

THE PRINCIPLE OF HISTORICITY IN SOCIOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY AND BIOGRAPHICAL WRITING

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Abstract

The study reconsiders biographical writing as one of the central analytical tools of sociology and proposes a four-level methodological framework. The suggested model, which includes functional levels, a dialectical approach, spatial and urban analysis and the examination of social determinants, explains how individual life narratives are shaped through the interaction of social structure, historical configurations and the social energy of space. The research demonstrates that a biography attains scientific value not as a mere sequence of personal experiences, but when it is read as a micro-expression of social change. Through the principle of historicity, an individual's life trajectory is connected to the political-economic conditions of the period, institutional influences and transformations occurring within the urban environment. The dialectical approach clarifies how contradictions within a biography evolve and contribute to the formation of theoretical positions. Social determinants systematize the structural factors underlying an individual's social and intellectual stance, while spatial-urban analysis elucidates how social capital and intellectual stimuli vary across different environments. Overall, this analytical-methodological framework transforms biographical material into a core empirical source for sociological analysis and opens new methodological possibilities for explaining social change at both micro and macro levels. Consequently, the study strengthens biographical writing conceptually and methodologically, offering an innovative analytical approach to contemporary sociology.

Keywords

Biographical writing, principle of historicity, social determinants, dialectical approach, functionality, methodological framework.

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1. Introduction

The role of biography in sociological analysis has long remained methodologically ambiguous, as the extent to which an individual life narrative should be connected to social structures and historical context has not been systematically clarified. The integration of the principle of historicity, spatial factors and social determinants into biographical analysis has likewise remained fragmented both theoretically and practically, creating the need for a coherent methodological framework. In this regard, the paper's relevance to sociology lies in its proposal of an original methodological model that transforms biographical writing from a traditional descriptive account into an analytical tool for sociological inquiry. By integrating the principle of historicity, dialectical reasoning, spatial and urban analysis, as well as social determinants, the four-level framework enables the reading of an individual's life within the dynamic interplay of social structures, thereby filling an existing methodological gap in sociology. This

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model functions as a multifaceted analytical schema applicable to theoretical analysis, intellectual history and social research, offering both methodological and epistemological innovation within the field.

The research methods employed in the paper are predominantly theoretical and analytical, grounded in conceptual approaches that explain the application of the principle of historicity within sociological methodology. The text systematically utilizes elements such as temporality, contextuality, structural mapping and spatial-urban analysis to articulate the role of biographical writing as part of sociological interpretation. The study makes use of a dialectical approach to connect micro-level personal experiences with macro-level historical configurations, thereby revealing the dynamic interplay between an individual's life story and the broader socio-historical structures within which it is embedded.

2. The principle of historicity and the role of historical context in sociological analysis

The principle of historicity serves as a methodological foundation asserting that social phenomena, structures and theories can only be understood within time and under the specific conditions of a given historical period. According to this principle, no social fact possesses an independent, stable or immutable essence; rather, it acquires meaning only as part of a historical process. Historicity further emphasizes that social realities are shaped by the political, economic, cultural and institutional configurations that exist within a particular temporal context (Küle, 2006). This approach demonstrates that all explanations offered in the social sciences, the theoretical frameworks adopted and the processes observed emerge from their historical context and lose explanatory power when detached from it. For this reason, the principle of historicity is employed as a fundamental tool in fields such as sociology, anthropology, the philosophy of history, economic-historical research and intellectual history (Stewart, 2025).

The significance of the principle of historicity in the social sciences lies in its capacity to conceptualize society not as a static entity, but as a dynamic, changing, at times even regressing, evolving system (Sidorenko, 2021). Without this principle, it becomes impossible to understand the underlying reasons for the emergence of any social institution, relationship, idea or behavioral pattern, as no social form arises in a vacuum or within a historically neutral environment. For example, the formation of the state, class relations, the development of urban culture, transformations in family structures, xenophilia or xenophobia - all are products of specific socio-historical conditions. In this regard, the principle of historicity provides an analytical framework for explaining social phenomena by uncovering the sequence of these conditions, the causal relationships that link them and the structural transformations that occur over time.

Historicity is most frequently employed in historical sociology, intellectual history, political theory research and fields that examine cultural transformations. In these areas, the researcher analyzes a social phenomenon not in its present form, but through the stages it has passed, the trajectory of its transformation and the interplay of social forces that have shaped it (Klausen, 2020). For example, historical sociology links the collapse of empires and the formation of states, shifts in economic systems and the emergence of mass ideologies to the structural features of specific historical periods. Intellectual history, in turn, examines why particular theoretical ideas emerged in a given era, which social groups they represented and which historical needs they addressed. In each of these approaches, the principle of historicity serves as a foundational tool for

understanding the origins of the research object, its developmental trajectory and the sequence of stages through which it has arrived at its contemporary form.

The importance of historical context in sociological analysis stems from its role as the primary framework that shapes social behaviors and structures. Patterns of thought, behavioral norms, social institutions and collective identities are formed within a historical milieu and each era generates its own internal social logic. When historical context is neglected, sociological analysis becomes limited to surface-level descriptions, as understanding why phenomena take a particular form, rather than any other, requires examining historical causes, transitional phases and processes of transformation. As Leite (2022) and other scholars note, without historicity, the structures of society risk being portrayed as though they exist in a ready-made, timeless state, thereby stripping sociology of its analytical depth. Historical context thus reveals both causal relationships and the transformations that social formations undergo over time, providing an essential dimension for any robust sociological explanation.

Within this framework, the reason evolution, transformation and dialectics hold vital importance in sociology derives precisely from the principle of historicity. Societies have never been static; they continuously move within shifting economic conditions, technological innovations, ideological conflicts and political processes. From this perspective, it may be stated that societies evolve incessantly and without interruption. The central importance of social evolution stems from the fact that the social world is never fixed or immutable. Societies emerge from the gradual formation of human activity, collective experiences and institutional structures over time and thus social forms develop in a phased manner. Social evolution explains how institutions such as the family, the state, the economy, religion and education change over time, through which stages they pass and why they adapt to new functional requirements. This enables sociologists to understand the present form of any social structure by tracing its history, identifying its earlier configurations and explaining why those former arrangements lost their relevance. Evolution here is not merely the application of biological analogies to the social world; rather, it is the explanation of how social forms change in a logically sequenced temporal process: an understanding that is inseparable from the principle of historicity.

The concept of transformation, by contrast, refers not to gradual development but to the fundamental and sometimes abrupt alteration of social forms. Processes such as the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the collapse of empires, the Industrial Revolution or the emergence of contemporary digital society are not simply extensions of evolutionary stages but represent profound structural change. These are only basic examples, as the notion of transformation in sociology encompasses far more complex dynamics. Transformation reshapes power relations, modes of production, identities and institutional structures at their roots and therefore must be understood in connection with its historical context (Wiltshire, 2001). Similarly, each transformation arises from the pressures generated by specific social needs, contradictions and historical conditions; for this reason, sociological analysis must consider historical sequences, prior structural configurations and the social forces that make change possible. The principle of historicity thus demonstrates that transformation is never accidental but the outcome of accumulated historical processes.

Dialectics explains the underlying mechanism that connects evolution and transformation. From a dialectical perspective, social reality is structured through contradictions: class tensions, cultural conflicts, clashes of economic interests, ideological differences and political struggles function as the driving forces of social

change (Martin, 2009). These contradictions generate new social forms through the interaction of opposing forces over time, making change both inevitable and necessary. Dialectical analysis reveals the causal relations within social processes and shows that every social form is destined to change because it contains internal contradictions that eventually destabilize it (Papa *et al.*, 2006). Understanding these mechanisms is impossible without the principle of historicity, since dialectical development can only be traced through time. Thus, dialectics, evolution and transformation are not merely analytical categories in sociology but foundational methodological pillars that illuminate the nature of social reality; each becomes meaningful only when integrated with the principle of historicity, which gives sociological explanation its depth and explanatory force. Notably, causal relations in dialectics are neither linear nor unidirectional; because processes emerge through interaction and contradiction, causes reshape their outcomes and outcomes reconfigure their causes. This dynamic reciprocity renders it impossible to understand social phenomena solely through their present form. For this reason, dialectical analysis relies on historicity, since every social form is the product of contradictions accumulated in its historical trajectory. The principle of historicity allows these cycles of causation to be traced, thereby disclosing the logic of dialectical development.

The relationship among historicity, evolution, transformation and dialectics is reciprocal and mutually reinforcing. In brief, historicity explains the structuring role of time; evolution identifies the sequence of stages unfolding within that temporal framework; transformation reveals how fundamental shifts occur; and dialectics uncovers the contradictions and tensions that drive those shifts. Through this framework, the principle of historicity deepens sociological analysis by enabling an understanding of social processes not only in terms of what happens but also how and why it happens. Without historicity, these mechanisms remain invisible and sociological explanation becomes confined to surface-level description, even though the central aim of sociology is to illuminate the nature, origins and developmental trajectory of social reality.

3. The relationship between biography writing and sociological analysis

Biography is a narrative form of inquiry that traces an individual's life trajectory and explains the social, cultural, political and intellectual influences that shape a person's identity, choices and worldview; therefore, it is not merely a chronological listing of events but an interpretive account of the structural conditions that make a particular life possible. Biographical writing is the process of placing this life narrative within a scientific or analytical framework by selecting relevant facts, establishing connections among them and revealing the social logic underlying those connections (Dodds, 2022). This work is not only the reconstruction of an individual destiny but also an analysis of the social conditions that enable and constrain that destiny. Principles such as objectivity, verification of facts, maintenance of historical sequence and contextual interpretation guide the biographical writing process.

Throughout history, many influential biographies have been written and most of them have become foundational sources in literature, history and the social sciences. Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* is one of the most significant examples from antiquity, presenting the lives of selected figures in a comparative manner. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, James Boswell's biography of Samuel Johnson came to be regarded as a pinnacle of critical realism, while Stefan Zweig's psychological biographies were celebrated for their exploration of human character in depth. In the social sciences, Steven

Lukes's work on Durkheim, Isaiah Berlin's intellectual biographies and Robert Caro's multi-volume study of Lyndon Johnson stand among the most prominent examples. Each of these works demonstrates that a biography is not merely the story of an individual but also an analytical framework through which the spirit of an era can be understood.

A fundamental similarity across these notable biographies is their ability to construct a bridge between personal life and the social world. They connect individual events to historical, political and cultural conditions, thus revealing the ways in which a person's fate, decisions and ideas are shaped within a broader structural context (Salvatore, 2004). In these works, life is not treated as a simple sequence of facts but as a dynamic process closely intertwined with the economic systems, ideological climate, technological conditions and collective psychology of its time.

Among the most commonly used techniques in biographical writing are chronological narrative, thematically organized structures, the use of archival materials, the analysis of personal letters and diaries, direct and indirect witness accounts, interviews and the reconstruction of socio-historical context (Merrill & West, 2009). Psychological analysis or the creation of a psychological portrait is also frequently employed, as understanding the motivations behind human behavior requires psychological depth. Contemporary biographical writing additionally draws on sociological methods such as structural analysis, cultural analysis, discourse analysis and the mapping of institutional contexts. In this way, biography reveals both the inner world of the individual and the external social world in parallel.

Biographical writing also involves significant challenges. One major difficulty is objectivity, as the biographer constructs a narrative through the selection and interpretation of available materials, which inevitably introduces a degree of subjectivity (Oakley, 2010). Another challenge is the incompleteness of information: in many cases, archival records are fragmentary, witness accounts may be contradictory and the researcher must carefully fill in gaps without overextending interpretation. Furthermore, linking individual experiences to broader social structures requires high analytical precision; without it, biography risks collapsing either into psychology or into a mere chronological listing of events (Oakley, 2010). For these reasons, biographical writing is a demanding endeavor that requires both artistic sensitivity and rigorous scientific method.

Parallel to this, sociological analysis is a scientific process aimed at understanding the structural causes, dynamics and consequences of social phenomena. It links individual behavior and experience to social structures and examines how these structures are formed and transformed over time. This analytical orientation answers the question of why things are the way they are: why people act as they do, why institutions function in particular ways, how ideas emerge and change and through which mechanisms society is constituted and undergoes transformation. Because sociological analysis uncovers the layers of social reality, it is scientifically indispensable; it does not merely describe phenomena but systematically explains their causes and outcomes.

The role of biographical writing in sociological analysis derives precisely from its ability to present an individual's life as a micro-instance of social structure. Biography enables the sociologist to observe abstract structural concepts within the concrete experience of a particular person and to elucidate the mechanisms of society at the micro level. The writing of sociologists' biographies is therefore not accidental: biography is one of the most powerful methods for understanding the sources of their theoretical ideas, their social origins and the historical conditions under which those ideas were formed

(Erben, 1993). Biographies written from a sociological perspective show that no theory emerges in a vacuum; every idea, method and intellectual stance is a product of specific social, political and cultural realities.

In this respect, the biography of a sociologist is not treated as a simple life story but as an empirical foundation for interpreting theoretical thought. A sociological approach reveals the structural tensions, class positions, cultural influences and institutional contexts embedded within a life narrative. For this reason, the biography of a sociologist is not a mere sequence of facts but an analytical map of the social mechanisms that make those facts possible. Biography is crucial for understanding the historical conditions under which a sociologist was formed, the social groups with which they interacted, the intellectual traditions that influenced them and the ways these influences shaped their theoretical production.

4. Methodological application of the principle of historicity in biographical writing

The principle of historicity occupies a central place in biographical writing because, without it, a biography remains merely descriptive and obscures the underlying forces that shape a person's life trajectory. Since no human life develops in a vacuum, taking into account the historical environment and the collective experiences of a given period substantially enhances the analytical value of biographical interpretation. The purpose of applying this principle is to uncover the historical causes that inform an individual's actions, decisions and intellectual formation. Only by examining the historical context can a biographer understand why a person became committed to a particular idea, which events altered their worldview and which social strata and institutions they interacted with. In this way, the principle of historicity creates a bridge between subjective experience and objective social reality. The aim is not only to explain who the individual is but to show why they become that particular person. This approach is especially significant in intellectual biography, where theoretical ideas often emerge from historical tensions and the pressing concerns of the time.

The principle of historicity is applied in biographical writing through several methodological practices. A biographer first reconstructs the economic structures, political events, cultural codes and technological conditions of the period in which the subject lived. These historical elements are then linked to the turning points in the individual's life: which events generated changes in their thinking, which social mechanisms positioned them in specific roles and which institutional frameworks constrained or expanded their opportunities. This method integrates macro-level historical processes with the micro-level intricacies of personal life, thereby producing a synthesis between biography and sociological analysis.

The first core element of the principle of historicity, temporality, is reflected in the biographical portrayal of a human life as a continuous developmental process. Here, the emphasis shifts from the question of "what happened?" to "how did this occur and through which stages did it unfold?". From the perspective of social evolution, a person's childhood environment, youthful experiences, adulthood and intellectual formation are not treated as disconnected episodes but as processes that acquire meaning through their temporal sequence. This approach links biography to history and situates the transitions of an individual life within the broader historical structure.

The second element, contextuality, ensures that the social environment occupies a central place in biographical interpretation. Although individuals live their own lives,

much of the content of those lives is shaped by social structures beyond their control, such as class position, political regimes, religious and cultural norms, economic opportunities and institutional constraints. Contextuality in biographical writing shows that these structures are not merely a background but key mechanisms that shape the life narrative. Consequently, the story of the individual also becomes the story of society and the biography presents a micro-model of the social world.

The third element of historicity, transformation, makes it possible to explain simultaneously the transformations of both the individual and the era. A person does not merely adapt to a changing world but at times becomes an active participant in or even a creator of, those changes. Biography demonstrates that life does not unfold along fixed lines; turning points in a personal trajectory are often closely linked to turning points in history. Wars, economic crises, political upheavals and intellectual movements leave profound marks on an individual's path and reshape that person's worldview.

Within this framework, several concrete examples can be observed. Lukes's work (1973) is widely regarded as a paradigmatic application of the sociological biography method, constructing biography not merely as the life story of an individual but as an analytical map of an entire socio-intellectual context. In explaining Durkheim's upbringing in the provincial environment of the Lottingi region of France, Lukes links the formation of the individual to the institutional fabric of social space by examining the intellectual and cultural structures of the local Jewish community and the familial traditions that shaped Durkheim's early worldview. The republican and modernizing policies of late nineteenth-century France, reforms in the educational system and the secularization of intellectual life are presented as core structural forces that shaped both Durkheim's academic position and the contours of his social theory. In Lukes's analysis, the transition between Durkheim's engagement with the Parisian intellectual milieu and his academic work at the University of Bordeaux is depicted not only as a geographical shift but as a form of social transformation. The provincial yet innovative environment of Bordeaux provided conditions conducive to the development of Durkheim's more systematic and functionalist reflections on social institutions. Lukes therefore constructs biography not as a chronological sequence of life events but as an exposition of the historical and social structure that produced Durkheim's theoretical ideas, creating one of the most influential exemplars of sociological biography.

The biographical-sociological methodology articulated in Lukes's work subsequently became an analytical model for later Durkheim studies and provided a methodological foundation for contemporary scholarship. This framework served as a central analytical reference for Allen and O'Boyle's (2017) study, which linked Durkheim's theoretical legacy to its social and ideological context. Similarly, Vesey (2014) drew upon Lukes's approach to analyse Durkheim's intellectual formation within a broad historical and social structure. Flannery's PhD dissertation (2021) also builds on this trajectory, interpreting Durkheim as a liminal subject situated within transitional historical conditions and analysing the formation of his theoretical corpus through a renewed analytical lens.

Eribon's biography of Foucault (1992) demonstrates how the application of the historicity principle reveals theoretical ideas not as products of purely individual creativity but as formations shaped by political repression, intellectual milieus and personal experiences of the period in which the thinker lived. Similarly, Radkau's biography of Weber (2011) shows how Weber's intellectual outlook was conditioned by the structural forces of imperial-era Germany, the Protestant work ethic, bureaucratic

modernization and familial environment, thereby illustrating the necessity of reading biography together with its historical context. Both approaches confirm that intellectual biography is impossible without the historicity principle, since theoretical ideas themselves are outcomes of the historical and cultural structures in which they emerge.

Van Vleet (2014) likewise emphasizes that Ellul's worldview was shaped less by private experiences than by structural factors such as the political upheavals of the twentieth century, technological transformations and Christian intellectual traditions. The study shows that Ellul's dialectical mode of thinking arose within these historical and social tensions, demonstrating that his ideas were generated through the evolving conflicts of his time. This reinforces the significance of the historicity principle in biographical writing, because Ellul's theoretical stance can be understood only when situated within the social dynamism of the period in which he lived.

Jabarov's dissertation (2023) departs from the classical "life history" genre and reflects the core principles of the sociological biography method. Ellul's birth in Bordeaux and his spending most of his life there are interpreted not merely as geographical information but as a socio-cultural ecosystem that shaped his intellectual formation. In the early twentieth century, Bordeaux functioned as a multilayered urban environment grounded in a port economy and extensive commercial networks, where both Catholic and republican traditions coexisted. The city's social profile (comprising religious families, merchant strata, working-class groups and intellectual circles) constituted Ellul's childhood milieu. The heterogeneity of this environment nourished his interest in the Christian tradition while simultaneously cultivating his later critical approach to technological modernity. The social tensions, economic inequalities and rhythm of urban life in Bordeaux exposed Ellul from an early age to structural processes, which became clearly reflected in his mature conceptualisations of Christianity, freedom and propaganda/manipulation. In this sense, biographical data are employed not simply as personal life facts but as an analytical reconstruction of the historical and social structures that enabled Ellul's intellectual trajectory.

The worldviews of intellectuals such as Ellul demonstrate that identifying contradictions and integrating them into a coherent analytical line is essential in biographical writing, because human life is never a linear or harmonious process. It emerges from tensions produced by interactions among social strata, ideological influences, emotional experiences and institutional constraints. A dialectical approach does more than describe these contradictions: it shows how they enter into reciprocal interaction, under what conditions they reinforce one another and at which points they generate new forms of thought, positions or life choices. This process enables the biographer to uncover the internal logic of an individual's life trajectory and the contradictions embedded within it: a specific tension point creates the threshold for a new stage and when various motivations collide with historical conditions, a new behaviour or idea is formed.

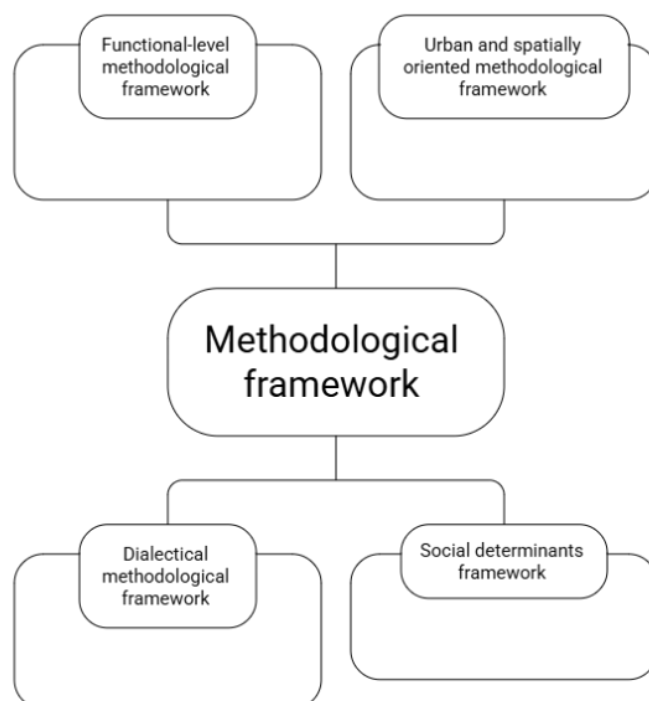
5. Proposal for a methodological framework for exemplary analyses

The strength of the historical-biographical approach lies in its ability to connect micro-level personal experiences, emotional turning points and individual choices with macro-level political, economic and cultural transformations. Within a biography, it becomes possible to uncover the historical factors that shape an individual's motivational structure: attachment to a particular ideology, the selection of a profession or the pursuit of a specific intellectual trajectory is often conditioned by the structural circumstances of

the period. Without taking this structural framework into account, no analytical conclusion about a person's life can possess scientific value and the account remains limited to descriptive narration.

A second analytical capacity of this approach is its ability to explain the social origins of ideas, theories and intellectual orientations. Sociology seeks not only to understand institutional functioning but also to grasp how ideas emerge and why they become salient in particular historical moments. The historical-biographical method demonstrates that intellectual production is shaped not only by personal effort but also by the historical tensions, political processes, cultural environments and patterns of social stratification within which an individual lives. For example, behind a sociologist's theoretical conception may stand the social structure of the city in which they spent their youth, historical events such as war or economic crisis or the intellectual atmosphere of their family environment. This method examines not the idea alone but the historical conditions of its production, treating theory as a social fact and thereby provides answers to the core questions of sociological epistemology.

The historical-biographical approach also makes it possible to clarify the micro-mechanisms of social change. Although societies are shaped by large structural transformations, these transformations manifest themselves in individual lives; people adapt to shifting social conditions, resist them or actively shape them through their own creative actions. Through biographical data, sociologists can analyse which choices individuals confronted in a given historical period, which social constraints structured these choices and how personal responses became interconnected with broader social processes. This dual mechanism reveals both the influence of structure on individual life and the role of individuals in structural transformation.

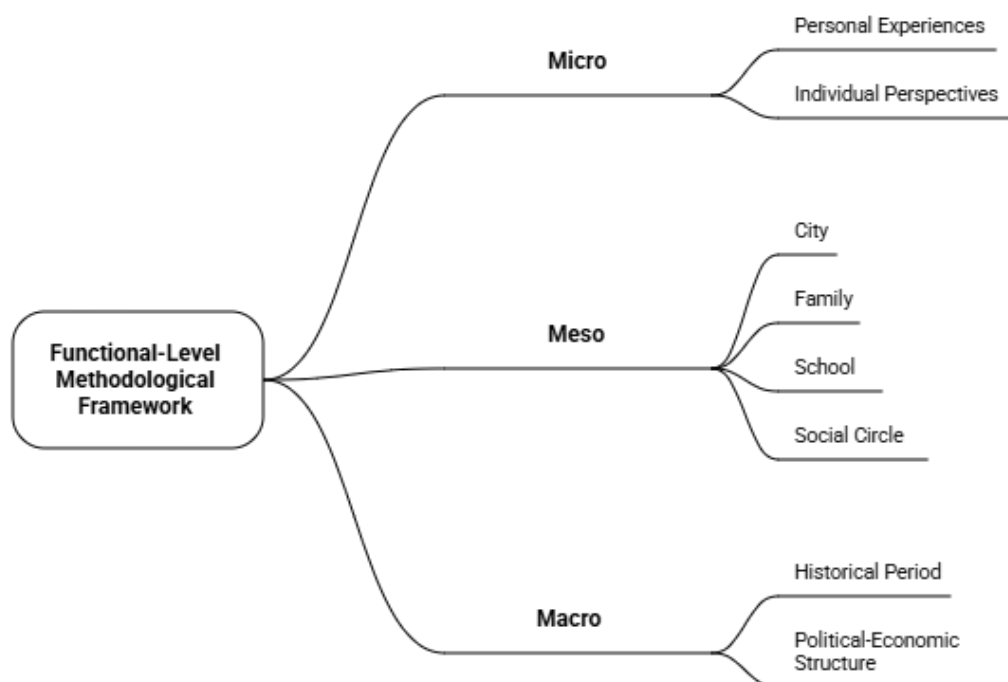


Graph 1. Proposed general methodological framework

The historical-biographical approach further provides extensive opportunities for sociological classification and comparison. Comparing the biographies of individuals

who lived in different periods or different societies allows researchers to see more clearly how social structures operate and how historical contexts shape mechanisms of human behaviour. It also enables sociologists to develop classifications, establish typological categories and identify the intellectual or behavioural outcomes associated with specific social positions. Comparative work based on biographical material demonstrates that similar structural conditions often produce similar intellectual or social results, whereas differing conditions generate divergent life trajectories.

In this regard, we can propose a four-level methodological framework: functional, dialectical, urban and spatial and social determinants. This can be visualised in Graph 1.

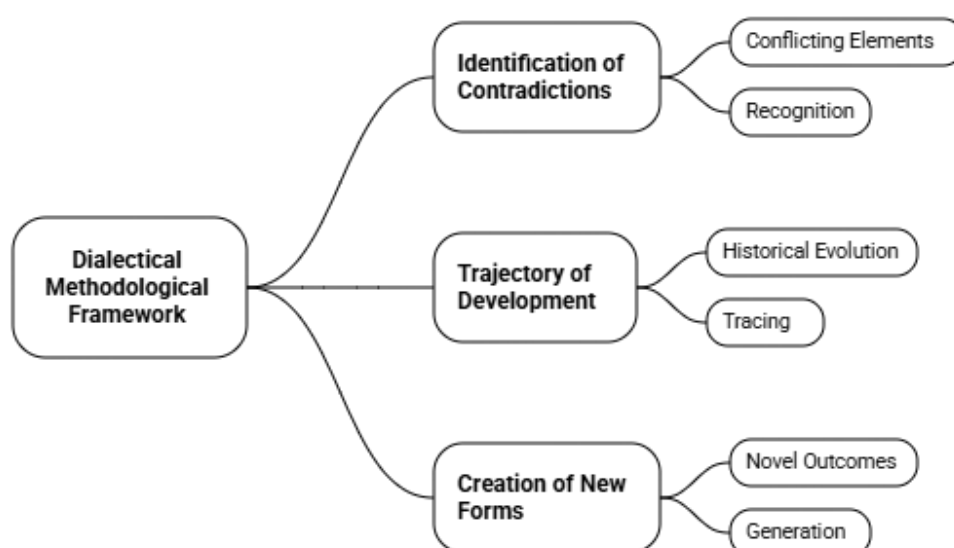


Graph 2. Functional-level methodological framework

The functional-level methodological framework enables biographical analysis to move beyond a mere sequence of personal events and instead conceptualise an individual's life as the intersection of three analytically interconnected levels. The micro level encompasses the individual's personal experiences, early socialisation, emotional turning points, the awakening of intellectual interests and the personal decisions that shape life trajectories. At this level, the focus is on the individual's inner world, psychological motivations and the structural significance of the personal events that determine the rhythm of life. Yet the micro level alone explains very little, because personal experience is always formed in interaction with the surrounding environment; therefore, the framework necessarily incorporates a second analytical domain, the meso level. The meso level investigates components such as the social and economic profile of the city in which the individual lives, family origins, the institutions in which they were educated, the social circles they entered and the local cultural environment. Its purpose is to reveal the social conditions under which the individual's life was shaped, the institutions that generated their social capital and the spatial experiences that oriented their intellectual and social development. The macro level is directly linked to the principle of historicity; here the researcher analyses the political and economic structures

of the period, the ideological atmosphere, technological change, major historical events such as wars and crises and the broader structural dynamics of society. Since the individual's micro experiences and meso environment acquire meaning only within the macro structure, analysing all three levels together renders the biography complete and sociologically comprehensive (Graph 2).

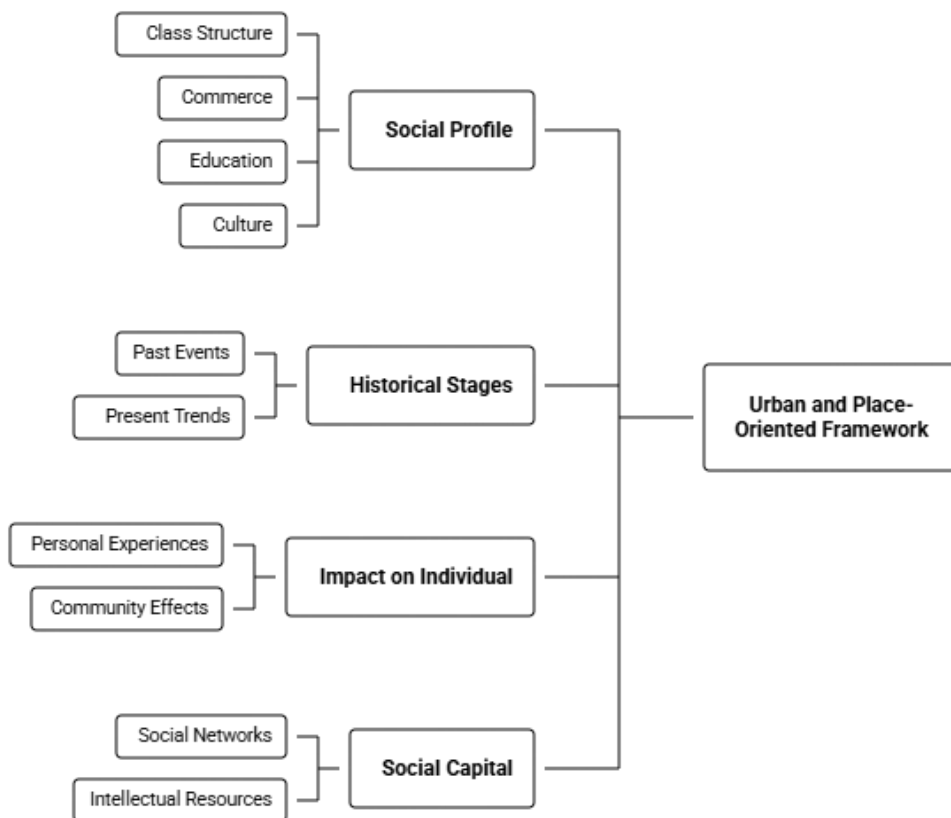
The dialectical methodological framework treats the internal and external contradictions in an individual's life as the central analytic mechanism in biographical research and examines how these tensions shape the person's developmental trajectory. In the stage of identifying contradictions, the researcher uncovers tensions between personal values and societal expectations, mismatches between social origin and intellectual aspirations, conflicts between religious-moral orientations and experiences of modernity or clashes between an authoritarian political regime and the individual's search for autonomy. Here, contradiction is not understood merely as a psychological conflict but as an objective tension generated by social structures within the individual's life. The dialectical approach recognises that human life does not unfold in stable harmony; it is shaped within a multilayered field of tensions generated through interactions with social strata, institutional forces and historical events. This stage exposes the structural dynamics hidden beneath the surface of the biographical narrative and links individual actions to broader social mechanisms. Tracing the historical trajectory of contradictions allows the researcher to understand how these tensions change over time, under what historical conditions they intensify or weaken and how they contribute to transitions between life stages. The principle of historicity plays a crucial role here, because contradictions are not static; they acquire new meanings as political regimes shift, technological innovations emerge, economic crises unfold or an individual's social networks expand. The third stage of the dialectical process, in which contradictions generate new forms and outcomes, reveals the essence of dialectics: turning points in a life trajectory often arise from pressure points produced by these tensions, giving rise to new value orientations, new intellectual positions or new social roles (Graph 3).



Graph 3. Dialectical methodological framework

The urban and spatially oriented methodological framework aims to connect an individual's life and intellectual development with the social structure of the city in which

they live. In this approach, the city is not viewed merely as a geographic location but as a complex structure where social relations, class dynamics, economic activities, educational institutions and cultural codes intersect. The city's social profile, including class stratification, the nature of commercial relations, the quality of educational institutions and the degree of religious and cultural diversity, directly shapes an individual's socialisation experiences, worldview and intellectual interests. Consequently, a reciprocal relationship emerges between a person's biography and the structure of the city: while individuals may influence their city, the city first shapes them. Within this framework, it becomes clear that understanding a biography requires mapping the individual's lived environment sociologically. It is precisely for this reason that the historical transformation phases of the city also become core analytic components. Every city undergoes transformation over time through economic crises, waves of modernisation, technological innovations, demographic shifts and the impact of political regimes. These changes reshape the city's cultural atmosphere, institutional power centres and the everyday experiences of its inhabitants. For instance, the influence of the Industrial Revolution on London transformed how the intellectuals living there perceived class relations; similarly, the modernisation of Bordeaux in the twentieth century shaped Ellul's reflections on technique and modernity. Urban transformation alters a life trajectory: it creates new opportunities, restricts older social roles, forms new networks and either expands or limits an individual's social capital.



Graph 4. Urban and place-oriented methodological framework

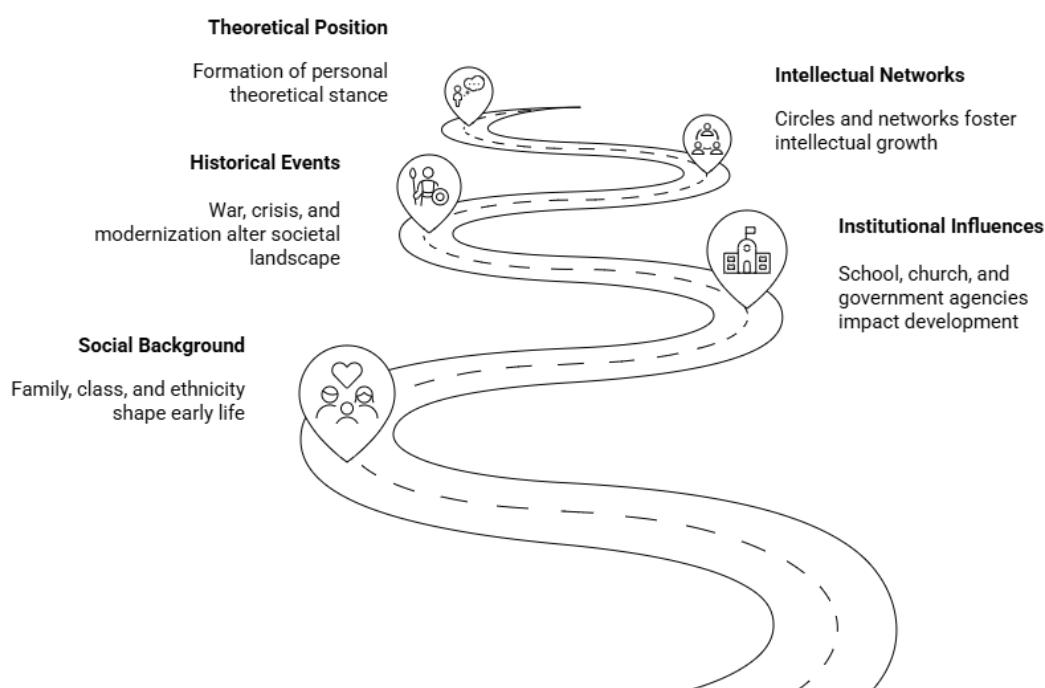
The practical functioning of this framework can be illustrated through the example of Jacques Ellul. Ellul's birth and lifelong residence in Bordeaux played a decisive role

in shaping his system of thought. In the early twentieth century, Bordeaux was simultaneously a major commercial city and a centre where strong Catholic traditions coexisted with emerging republican-modernist ideas. This hybrid social profile created the dialectical environment that explains both Ellul's attachment to Christian ethics and his critical stance toward technological modernity. The stages of Bordeaux's modernisation, the diversification of its economy, the expansion of its university environment and the growth of its intellectual circles enriched Ellul's intellectual stimuli and contributed to his development as a social critic. This example demonstrates that the urban and spatial methodological framework provides a powerful analytic basis for biographical interpretation: it enables reading an individual's life alongside the social energy, structural transformations and cultural atmosphere of the city (Graph 4).

The social determinants framework aims to analyse an individual's life in direct relation to the structural components of social reality and therefore integrates the core analytic principles of sociology into biographical inquiry. The first component of this framework, social origin (including family background, class position and ethnic or cultural identity) shapes how a person perceives the world, what kinds of social opportunities are available to them and which constraints they encounter. Social origin forms the starting point of an individual's life trajectory and provides the structural basis for explaining subsequent developments along that trajectory. For example, a thinker from a working-class background may be drawn toward issues of social justice, whereas an intellectual from a bourgeois family may prioritise themes such as individual responsibility or the ethics of autonomy. In this sense, social origin defines the "zone of possible development" for the individual in both sociology and biographical writing.

Institutional influences, such as schools, churches, universities and state organisations constitute the second layer of the social determinants framework and shape behavioural patterns from early socialisation into adulthood. These institutions are not merely formal structures that transmit knowledge and values; they also function as ideological apparatuses that determine how individuals think, which positions they come to adopt and within which normative boundaries they act. It is therefore not coincidental that a sociologist educated in a religious school may place stronger emphasis on ethical or spiritual questions, just as intellectuals shaped within the context of Republican French education often embrace secular and rationalist perspectives; these outcomes reflect institutional socialisation. Historical events, including wars, crises, political upheavals and waves of modernisation, form the third determinant and intervene in an individual's trajectory on a larger scale, often transforming a person's social position, values and intellectual direction. Such events reshape meso-level influences and generate new experiences and tensions at the micro level, enabling the researcher to observe dialectical development within the biographical narrative.

The final element of this framework, intellectual networks and circles, adds a collective dimension to an individual's life story and strengthens its connection to sociological analysis. A person is never merely an isolated thinking subject; rather, they are formed within specific environments such as academic communities, political groups, artistic circles or religious communities. These networks transmit knowledge, generate social capital and shape the direction of an individual's theoretical positions. Ultimately, the interaction of these four determinants – social origin, institutional influence, historical events and intellectual networks produces the individual's theoretical orientation and transforms biographical writing from a simple account of personal experience into an analytically grounded sociological framework (Graph 5).



Graph 5. Social determinants framework

The four-level methodological framework model that I propose creates a multilayered platform for both sociology and biographical writing. This framework makes it possible to trace an individual's life across a wide spectrum, from micro-level personal experiences to macro-level historical structures and it interprets biography not merely as a personal narrative but as a concrete micro-manifestation of the broader and more complex structure of social reality. As a result, the synthesis of these four approaches transforms biographical writing from a descriptive genre into an analytic-sociological method, while providing sociology with a systematic conceptual foundation for uncovering the multilayered mechanisms through which human lives are formed.

6. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that biography is not merely a description of an individual life but a powerful analytical instrument for uncovering the structural mechanisms of social reality. Tracing the intersections between personal experiences and historical processes enables sociology to understand how social change is manifested at the micro level. In this sense, biography gains its methodological value not by focusing on the individual as an isolated subject but by situating that individual within the broader social system. The analysis shows that human life trajectories are not random sequences; they are shaped by the opportunities and constraints produced by specific social, economic and cultural structures and revealing this framework is one of the central aims of sociological explanation.

The study further demonstrates that no single method is sufficient to understand an individual's developmental trajectory; instead, a multilayered methodological integration is required. In brief, the functional level explains the structures within which a person is socialised; the dialectical approach uncovers the underlying contradictions; the spatial and urban analysis reveals the social energies generated by the environments

in which individuals live; and the social determinants framework systematises the structural conditions shaping a life trajectory. Bringing these four approaches together shows that sociology can expand its methodological power not only through abstract theorising but also through the complex reading of concrete life narratives. This opens new interpretive possibilities for both theoretical models and empirical research.

Ultimately, the study reaffirms that the biographical approach is not a peripheral branch of sociology but a focused and productive analytical mechanism for understanding the essence of social reality. The methodological framework proposed here makes it possible to interpret individual lives within broad historical and structural contexts, thereby clarifying the mechanisms of social change and the dynamics through which theoretical ideas are formed. The model opens new avenues for future research, including the genealogies of sociological theories, the formation of intellectual environments and the ways in which individuals' social positions shift across different historical periods.

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