

# (Post)modern identity types

Maria Świątkiewicz-Mośny

## Abstract

Identity is a very popular concept in social sciences. It is very differently defined and understood. The socio-cultural change taking place in the conditions of globalization is of great importance for understanding the concept (of identity). In (post)modernity, identity is undergoing transformations both in relation to its contents and form. The changes concern the course of identity construction process, its composition and importance hierarchy of particular elements. The article will present various views on the identity and its possible types. Among other things, the ideas of Bauman, Melosik and Szkudlarek, Castells and Bokszański will be presented.

**Keywords:** Identity, globalization, modernity, postmodernity, self-manager

Identity remains an important notion of (post)modernity, both in the scientific dimension as well as in everyday life. Liquidity, inconsistency, fragmentarity, and episodicity force reflexivity in constructing life projects (Świątkiewicz-Mośny 2015). In the past identity did not have to be discussed as it was obvious, so to say imposed on an individual, constructed beyond him or her. (Today) “other features than before foster life success: not consistent conduct, stubborn adherence to a chosen goal, persistent specialization, gathering qualifications with a determined profile – but flexibility of interest and quick interest change, adaptability, readiness to learn and the ability to forget what is already out of use” (Bauman 2011, 441).

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in relation to its contents and form. The changes concern the course of identity construction process, its composition and importance hierarchy of particular elements.

The notion of identity is very popular, which results in a multitude of definitions and ways of its understanding or operationalization. One of the ways of dealing with multiple definitions in science is building typology. In view of the speed of change which a modern man has to face and the risks and uncertainties that these changes bring, order remains a dream. "One dreams of a simple, more unambiguous world that can be embraced with one glance and measured with one measure (...). We can say that simplification is the most acute psychosis of post-modern times, an innate and common ailment of the postmodern lifestyle" (Bauman 1995, 31). Typology construction can thus be treated as a kind of realization of this dream.

### **From pilgrim to tourist. Bauman's types of individual identity**

Postmodernity, with all luggage of its features and their consequences, is constructing new identity types. Bauman's **pilgrim**, a postmodern personality model, is losing its attractiveness (Bauman 1994). The metaphor of a life pilgrimage (appropriate for describing the middle class – as Bauman underlines) was expressive in modernity, but does not find justification in postmodernity, as a pilgrim has been systematically and consistently heading for the sacred goal of the life pilgrimage, choosing the strategies allowing him to reach it. Bauman proposes four quite artistic<sup>1</sup> metaphors which were supposed to characterise personality types in postmodernity – a stroller, a tourist, a player and a vagabond.

A **stroller** lives here and now, isolated from the past and the future. His or her activity is autotelic, not necessarily purposeful. The walking space can be provided by shopping centres or anything else, but it can also be the media, television with a possibility of channel surfing, the Internet with boundless information and options of endless clicking. "In a stroller's paradise things are free from their own weight. Only the satisfaction gained thanks to them gives them importance." (Bauman 1994, 8)

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<sup>1</sup> The stroller metaphor used by Bauman is taken from Walter Benjamin, who, in turn is inspired by Charles Baudelaire's poetry and Constantin Guy's paintings, presenting captured life street scenes (Bauman 1994, 4).

Strollers live alongside **vagabonds**, who do not have plans for the future either. They are temporary people, without any roots. Unlike **tourists**, who have homes and are so strongly attached to them that they take their homes everywhere. A tourist has a plan and collects impressions according to it, accepting, however, the perspective of a viewer enclosed in his fortress. From the height of the last tower window he observes, analyses, admires, comments, and criticizes. For a postmodern tourist involved in the tourist business, home always remains the point of reference. “We need a home with its everyday routine to unscrupulously immerse ourselves in a ...<make believe> life (...). We need a home as a postulate; home – indulgence; home- dodge” (Bauman 1994, 15). However, the need for a home does not limit mobility, as it is better to miss home than be at home. Tourists’ life is all about freedom, autonomy and independence, which allow them to be ready, lock the door behind and set off anytime.

The fourth of Bauman’s types is a **player** – a smart, sly person hunting for an opportunity and taking his chances, because what counts in a game is winning. In a player’s world rules are clearly defined, but also imposed. A player can only decide how to use the selected card.

What is characteristic for Bauman’s typology is that none of the proposed personality models is new. They have already occurred before, however, according to the author, they were not as common as they are now. What is more, it happens that all of them occur simultaneously in one person. “The same people, at the same time, lead a life that contains elements of each of the patterns” (Bauman 1994, 18).

### **Identity: between a museum and a supermarket**

Another proposition of describing a postmodern identity can be found in the book “Kultura tożsamość edukacja – migotanie znaczeń” by Zbyszko Melosik and Tomasz Szkudlarek. The authors, with a postmodern style describe postmodern reality, combining identity **constructed/imposed** in the *museum and supermarket* metaphor. In this context, the *museum* is first of all a collective memory depositary. “The museum is a form of creating and disciplining identity. The museum determines who we should be and who we must not be.” (Melosik, Szkudlarek 2009, 23). The museum is opposed to the supermarket, which is a metaphor of the need to select. The multiplicity of choice gives the appearance of

freedom, enforces cognitive activity. Melosik and Szkudlarek notice the seeming freedom in the supermarket, perhaps the terror of choice is more disturbing than the pattern imposed by the museum. “The charming <you can be everyone>, is becoming the ominous <you must be everyone>” (Melosik, Szkudlarek 2009, 25).

The reported proposition of individual identity types is not, by assumption, a typology. The authors also underline overlapping of different identity types and a possibility of their simultaneous occurrence within individual personalities. The proposed examples do not exhaust the multitude of post-modern identities.

**Global transparent identity** is “a response to the needs of international corporations for a ‘universal’ expert, negotiator, researcher who would have technocratic and pragmatic tools: both in terms of “formality” (knowledge, language, qualifications) as well as personality” (Melosik, Szkudlarek 2009, 48). The universalism, matching everywhere, searching for what unites becomes key. This excludes rooting and characteristic features, different from the majority. People with a global transparent identity “are pragmatic, optimistic, action-oriented and successful, communicative and open” (Melosik, Szkudlarek 2009, 49). Employees with such features fit in perfectly with the culture of international corporations, do not experience communication problems with representatives of other cultures, are mobile, as they do not settle down anywhere and do not grow deep roots.

The second type proposed by the authors is “**global every identity**” (compare: Melosik, Szkudlarek 2009, 50). It describes a permanent wanderer who focuses on entering deeply into the world here and now. This identity is based on temporariness, which in the traditional sense does not allow for rooting, but here we are talking about “everywhere-rootedness”. It is something like saying that I feel at home everywhere.

The temporarily engaged Everyone meets the third type, who does not see differences, but only appearances. **Derealized simulated identity** (Melosik, Szkudlarek 2009, 51) is described by authentic non-authenticity, which means that each assumed identity is only seeming (Melosik, Szkudlarek 2009, 51). **Supermarket identity** is superficial as well. In the consumer world of choice among many possibilities, this type of identity also gives a sense of free choice. The unlimited choice is defined only by individual preferences.

Another type of identity is “**made in the USA**” identity, based on affirming American concepts of individualism, self-realization, consumption and mobility.

The last type of postmodern identity models presented by Melosik and Szkudlarek uses a **razor metaphor**, which is characterized by “essentialization of a specific form of difference as a basis of constructing identity and cutting off anything and anyone that <do not fit>. This leads to <celebrating the difference>, also called a separatist identity policy, which consists in a specific closure in a given identity form” (Melosik, Szkudlarek 2009, 55). Building a community on diversity is a consequence of a society of risk, distrust and authority. It brings about a revival of various types of fundamentalism.

Melosik and Szkudlarek repeatedly declare that their typology is not finite, cannot be surely finished in the post-modern paradigm in which the fluidity of reality is inscribed. The presented types are not rooted, more supermarket-like than shaped by the closed museum discourse. Multiple possibilities, and the subsequent fragmentariness and elusiveness of identity constructions, their inner contradiction can be frightening. The authors notice these concerns, and optimistically conclude that postmodern people have worked out strategies of dealing with the fluidity and transience. (Melosik, Szkudlarek 2009, 55).

### **Between legitimization and projecting**

Forms (construction processes) of collective identities have been distinguished in view of the power relations that determine the context of building them. The typology of collective identities proposed by **Castells** (2008) assumes that identities are constructed using such elements (building materials) like: “history, geography, biology, production and reproduction institutions, collective memory and personal dreams, authority units and religious revelations” (Castells 2008, 23).

“**Legitimizing identity**; is introduced by “the dominating social institutions in order to expand and rationalize their dominance against social actors” (Castells 2008, 23). This type occurs in a civil society which, in this case, is treated somehow as a tool of symbolic violence (Castells 2008, 24).

For contemporary western societies, where resistance movements are spreading, **resistance identity** would be characteristic. It appears among

the actors, who, due to their situation, have to resist the dominating groups. *Exclusion of the excluding by the excluded* means “building defensive identity in the categories of dominating ideologies/institutions by reversing the assessing judgement with simultaneous strengthening borders” (Castells 2008, 25). Stigmatized actors, who occupy inferior social positions create in such conditions the ways of self-definition which are alternative with respect to the majority. Identity policy is also related to it. (compare Castells 2008, 23).

**Project identity** belongs to a new kind of identities which appear as a result of reflection and action. This kind of identity creates *subjects*, which Castells understands after Alain Tourain as: “a will to be an individual, create a personal story, give sense to the whole range of experiences of an individual life [...] Transforming individuals into subjects results from the inevitable connection of two affirmations: affirmation of individuals against communities and affirmation of individuals against the market (1995a, 29 – 30, quote after Castells 2008, 25). However, the most important thing is that subjects are not individuals, but a collective social actor (Castells 2008, 25). Project identity is understood as a reflexive project of another life. According to Giddens (2010), late modernity is characterized by detachment from tradition, which, in turn, results in a need to make choices, including identity choices. Although Castells does not fully agree with Giddens’s vision, who assumes reflexive identity construction, he claims that the reflexive construction is a privilege of “the elites inhabiting timeless space of flows in global networks and in their auxiliary locations” (Castells 2008, 26). The dynamics of project creation proceeds towards a community project (whereas in modernism it grew out of resistance movement).

Among the changes observed by Castells we can name a legitimization crisis, which invalidates the sense of industrial age institutions, separating nations from states, privatization of public agencies, an attack on *welfare state*, which consequently impoverishes a part of society, weakening and politicizing the workers movement (through internationalization of the economy and individualization of work), questioning patriarchy, weakening the power of churches in influencing the behaviour of the faithful (Castells 2008, 379) it also cause identity to diminish.

### From a cluttered library to the postmodern order

Analytical types of collective identities are formulated also by Bokszański (2005). This is another attempt of ordering a ‘cluttered’ identity library. The differentiation takes place along two dimensions. The first division axis is: “collective identities relevant to really existing communities vs. collective identities relevant to ideal types of society” (Bokszański 2005, 63). The other one is: “collective identities conceived as various manifestations of self-awareness of the collective subject vs. collective identities conceived as constitutive cultural values of a group, distinguishing it from strangers” (Bokszański 2005, 66). As a result, we get a matrix with four areas – types which are not given any particular names by the author.

Table 1.1.

Range of the notion of collective identity	Collective identity subjects	
	Communities	Types of society
<b>Auto-definition of the subject</b>	1, e.g. national identities as understood by Kłoskowska	2, e.g. Bauman’s identity types
<b>Cultural values</b>	3, e.g. regional and ethnic identities, social movements	4, e.g. Giddens’s postmodern identity

*Source: Bokszański, 2005, p. 66*

The first type (field 1) signifies “identities created from knowledge and attitudes towards the native community, formulated by its members”. Bokszański gives an example of national identities according to Kłoskowska’s understanding: “the convergence of subjective attitudes of many people related to their own cultural group can be just considered to be collective national identity” (Kłoskowska 1992, 134). So, it involves such collective identities which connect communities of the individuals who are aware of their auto-definition. This kind of collective identity is built just by reflexive individuals.

The third type (field 3) are “collective identities of communities existing in a social world, which are conceived as characteristics of their basic constitutive cultural values” (Bokszański 2005, 68). Examples include regional identities, ethnic groups or social movements. Not every

region has potential to create an identity, only those, whose inhabitants have a sense of cultural distinctness from the dominant majority. An important element remains the language/dialect, which somehow legitimizes separateness.

The second (field 2) and fourth (field 4) types are relevant for ideal society types, with European identity or postmodern identity as examples. Ideal types are of abstract character, so, talking about European identity, we do not understand it in the context of a potential set of members. Field number 2, as Bokszański highlights, can be filled with such kinds of collective identities which are identities of ideal society types in the context of an individual entity's auto-perception. Identity is seen this way by Bauman, who refers just to a certain type of an ideal society, filled with "fluid modernity" when constructing his identity types (tourist, player, vagabond and stroller are described above). In this fluid modernity, everything is flowing and fixed institutions can no longer, according to Bauman, function within the new globalized framework.

The fourth field, in turn, signifies this kind of identity which is based on ideal collective identity types in relation to the values determining the otherness of this type of societies (Bokszański 2005, 69). The identity of late modernity discussed by Giddens would be a good example. "The world of late modernity is apocalyptic (...), it involves such forms of risk that previous generations did not know" (Giddens 2010, 6). Identity is for Giddens a reflexive enterprise, "a 'me' project, which consists in maintaining consistent, though constantly verified, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice mediated by abstract systems (...). The main factor in structuring identity of an individual is reflective planning of life, which by its nature assumes risk assessment mediated through contact with expert systems (Giddens 2010, 8 – 9).

### **Self-managers**

(Post)modern identity is surely polymorphic and multithreaded. The mosaic created from its elements is unusual and unique. What is more, it is temporary and loosely connected with traditional reference points. Family is more and more often constructed and re-constructed, nationality is becoming conventional. Responsibility for who we are and who we are becoming rests on us. This is a consequence of the departure from the disciplinary society towards the society of achievement (Han

2017). “In place of the ban, order or rule, there is a project, initiative and motivation. Disciplinary society is still controlled by “no”, and its negativity generates madmen and criminals. The society of achievement produces people with depression and losers” (Han 2017). Identity created in conditions of unlimited possibilities and prospects for achievement is associated with constant tension, searching for new perspectives. This does not promote growing roots, but rather temporariness and superficiality. The risk of failure is high, and the conditions in which identity is constructed are undefined, and then depression occurs. “*A depressed person is not in good shape, is exhausted by the effort to become himself*” (Ehrenberg 2008, 14). Responsibility exhausts a (post)modern man, plunging him into a spiral of sadness and frustration.

Self-managers are responsible for all aspects of life. For instance, disease, which for Parsons was a state not caused by the patient, whose only task was to recover, for a self-manager becomes a failure, negligence, a result of improper diet, lack of sport activity, smoking or alcohol abuse. Knowledge about threats results in transferring responsibility, which, in turn, causes that the patient bears the burden of guilt for the situation; he managed himself in such a way that now he must deal with (manage) the crisis.

The situation is similar in the area of education. Open knowledge repositories and countless courses, workshops, webinars and other available educational tools are becoming tools to build oneself. Exploring these resources, self-managers acquire unlimited possibilities, however without a guide made of clearly defined rules and principles, they remain tense as they have failed to achieve the desired goals.

Self-managers form a multithreaded type of (post)modern identity. Each of them is different and impossible to undergo typologization, permanently and situationally constructed by the involved actors.

## Summary

The identity discourse takes place in the background of globalization processes, reflective modernization, and social change covering all areas of social life. The development of techniques and tools for communication, transport, medicine and many other areas result in the emergence of global risk which interweaves the fates of people all around the world. Not only pessimistic visions of life in a “global village” are possible. We

definitely live longer, but nobody knows if more happily, because, as Ryszard Kapuściński (2006) writes, what is global is a station, not a village (as McLuhan wanted), and that means momentum, temporariness and transience of interpersonal relations, detachment from the place and indifference.

As a consequence of globalization and glocalisation, there emerge new types of societies, variously called post-modern, late-modern, modern, fluently modern, which signify individualization, universalization, differentiation, and, above all, fluency and changeability. “Only the concept of identity allows to fully analyse the dynamics of contemporary social phenomena, abound in manifestations of rebellion, deviation from the official ideology, questioning the assigned obligations, propagating new lifestyles” (Boksański 1988, 15 – 16). Identity in the (post)modern world is an intriguing thread of scientific investigation. Practically, most prominent contemporary researchers reflect on the issue. They underline, above all, a change resulting in greater reflexivity, subjectivity, the ability to construct oneself, but also the obligation to take responsibility for one’s biography. The multitude of possibilities makes the choice more interesting, but also more difficult. Also collective identities around ethnic, religious and ideological social movements in the network society are being re-constructed. Old social organizations that produce legitimizing identities are falling apart. “King and queen, Castells writes graphically, the state and civil society are naked, and their children-citizens are wandering around various foster families.” (Castells 2008, 380). In the world of the market, the flow of capital, resistance identities appear which are built around traditional values against “capitalist globalization.” New social movements, which construct new collective identities, want to ensure global justice (among others, environmentalists, feminists, religious fundamentalists).

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dr. hab. Maria Świątkiewicz-Mośny  
Institute of Sociology  
Jagiellonian University  
Krakow, Poland  
e-mail: maria.swiatkiewicz-mosny@uj.edu.pl