not allow for the explanation of these structures, because it focuses on small things that do not have a major impact on the shape of contemporary scientific discourse. This problem is mainly due to the research on large corporations, international organizations and complex political, economic and military processes that became popular at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. It was then that the integration processes, which took over, in particular, Central and Eastern Europe, became the object of interest of a wide group of scientists (Levi, 2018: 23-24). European integration along with the adoption of new treaties, the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States, international initiatives such as the Weimar Triangle or the Visegrad Group required research on a much larger scale than that proposed by microhistory. Hence, economic and political conditions led to relegating the theory of microhistory to the background (Di Fiore, 2018: 46-

48). The enthusiasm that was associated with the end of the Cold War rivalry and the change in the balance of power on the international arena towards being placed as the hegemon of the United States fostered the development of historiography aimed at studying great social and political structures. A pragmatic approach has become widespread, which analyzed the political and economic calculations and relations between various actors on the international arena and the resulting balance of power.

It is worth emphasizing that this type of research on large structures required an interdisciplinary approach, which directly referred to the methodological hybridism already mentioned in this article. It follows that the microhistory, which has been accused of using this hybridity, could defend itself against this accusation, but it would fail to prove that it is not a very effective method of studying large structures, such as multinational corporations and organizations, which require a completely different methodology and research tools. The authors of this article deny these allegations, claiming that microhistory, through the use of the inductive method, also allows the study of complex social and political structures. The denial of the criticism presented above is also related to the growing need to consider complex processes in points. What's more, it also results from the more and more often proclaimed idea of the polycentralization of the world. Therefore, in order to get to know a specific entity in a better way, it is necessary to disassemble the components that constitute its internal structure. This metaphor can be applied to virtually any complex structure in the world – a transnational corporation, an international organization, because learning how to decide within such structures is possible only by learning about their internal diversity.

Conclusions

The theory of microhistory, despite many critical voices, continues to play a significant role in the scientific discourse around the world. The authors of this article emphasize the need to use microhistory in research in the field of humanities and social sciences. Charles Joyner postulated that microhistory is asking very large questions in very small places that allow you to find the essence and get to know the essence that is often hidden in complex structures (Szijártó et al., 2008). This is an extremely important aspect as it allows you to find authentic and credible facts.

Istvan Szijártó, argues that the application of microhistory to modern scientific discourse has four distinct advantages over traditional macro-oriented social history. First, it is attractive to the general public; second, it is much closer to reality; third, he communicates his personal experiences directly with all the details and issues that make up the outer layer of a specific case; and fourthly, at the center of the research process are people, places, things, the knowledge of which allows drawing broader, more general conclusions (Szijártó, 2002: 211-213). Thus, microhistory is a method that, through inductive reasoning, allows for the formulation of more general conclusions.

In this context, the issue of interdisciplinarity that accompanies microhistory should not be forgotten either. The authors of the article believe that, on the one hand, this is an allegation that criticizes microhistory, but on the other hand, learning the authenticity and uniqueness of the studied object or phenomenon requires the use of various methods and theories, which directly leads to this interdisciplinarity in research. Hence the simple conclusion that considering small things, as dictated by microhistory, and then drawing general conclusions, cannot be devoid of an interdisciplinary aspect. Of course, the issue of interdisciplinarity should be contrasted

with contemporary attempts to “clean up” scientific disciplines so that each of them uses only the methodology and theory assigned to it. The creation of hybrids, referring back to Georg Iggers, is not very welcome in the research process. It does not change the fact that it is still hard to avoid borrowings and the contemporary scientific discourse is full of interdisciplinary research, and microhistory in this context is no exception.

The authors of this article also postulate that microhistory is a method that will be increasingly used by various researchers. This is mainly due to the issue of increasing interest in a specific place signaled in the introduction to this article. The aspect of locality will gain importance in research all over the world. Scientists, in turn, will focus on researching small communities and specific individuals in order to achieve both the maximum depth of past reality and its greater color and naturalness (Magnússon & Szjártó, 2013: 38). Getting to know the authentic social moods and the uniqueness of a particular community will allow you to understand the wider processes in which this community is involved. Community is mentioned in this context, but it is only an example that can be replaced by an aspect of a place or a specific phenomenon. Well, microhistory is an effective tool in the research process to answer broad questions by examining small things. The authors predict that the issue of microhistory will be more and more often taken into account in the scientific discourse, which aims to study simple structures that, through induction, will provide conclusions about more complex structures.

Thus, as it was indicated at the beginning of this article, the theory of microhistory cannot be underestimated by the scientific community, especially in a country such as Ukraine. In the context of a hybrid war in which this country has become entangled, it is necessary to learn about the stories of small ones that will certainly allow to draw significant conclusions. Therefore, the authors of this article emphasize the importance of the theory of microhistory in the contemporary scientific discourse, which, through the implementation of various research activities, may become an effective tool in the process of repairing Ukrainian statehood.

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