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FIRST DRAFT

Professional Biographies in Transition. Comparing Experiences of Workers and Business People in Post-Socialist Poland



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Postsocialist transformation as a deep and overwhelming change takes place on all levels of social reality. It shapes a new institutional order and re-shapes people's ways of thinking and acting. On the level of individual biographies it is marked as a turning point, which brings new opportunities and new constraints, introduces new rules and requires new strategies. Therefore it also brings the need of biographical work defined as the work of orienting temporal process of individual's life and of social change (Fischer-Rosenthal, 2000: 115) in order to maintain a consistent vision of self and of social world. The aim of our paper is to demonstrate the deep impact that postsocialist transformation and introduction of new market rules had on professional biographies. Trying to avoid a one-sided picture we have decided to compare work related experiences of two distinct groups, workers and business people, often considered as conflicting ones not only in their economic interests but also in their mental dispositions¹. We will present here some of the preliminary results concerning professional experiences proceeding and succeeding the system change. The paper is focused on the meanings given to work, both during socialism and at present moment, and the interplay between structural properties of social systems and individual professional careers². The conclusions are presented in the form of empirically grounded typology of biographical career patterns in both milieus investigated.

¹ In the public discourse in Poland business people are often told to be the driving force behind the "unavoidable" and "beneficial" changes whereas workers are simply treated as a "backward force" of the transformation. This oversimplified view has been much discussed in Polish sociological literature (cf. Jasiecki, 1998, Gardawski, 1997).

² We refer to the structure in Giddens' sense for whom it consists of "resources and rules", as the properties of social systems (cf. Giddens, 1984: 17). Social systems are "reproduced relations between actors or collectives, organized as regular social practices" (*ibidem*: 25). Rules are understood as "techniques or generalizable procedures applied in enactment/reproduction of social practices" (*ibidem*, 21). The rules which are the most durable in time and space will be called "institutional rules". Resources can be defined broadly as those properties of social system which are inseparably connected with the actors' capacities to exercise power (over material objects and social world, *ibidem*, 33). Further, we will make use of Bourdieu's division (cf. Bourdieu, 1986) into three types of resources defining social positions of actors: economic capital (material property and income), cultural capital (cultural competences, formal education and practical skills) and social capital (in form of potentially useful social networks based on belonging to a certain group).

Theoretical inspirations

Biography is understood here as an individually mediated social structure in a sense that it is, at least partially, provided by society and it institutionalises and organises the many types of timetables one has to go through in a lifetime (cf. Fischer-Rosenthal, 2000: 118; Ferrarotti, 2003: 25-32). We assume that biographical narratives, rooted in time, place and individual experience, are an excellent means to investigate both subjective and objective changes in professional careers. According to Hughes "every biography is a case-study of a career" (Hughes, 1997: 390) providing an excess to the inner perspective of actors. The concept of career may be defined very broadly as a person's course or progress through life or a distinct portion of life (Hughes, 1997: 389). In our paper, we are referring especially to those stages of life, which are determined by work³. Socially constructed and historically based career models in the work sphere function as an element of life's "normality", as a source of everyday life knowledge directing the course of action. These models mark life phases and turning points (cf. Prawda, 1987: 211) and often work as taken for granted biographical scenarios. System transformation is a process that shakes them, makes the previous strategies ineffective and re-opens the question of one's professional and personal future. When the previously prescribed biographical patterns tend to close options instead of opening them, then some new scenarios need to be worked out on one's own. As a consequence of transformation, also a narrower definition of career as a professional achievements involving working one's way up the ladder, entered the public discourse in Poland. In our paper, we will refer to it as "career making".

Inductive data analysis allowed us to redefine the concept of work as a central dimension of individual's life in both milieus investigated. Work appears as a fundamental category ordering and structuring the course of life, a significant reference point and one the main sources of identification (cf. Hughes, 1958). In the course of systemic change, the fact of work ceases to be an obvious element of individual life-course (cf. Drozdowski, 2002: 51) and begins to concentrate risks and incentives generated by the new social system. On biographical level, work experience assumes specific continuity, because successive experiences are based always on the previous practices and at the same time lead to the next

³ We refer to the concept of work in its most basic meaning, as "carrying out tasks which enable people to *make a living* within the environment in which they find themselves" (cf. Watson, 1995:113). This kind of definition should not be, however, misunderstood as reduction of work to economic functions. In our analysis, work appears always as directed towards the accumulation and conversion of different kinds of capital (not only economic, but also social, cultural and symbolic ones)

ones. Since the experience of work is always both individual and social (regarding that work always takes place in a certain social context and it involves participation in certain social relations), its analysis enables us to understand the dynamics of the continuity and the change, both on the level of social system and on the level of individual biographies.

Methodological note

The basis of our research constitutes the analysis of biographical narrative interviews with workers and business people, which have been carried out in the years 2001-2004 in Silesia region (Lower Silesia, Opole Silesia and Upper Silesia) in south-western part of Poland, resulting in more than one hundred interviews collected within each of the milieus⁴. The main feature of narrative interview approach is an attempt to encourage people to tell the story of their whole life, from their childhood up to the present. According to method's originators (cf. Schütze, 1983, 1984; Kallmeyer and Schütze, 1977, Hermanns, 1987), the spontaneously told life story is a sequential ordering of process structures (Schütze, 1983: 284), which describes the attitude of its teller towards the most important parts of his or her life⁵. The basic methodological framework of our research has been established by grounded theory methodology by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967). Theoretical sampling allowed us to differentiate our samples on the basis of maximization and minimization of differences between comparison groups, emerged as relevant during coding⁶. The coding procedure has been divided into two stages: open coding, done line-by-line in order to fracture biographical data and conceptualize regularities in the form of categories and their

⁴ Data for our study come from two PhD projects (one on workers and the other on actors of business field) based on the same methodological framework. For the heuristic reasons, workers have been defined as the full-time employees out of the agricultural sector occupying work positions localized on the lowest level of an enterprise hierarchy, performing manual work or routine tasks marked by the limited extend of decision and control. Business people are characterized broadly as men and women owning a firm (and employing at least five people) or occupying managerial and executive positions within service and industrial enterprises, banks and other financial companies. In case of workers, the analytical procedure of open coding (cf. Glaser, 1978: 56) encompassed 112 biographical accounts, in case of business milieu, 84 narratives were analysed so far.

⁵ Because of communicative constrains (cf. Kallmeyer, Schuetze, 1977: 162, 187-200), which guarantee mutual understanding between narrator and listener, the former cannot invent his/her life story in a completely free way. On the level of content, the freedom of self-presentation is additionally limited by cognitive figures of improvised narrative story which a narrator refers to (cf. Schütze, 1984: 84-115).

⁶ Theoretical sampling is defined as the process "whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them in order to develop his theory as it emerges" (cf. Glaser, Strauss, 1967: 45). The comparison groups in our study were based on the contrasts between professional experiences in the life course, current work position (and the way of its achieving) and general logic of biography (institutionalized, conditioned and intentional patterns). The data pile from which we sampled consisted of interviews collected in small, medium and big cities in Lower Silesia, Opole Silesia and Upper Silesia regions, among women and men working in public sector and private sector, in industry and service branches, in small, medium and big enterprises.

properties, and selective coding, conducted in order to discover the relationships between the category of professional career and other categories (cf. Glaser, 1978: 56-72). The saturation process (based on accumulation of our knowledge about the patterns underlying individual cases), allowed us to formulate preliminary typology, which can help us to understand biographical experiences as the consequence of broader, structural tendencies (cf. Bertaux, 1981: 40, Prawda, 1987: 217).

Stiff rules and flexible practices: the experience of work in socialism

We would like to begin our argumentation by demonstrating the most important institutional rules shaping work sphere in socialism. Our aim is to show the conditioning role of those rules for career patterns in both milieus investigated⁷. Writing about work experiences in socialism we refer first and foremost to the last twenty years of systems' existence, because the majority of our respondents who have any memories of the previous system entered labour market in the 70s and the 80s. Although the 70s exist in collective memory as the time of "prosperity on credit" and the 80s as overall economic "crisis", the rules in work sphere remained comparable, including full employment policy, the crucial social, economic and political role of state-owned companies, and the political determination of economy resulting in scarcity of incentives for educational investments and entrepreneurship. In the following passages we would like to discuss some of their practical consequences on the level of biographical experiences.

One of the most important premises of socialist economy was the policy of full employment which minimized risk unavoidably attached to a professional life in capitalist labour market (cf. Drozdowski, 2002: 51). The effect was specific "employment's naturalization" based on the assumption that having a job is obvious and need not to be achieved by any special personal efforts (cf. Poleszczuk, 1991: 110-113). On the level of occupational careers, it contributed, first, to the dominance of "work till retirement" pattern, characterized by lifetime employment in one company (or similar companies within a branch). Second, it was supportive for more pragmatic strategies which drew on connecting advantages of employment security with simultaneous undertaking of more innovative actions (like searching for better pays and social incentives in other companies, or working abroad during unpaid leaves). In general terms, it resulted in more "calm" and predictable work

situation than the contemporary one, which refers both to greater employment security and lesser engagement required at workplace⁸:

Arek: “There was a kind of inner calmness, those days, that they will not dismiss you, that you will have a job all the time” (A steelworker, M, 42) [W-5]⁹

Ewa: “Work was totally different than now. One was working eight hours ((*with nostalgia*)) and after eight hours one was closing... closing the door and no problems, no trouble. It used to be like that... but it will never come back...” (A manager in a bank, F, 48) [B-72]

The most striking side effect of the full employment policy was the lowering of work discipline. The phenomenon of “apparent work”, as the work which goes on without significant results, is evoked by managers and skilled workers as the result of “uncontrollability” of employees (who could always find job somewhere else), as well as the outcome of permanent “excess of employment” and the politization of command economy¹⁰. On the one hand, “silent consent” for evading officially prescribed regulations, norms and rules of actions at workplace was perceived as to some extent functional towards production demands (since the norms were imposed administratively without taking into account real possibilities of companies). On the other hand, it was treated also as the way of “making life easier”, which legitimized specific “resourcefulness” at workplace: appropriating certain materials and tools for private reasons, turning a blind eye to “slapdash work” and avoiding of work in general. Unspoken approval for alcohol at workplace, recalled especially by workers, complements the properties of “apparent work” category:

Marek: “One earned a lot of money, because one sold everything [tools and materials] and additionally one got his wage, and in any case one drunk away everything (...) There wasn’t any control over anything those days, nobody was in control (...) Everybody worked like this, this is how one worked” (A foreman in domestic appliances industry, M, 36) [W-13]

In the flood of low quality and apparent work there were also attempts to create the “enclaves of good work”. Some skilled workers and managers were constructing their

⁷ We assume that saturation process, based on systematic observation of the same principles underlying biographical actions, allows us to transcend individual features of any biography collected and conclude about macrosocial regularities (cf. Bertaux, 1981: 40)

⁸ Especially in biographies of business people, the clearer border between work and family life is stressed. The reference point is the present time, when full availability on evenings, weekends and holidays is required and the border gets more and more blurred.

⁹ Labels of interviewees contain: (occupation, sex (M=male, F=female), age) [data base type (W=workers, B=business people), code number of interview]. All names and place indicators have been changed.

¹⁰ Since the situation of companies in socialism was weakly related to their economic effectiveness, the number of employees used to substitute profitability as the measurement of it. As a result, state-owned enterprises began to compete with each other in order to gain more staff, offering special “bonuses” and “privileges” (like flats). (cf. Drozdowski, 2002: 53). It was another consequence of economy politization which can be defined as subordination of economic efficiency to the rules of political rationality.

identities on the basis of work ethos, and the definitions of selves as specialists or craftsmen¹¹. In this sense, work could become an intrinsic value grounding a constant motivation to improve one's qualifications, despite of the overall work context.

Eryk: "Even though it was a socialist firm, so one can say everything the worst about it, but I... I created an enclave, an enclave of good work. So I started alone and then the team grew to more than a dozen people... the construction team, designing devices of digital automation where I was introducing technologies... the most recent technologies that appeared in the field of digital systems. And I had a few successes there, among others, ten patents." (A president of a printing house, M, 55) [B-80]

If the full-employment policy was the main system's principle, then state-owned companies were the crucial place of its realization. Socialistic enterprises created specific "social worlds" (cf. Strauss, 1991), characterized by multiple *activities* encompassing not only production and economic tasks, but also special commitments connected to housing problems, social services (education, social welfare, health care), leisure (holidays facilities), as well as economic redistribution of rare goods and – unsuccessful thought attempted – political indoctrination (cf. Żukowski, 1994). The employment climate in state-owned companies in socialism can be described as more collectivist and more informal than the one after the systemic change. The less formal relations within the companies and greater embedding in social bonds at shop-floor level, appreciated especially by workers, had two important consequences. On the one hand, they brought about greater dependency of professional career on informal "cliques" constituted by employees with long seniority and better "contacts" in enterprises. On the other hand, they could be described as less competitive and more "cheerful" than contemporary relations. In biographies, it is symbolized by the picture of a "decent director" who used to talk with "ordinary workers" and "shake their hands". The memories about more "intimate" atmosphere between employees tend to appear in both milieus, but they are more typical of workers:

Przemysław: "People were closer to each other. How did I understand it? Because, simply, you could here, there wasn't envy here, as such. You could make jokes, fool around... And we met in all sorts of, either during matches or bonfires, or during outings to a café, or to a restaurant. And this was totally different" (An operator in an automobile industry, M, 50) [W-79]

The paternalist socialist enterprise was governed first and foremost by political principles. Being the main place of laying claims towards authorities and redistributing goods in order to maintain social peace, it enhanced the position of workers, who in case of conflicts could always appeal to their ideologically privileged position to execute rights

¹¹ In 80s, the need for "real work" was related to the specific vision of market economy, which would provide clearer organizational rules and guarantee work for those who really want to work, without losing advantages of paternalist state (cf. Kolarska-Bobińska, 1998: 123-138). Skilled workers' critique of pathological attitudes at workplace constituted "festive" dimension of their mentality in socialism (cf. Gardawski, 2000: 323).

officially guaranteed to them by communist ideology¹². In case of business people, the influence of state in organizational and production decisions was perceived as more problematic, since it made efficient management impossible and contributed to greater dissatisfaction with work, especially in time of economic crisis in the 80s.

Włodzimierz: “Work in the 80s, I don’t know, it was like... it required calmness, it was poorly, miserably, it was the black night of martial law that mister Jaruzelski prepared for us. Managing a firm was like one big problem connected with the endless shortages of material, equipment, with the slump of investments, with the general social apathy in the country, with reluctance. People were taking on their duties without any enthusiasm. The 80s were terrible. Well, everybody will say that. (...) Every company had, as they called themselves, a guardian from the security service who was staying permanently in the firm, and he was sniffing around, inquiring and everything was so distasteful.” (A co-owner of a construction company, M, 54) [B-68]

Constant production problems in state-owned companies, caused by the shortage of raw materials, delays in supply and randomness of administrative decisions, were to some extent counterbalanced by black market circulation and the activity of marginalized private firms¹³. Private entrepreneurs, who in 1988 constituted very small group of three per cent of professionally active population (cf. Morawski, 1995: 67), took advantages of the scarcity of consumer goods, fitting the niches left by the centrally planned economy. In order to deal with the unpredictable and hostile institutional context, continuous re-qualifying and changing of business type were necessary:

Alfred: “One had to have a lot of fortitude to conduct this [business] activity in communist time. I managed to do it, somehow, perhaps because I was changing very often the fields I was working in (...) I was turning myself towards what was the most needed those days, I was always landing in these gaps which were in market, and these gaps, which authorities of the time wanted to fill somehow, enabled the people like me a kind of short existence” (A president of a company producing cosmetic goods, M, 73) [B-76]

The politization of economic rules questioned the significance of individual efforts and qualifications for gaining economic and symbolic rewards for the work performed. First, the lack of political capital¹⁴, if manifested through opposition towards the Communist Party and its functionaries in a company, hindered the possibilities of professional advancement,

¹² Without real engagement in communist organizations (which appears as very rare in narratives collected), workers took advantages of political capital ideologically guaranteed to them by the state. One of the biggest paradoxes created by “real socialism” in Poland was “Solidarity” movement, which core was constituted by workers in big, state-owned industrial enterprises laying “socialist” claims against communist state.

¹³ For reasons of limited space, we cannot deal with the problem of “black economy” in socialism extensively in this paper. In biographies collected, it is represented, among other things, by already mentioned “resourcefulness” at workplace (relying on reaping personal profits of materials belonging to state-owned companies and taking of unregistered jobs on side), “merchant tourism” (the phenomenon appeared especially in the 80s and it was based on reselling goods smuggled from other countries to Poland) and the great importance of corruption practices on every level of social reality (beginning from shopping and gaining basic services in public institutions and finishing on the level of political decisions).

¹⁴ Political capital, connected with belonging to ideologically privileged groups, replaced economic capital and relativized value of cultural capital in the circumstances of a non-market, centrally planned economy. It guaranteed to its owners the priority of access to public goods and services (cf. Bourdieu 1991, 32).

even if one possessed required qualifications and skills. Second, some of the occupations, work positions and branches were politically more privileged than the others, which called into question the meritocratic rules in general. Socialism enhanced the value of hard, physical labour offering high economic rewards for skilled workers in heavy industry, which are recalled by them until now¹⁵. Workers' satisfaction with the wages can be contradicted to the stories of those who were to become later business people, who entered work market as university graduates and experienced great frustration because of low salaries:

Ernest: "There were excellent earnings, big earnings, I have earned really a lot... It was such money, oh my God! ((6)) In those years, I was seventeen, so I was snot-nosed kid, and I earned simply gigantic money. I could buy a car. I was seventeen, I worked one year and I bought a car, and I put money in the building society book" (A turner in machine industry, M, 37) [W-87]

Piotr: "Getting a job just after studies (...) I could buy for my salary five bottles of vodka (...) And my colleagues, my peers, who were technicians, or even not technicians, they were installers, electricians, after vocational school, and it appeared that they had been already contract workers abroad. Libya and Iraq were fashionable those days, they travelled to Iraq, they had had already a car, a flat, a family. And when I began, I had nothing. (A manager in international company, M, 37) [B-9]

If meritocracy can be defined as consisting in "rewarding for abilities, for investing in own development and improving own skills of which the most general indicator is the level of education" (cf. Domański, 2000: 37), the socialist society was not a meritocratic one, and the politization of economic rules was the most important reason for it¹⁶. The lack of significantly bigger economic rewards for higher education and performing more complex jobs, and the importance of political capital for occupational promotion discouraged from attempts to invest in own qualifications and skills. Since socialist economy was first and foremost oriented towards heavy industrialization model, the predominance of vocational education (in workers' milieu) and higher technical education (in the case of business people occupying managerial positions in socialism) were functional to the system needs (cf. Cybula, 1998: 211). As a result, both workers and prospective business people entered new social reality equipped with quickly devaluing educational background, which did not facilitate adaptation to more flexible and competitive labour market:

Marek: "I finished vocational school and I decided that I would go to work. Once, it was like that, that if one was after vocational school, one was after a school, you know? One was after a school. And today the vocational school is not a school anymore, it is simply ((laughter)) such a supplement to primary school (...) I have no education and so on, to climb higher" (A foreman in domestic appliances industry, M, 36) [W-13]

¹⁵ Interestingly, such memories never appear in biographies of women, unskilled workers and employed outside 'key branches', showing inner inequalities within working-class milieus in socialism (cf. Malanowski, 1981).

¹⁶ The relationship between incomes and education level was nonlinear and unclear to greater extent than it is now (cf. Drozdowski, 2002: 72). However, the level of education positively correlated with individual economic wealth (measured, among other things, by owned household equipments), which is sometimes explained by greater resources of social capital possessed by university graduates in socialism (*ibidem*, 78-79).

Piotr: “The beginning of my work was especially difficult because it fell in the time of big economic changes. It was the end of 80s. When I got employed there was still command-distribution economy and then it soon turned out that there was a new totally different economy. And then it turned out that we were completely unprepared and even I as a young man, after university graduation, I wasn’t prepared either for the work in market conditions, everything has changed. One had to change his consciousness (A manager in international company, M, 37) [B-9]

Between state and market: work experience in the course of transformation

The political impulse for changes in economic sphere was the plan of reforms elaborated by Leszek Balcerowicz, the minister of finance in the first non-communist government in Poland in 1989. Based on neoliberal principles, it assumed, among other things, economic stabilization (fiscal and budget discipline), macroeconomic liberalization, the reduction of subsidies for state-owned companies and their consequent privatization (cf. Drozdowski, 2002: 146)¹⁷. Political decisions had clear consequences for the rules underlying the sphere of work after 1989, contributing to the marketization of economy and labour market, subordinating companies’ function to economic principles (like profit and productivity), and increasing importance of education and occupational flexibility for distribution of economic and symbolic rewards. Because neoliberal plans quickly encountered different “barriers” resulted from competences and resources of social actors involved (cf. Mach, 1998: 32-33), the real “rules of the game” began to remind more amalgamation of the new and old action patterns that the clear implementation of tried-and-tested models of capitalist modernization (cf. Stark, Bruszt, 2001).

One of the most striking results of systemic change in Poland was the process of systematic (though not always consequent) retreat of state from controlling of economic matters. From the perspective of business people, it led to the effect of "spread wings". Replacing the barriers of command economy with the new economic rules contributed to the formation of business field¹⁸, which became the arena of testing oneself in the market conditions and taking advantage of the unique chance. Economic boom in the first half of 90s enabled high profitability of the new firms and gave a feeling that finally one was able to demonstrate how much s/he is worth. At the beginning of transformation, individual initiative

¹⁷ Some of the changes already began in the late 80s, when (in December 1988) the last communist government approved the Law on Economic Activity abolishing most of the licensing requirements for setting up and running a private business. “The Balcerowicz’s plan”, however, gave them legislative support, contributing to overall transformation of the rules governing Polish economy and labour market.

¹⁸ With the reference to Bourdieu’s definition of the term (cf. Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992: 97), the business field can be understood as configuration of objective relations between positions of actors participating in business activity, in which “the stakes” of actions are determined by economic principles (like profit, efficiency, productivity etc.)

and entrepreneurship became highly profitable resources, which were efficient even if not accompanied by specialized knowledge and the significant amount of economic capital. As a consequence, the access to business field was almost unlimited, contributing to a great diversity of career paths leading to it. Apart of new generation of managers, who entered labour market with new high educational resources and a strong need for success, there were also a large category of those who were able to convert their economic, social and cultural resources, gained in the previous system, into assets valuable in the new reality¹⁹.

Borys: “In those days, we were maturing to create our own visions of the career of enterprise, and we carried them out in our own enterprise /y. We acquired experiences in big state-owned firms (...) It was the beginning of 1988. We started the firm from the scratches because ten people who started the firm, counting in today’s currency, each of us invested five zlotys. So, the firm’s founding capital was fifty zlotys. (...) And that’s how we started a firm that employed around three hundred people. (...) All what we had was just willingness to work, strong motivation, an aim to provide workplaces for ourselves. We’re not rich men, we didn’t focus on our own benefits, we’re more focused on building the firm, on giving work to people.” (a director of a firm producing advertising materials, M, 50) [B-84]

The end of policy of full employment, the economic reconstruction and the privatization of state-owned companies contributed to slow, though significant, decline of career model assuming “work till retirement”, which dominated in socialism. The risk of unemployment, minimized in socialist society, comes back as the reference point for professional experiences, contributing to the “greater respect for job” in workers milieu, and the increasing value of work for self-esteem and the evaluation of other people’s status (in both milieus investigated). The introduction of rules rewarding individual efficiency and productivity necessitates greater engagement in job performed. In case of workers, it refers first and foremost to the enhanced work discipline in the context of more and more competitive labour market and continuous threads of lay-offs²⁰. In business people milieu, work is perceived not only as much more challenging than in socialist time, but also as to greater extent determining the structure of everyday life and the scope of personal goals:

Przemysław: „At that time, work was a duty...And nowadays it is an achievement...If you have work today, it means that you deserved it... It has some good points, because those people who didn’t want to work were eliminated (...) [Nowadays], the one who has work... is a man who’s got class, you can say. Something similar like from the stories [about] what used to be before the war, as far as I’ve heard” (An operator in an automobile industry, M, 50) [W-79]

¹⁹ The career paths leading to business field are described in detail in the next section of the paper. The problems of capital conversion within the new economic elite in Poland have been discussed at length in Polish sociological literature (cf. Jasiecki, 2002; Szelenyi, Wnuk-Lipinski, Treiman, 1995)

²⁰ In both milieus, the danger of occupational degradation and losing job is also related to broader “side bets”, external to the occupation itself but bounded with the fact of employment (cf. Becker, 1960). In the case of workers, side bets are usually connected with family life (“providing function” of work) and embedding in social bonds (like long-term friendships and camaraderie at workplace or “contacts” resulting from seniority). For the business people, side bets associated with occupational milieu seem to be less important, while the significance of those connected with family (and achieved living standard) remains central.

Mirosław: “In practice, work nowadays is, how to explain it? Well, it fulfils the whole life nowadays (...) There is no longer a model: no matter what you do, you will get your salary, unfortunately, it’s not like that anymore. Without work you cannot live today. People work sixteen, eighteen hours [per day] (An owner of a construction company, M, 45) [B-34]

In the course of economic reconstruction and privatization, the social worlds of state-owned enterprises underwent systematic disintegration. First, the principles of profit and cost calculation contributed to the withdrawal of companies from non-economic functions performed by them in socialist time. Second, the climate of work also changed significantly, reflecting both tense situation on labour market and general trend towards flexibility, versatility and accountability of individual employees in modern capitalism (cf. Vilroxx, 1999: 68). In the narratives collected, the latter process is indicated by the decreasing role of collective embedding at shop-floor level, lowering industrial solidarism and the growth of competitive attitudes. If socialist enterprise “feudalized” work relations, binding occupational positions with the years spent in “profession”, new conflicts are interpreted as the consequence of organizational change, which undermined seniority-based social capital and juxtaposed “old staff” with newcomers, often younger and better educated, but first and foremost – not involved in the existing social networks²¹.

Henryk: “At that time the relations were different, so friendly, and now there’s, as they call it, a rats race, so one is an enemy for the other. There’s a competition, they compete (...) Well, young people are right now better prepared, I mean they graduate universities, they master computer, they treat things in a different way. Us, as older people, we’ve got... such norms, rules, we’re afraid of direct... we’re trying... we’re more traditionalistic (A manager in insurance company, M, 51) [B-67]

Wanda: “Somebody has done a sinister work in this company, I don’t know who....Somebody who wanted to set the staff at variance with each other. How? They said: ‘Listen, these [women] who would come from [another department], they have secondary [education], they would take you all money (...) And there is still this kind of mistrust between the old and the new ones (...) (A lean production worker in a chemical plant, F, 54) [W-8]

The organizational change, triggered off by marketization of economic rules at macrosystemic level, increases the importance of effectiveness and productivity, and subordinates other aspects of work to economically measured results. Since informal work relations, which used to dominate in socialism appear as contradictory to the principles of economic calculation, there is a tendency to replace them by more formalized organizational solutions. For the workers, it is often just another indicator of more anxious, demanding and, in a broad sense, less “human” work situation in comparison to previous time. Business

²¹ The analysis of narratives collected confirms sectorial differentiation of labour relations described by quantitative researchers (cf. Gąciarz, 1999). Individualization of employees’ role is positively related to organizational change (if the reference point is constituted by the situation in socialism), with two extremes constituted by more “collectivistic” state-owned enterprises and much more “individualized” situation in corporate firms in private sector. A special case is represented by small private firms (with Polish capital), in which work relations are usually also much more informal, or even “familiar”.

people are more likely to support more formal and clear-defined division of organizational roles since they regard it as unavoidable from the viewpoint of economic efficiency and running the business on more and more competitive market:

Janina: „I’m terrified by the way the people are treated by [our] manager. Because he treats us like... an object. I told him: “Please, have a look, we cannot work any longer like that, in such pace, we cannot run, we must work calm”. And you know, he didn’t even come to me (...) After all, we understand, we want to work in this company, we understand that the owner has demands, that it’s difficult to find a job on the market, that it’s hard to sell our product, that it must be really good to sell it. We understand it, but some people want to tighten the screw to the extent, that we cannot breathe anymore” (domestic appliances assembler, F, 52) [W-7]

Andrzej: “My approach is that... an employee cannot be a friend... one needs to respect him, one needs to talk to him, but on the other hand one cannot allow familiarity and... slacking... I started counting soberly and it looked like we almost ran the business at a loss... that the employees were inefficient... It has changed... My father was running the business as... as it was a family business... how to call it? ((5 sec.)) In a way that previously the market used to function... it was nice, everybody was nice... there was a product ready, selling well (...) But at a certain moment it stopped, it turned upside down (...) and my approach has been changed, one can change (...) and I felt that I need to act in a different way... so there were dismissals, there were reorganizations... and when I look at turnover, let’s say... I see effects” (a co-owner of a publishing company, M, 34) [B-82]

Systemic transformation reduced the significance of political capital and enhanced the importance of cultural assets (formal education and skills) for distribution of economic rewards in the society²². It called into question the social (economic and symbolic) value of hard physical labour and vocational education, which, along with the devaluation of political capital gained in socialism, resulted in undermining of the symbolic status of workers. “Symbolic degradation” is reflected especially by those who in the previous system worked in the “key branches”, privileged by communist authorities and playing the crucial role in “Solidarity” revolt in 80s:

Włodzimierz: “The worst thing, in our opinion, [in the opinion] of those casual, ordinary people living here in Silesia, it’s that... suddenly from this pedestal, from such charisma (...) suddenly this [mining] became unwanted by anybody (...) They coddled us so much... they told us this crap... that we were, as I said, the salt of the black earth. And suddenly they all have cheated us.” (A miner, M, 43) [W-40]

Another consequence of meritocratization is the stronger connection of job positions available to individuals with formal education requirements. As we mentioned before, the first period of systemic transformation was marked by higher possibilities of occupational mobility

²² In the first half of 90s, “Polish society appeared to fit most closely the ideal of meritocracy, as a degree was clearly best rewarded there” (Domański 2000: 124). However, biographical narratives reflect at least two important countertrends to this tendency. First, the role of political capital did not disappear since it significantly facilitates access to certain positions in business field (like membership in the supervisory board of commercialised companies in public sector) and special economic rewards in the formerly privileged branches (like mining industry, cf. Gadowska, 2002). Second, the lack of social capital (in the form of strong “backing” or “recommendations”) hinders occupational promotion and finding a better job, which is especially criticized by those whose advancement has been blocked, despite of investments in educational resources.

even without formally certified knowledge. In the course of time, insufficient amount or irrelevant type of education became a barrier in climbing up the organizational ladders and began to reduce individual chances not only to keep currently occupied post, but also to find comparable one in the future. The investment in education is usually regarded as the most efficient strategy for social advancement and improving one's occupational position²³. Since its accomplishment usually requires institutional support and specific resources already at the starting point, its scope is much more limited in worker's milieu than among business people²⁴. Workers' educational investments results mostly from individual decisions, rarely supported by companies and carried out as consequent biographical plan for "better life". In the case of business people, numerous and frequent courses follow more often from organizational requirements and the specific demands of business field, in which educational investments are not only means to acquire and broaden professional knowledge, but also the proof of individual eagerness for career development:

Michał: "Life is too long to work one's arse there, in the pit, to work that hard. So I thought, I found that I had to do studies, which could help me, later on, to improve my life (...) Once, you used to get, for example, twenty days additional leave from your company, they'd paid for [your] extramural studies (...) [Today] I'm studying actually on my own (...). Afterwards, after graduating, I don't know, I will surely wait for promotion, because I'm not studying in order to still work physically. It's a point of honour, also...because those studies cost me a lot" (A miner, M, 27) [34]

Dariusz: „I am notoriously in some training courses, in some courses. And I provoke it also, I mean, I don't wait until the employer sends me, but I want it by myself. Because I think that a firm should work this way, that there should be notorious additional trainings. Actually, I try to send my employees also to training courses, because it's such a additional source, a stimulus, a motivation, if you observe it and you compare with the others" (A manager in a printing house, M, 33) [B-81]

In socialist economy, the specific flexibility of organizational practice was, at least to some extent, unavoidable because of constant discrepancy between "production plans" and allotted "production means". Its necessity in contemporary work sphere has two different reasons. First, it results from general trends in capitalist labour market and the changing nature of work organizations, marked by the transition towards knowledge-based economy (cf. Thompson, McHugh, 2002). Second, it is the consequence of fluid and hybrid character

²³ Educational boom in 90s confirms the popularity of educational investments in contemporary Polish society. According to the last national census, the percentage of Poles with university diploma increased from 6,5 per cent in 1988 to 10,2 per cent in 2002. In the year 2003/2004 almost 52% of inhabitants in the age of 19-24 were involved in educational process (Small Statistical Yearbook of Poland 2004).

²⁴ By institutional support we mean possibilities and encouragements to improve one's skills created by work organizations. The resources which facilitate educational investments are economic capital (certain amount of money which could be invested), social capital (support from family and friends, incentives from organizations) and cultural capital (transmission of educational aspirations within a milieu or a family). Because of scarcity of resources and organizational support, contemporary Polish workers rarely decide to invest in own skills. However, they did recognize well the new meritocratic rules, which the tendency to support their children's education, very common in narratives collected, confirms.

of institutional rules in the transitional period in Poland, which must be continuously monitored and learnt by the social agents involved. In business milieu, flexibility refers not only to the unremitting improvement of practical competencies and skills, and full time engagement (up to the sacrificing of own private life) for the firms' sake, but also to an ability to develop organizational strategies suitable to "survive" in more and more competitive market. In the case of workers, it concerns both flexibility at workplace (as the ability to perform different tasks allotted) and pragmatic activity after hours, relying on simultaneous performing of different jobs in order to improve own living standard²⁵:

Arek: "I have never earned my living from a single source, I have been always doing something more. Because, when I still worked in [factory], when those 90s began...everybody started those business activities, so I was also running a rotisserie [firm]. I mean, only in Saturdays and Sundays, because in other days I worked in [factory] (...) Nowadays I have also the second job, additionally... Not only in the Mill, but also a second, additional job (...) I had to retrain throughout all my life, or to train and learn something new, from the very beginning, when I began to work, there was always something... And not, that only here, blindly and that's the end (...) There were some guys, that...he did only this, who didn't do anything else in his life, he [dealt] only with four screws, and so...this guys aren't anymore in our Mill (...) (A steelworker, M, 42) [W-5]

Włodzimierz: "I began to learn it by reading the regulations which began to function in new reality, in such [economic] reality. I began a little bit to adapt to a totally new world. And in 1991 it was clear that firms, in the shape in which I worked until then, could not withstand all of this, that some changes are needed (...) Actually, within two years we've broken almost all contractual connections with the parent company and it's appeared, time has shown, that it had been very healthy move (...) And there has begun a kind of game which you've had to learn quickly. One, who had not learnt it quickly, was put back from this business. And there a good many firm went bust, at this time. And I think that we've managed to do it, we've succeeded. We've been able to pull us together in the new conditions, we've adapted organizational structures to those needs, to those struggles" (A co-owner of construction company, M, 54) [B-68]

Our argumentation so far was aimed at discussing the most important institutional rules (the properties of social systems of socialist society and the present society) which determine specific work experiences of workers and business people in contemporary Poland. In the next part, we would like to demonstrate the relationship between mentioned rules and professional career patterns, sketching preliminary typology which summarizes the analysis conducted.

Tentative typology of biographical careers patterns

Comparing workers' and business people's career paths present during two periods, before and after the system change, we have developed a tentative typology of career patterns

²⁵ The most widespread examples are simultaneous employment in more companies or self-employment in own, usually family-based firm. On the one hand, this kind of activity was not unknown in socialism. On the other hand, systemic transition created circumstances in which it is more often interpreted as "necessity", conditioned by lowering wages and uncertain situation on labour market.

realized in these two groups. The typology concerns different strategies developed in the sphere of work in face of changing institutional and organizational rules. The comparative procedure was twofold. First, the work experiences of interviewees were compared in the context of rules dominating in professional sphere in “real socialism” and introduced after the system change. Second, we contrasted general “logics of biographies” in order to reconstruct the specific configurations of biographical process structures describing the attitude of interviewees towards the most important part of their professional lives (cf. Schütze, 1983: 284). At this point, the criteria for the types building have been derived from Fritz Schuetze’s (1984: 92) differentiation among institutionalized action schemes, biographical (intentional) action schemes, conditioned action schemes marked by loss of control over one’s life, and metamorphosis (biographical turning points). By the means of systematic comparisons, we have distinguished three basic career types: anchor, patchwork and construction.

ANCHOR TYPE

Anchor type of career reflects the biographical action schemes oriented towards the persistence of institutionalized career patterns established in socialist society. Within this type, the new rules introduced after 1989 in the sphere of work are integrated into the model of employment till retirement which dominated in real socialism. It represents the career embedded in one company or one branch, in which long seniority creates significant resources of social capital bounded with worked-out occupational position. A typical pattern assumes occupying continuously the same position or working slowly ones way up the organizational ladder mainly on the basis of social capital. Since institutionalized action schemes changes, the game rules at workplace cannot remain unchanged, but one tries to develop various adaptation strategies to keep his/her job position or, if possible, to improve it within the possibilities of possessed resources and institutionally provided channels of organizational advancement.

Embedding in company and embedding in occupation support intergenerational traditions of craft and provide the feeling of belonging. Developing competence and skills at certain type of work becomes a source of self-conception. Embedding is often accompanied by the fear of change, understood as leaving a well known world. A common response to lowering economic rewards would be rather jobs on side and additional activity after hours than searching new work offers. In such cases the main work place provides security and

emotional reference point while additional activities serve for economic advancement. Emotional bonds serve also as justification of the lack of professional mobility.

Zygmunt: “One grows attached to certain things. To certain things one grows attached, and the same to a company. It’s a pity. If one is so many years at work, it’s...something. Leaving, it’s for me, I cannot imagine to leave. It used to be here...I’d treated this company as a family. There were my colleagues, I’d spent with them one eighth of my life. I’m sorry, one third, because eight hours. (A foreman in timber industry, M, 62) [16]

Roman: “Of course, at that time I had some offers to work somewhere else, but I made a mistake, and I was still at such age that I could... I even should have done it, you know... Staying long in a firm is not really good (...) I could, I could... I had various offers, from Warsaw, from Poland, and not only from Poland, but somehow, I don’t know, I grew fond of this company and I stayed. And now unfortunately I’m too old to look for something new.” (a manager in a clothing company, M, 51) [B-52]

In the course of time excessive anchoring in one company and work position may turn out a strategic mistake because it closed other opportunities and led to the point where changing a job seems so risky that it is thought to be impossible.

Anchor type of career, very frequent among workers, is the least common among business people. On the one hand it symbolizes stability and security, therefore is desired mostly by workers and small owners, on the other hand it is described as contrary to the rules of modern flexible work market and thus treated as anachronistic.

Social transformation weakens the institutional and ideological basis of anchor type of careers. Maintaining the same work position not only requires larger amount of learning but also some additional justification practices stressing emotional attachment to the work place and distance towards competitive and aggressive career making described as rats’ race.

PATCHWORK TYPE

Patchwork type expresses the changes in career patterns conditioned by external circumstances, resulting both from the specificity of transitional period (marked by tensions connected with marketization and economic reconstruction) and from the global tendencies in capitalist economy (assuming general flexibilization of work sphere). It manifests itself in the diversification of occupational activities and the multiplication of workplaces an individual works in during his/her life course. In this type, the transition between different employment places is rarely intentional, even though it can be presented as such. Careers are governed rather by the logic of coincidence and necessity than the logic of purposeful and long-term planning of own professional life. In some cases, patchwork career is accompanied by the specific “naturalization” of occupational change as required by the rules of functioning

in the modern labour market. In the other cases, it appears as biographical trajectory, reflected as systematic loss of control over one's life (cf. Schuetze, 1984: 92)

Understood in the terms of intensified occupational mobility, patchwork type of career existed already in socialism, yet in two different forms. The first one, more intentionally planned than externally conditioned, assumed wage-oriented fluctuation between different companies, supported by the policy of full employment and non-economic incentives offered by the state-owned enterprises²⁶. The second one was related to the situation of small private entrepreneurs, who were forced to frequently change the business type in order to "fit the niches" created by centrally planned economy.

In the context of systemic change, the externally conditioned switching among different employment places refers first and foremost to the situation of the lack of sufficient and relevant resources: cultural capital (formal education and practical skills) and social capital (in the form of worked-out occupational position). Patchwork career is the primary experience for the most of young workers and some lower rank managers, entering more and more demanding labour market without sought-after education and necessary experiences. Its other sources are uncontrollable processes connected with economic reconstruction (like bankruptcy of a company resulting in group lay-offs) and organizational changes in which weaker resources and lack of flexible skills decrease one's chances to keep his/her job. Finally, it describes the situation of small Polish entrepreneurs struggling to "survive on the market" through continuous switching among different trades:

Bolesław: "I've already worked... as I've counted it recently... well, at twelve places. And it has nothing, it's not connected at all with... that I was dismissed on disciplinary grounds, because I did not... but, simply, these are the days. I worked one week, two weeks, if I was lucky, then a month. And then an employer used to give me a notice (...) I accepted any work... I hadn't.... I gave up my pride (A line assembler in automotive industry, M, 33) [48]

Miroslaw: "One has to stay somehow on the market. It's crash now, as you've probably heard (...) I've changed a line several times, too. I had a trade, a tax consultancy company. I had pawnshops, second-hand shops, electronics trading, a building company, many things, catering. Anyway, I'm looking for a way out of situation, in order to maintain what already exists, to keep the money flowing in." (An owner of a construction company, M, 45) [B-34]

Patchwork type, usually connected with less efficient resources, is more typical of workers than of business people, reflecting the process of weakening social and occupational position of the former in the course of systemic change. Since it is reinforced both on institutional level (supported by attempts to make labour markets more flexible and less

²⁶ In many cases, the logic of such strategy was much more intentional than externally conditioned (for instance by hard family situation). If we decide to classify occupational fluctuation of workers in socialism as an indicator

controlled by state) and on the level of social consciousness (in which it “internalizes the necessity” created by the end of “work till retirement” model), we can expect its further development in the future.

CONSTRUCTION TYPE

Even though construction type of career already existed in socialism, it was the transformation that provided the conditions for its full development. It is a kind of career based on purposeful planning, accumulation of professional experiences and their conversion into useful capitals, as well as continuous investment in own educational resources and skills. On the one hand, it describes intentional vertical and horizontal moves within an organization; on the other hand, it can be based on switching from one career path into another one that does not have to be necessarily strictly connected with the former one. In both cases, it assumes the willingness to take a risk connected with leaving established position in order to gain the other one, which can satisfy better one’s extrinsic and intrinsic professional needs.

Construction type directly reflects the opportunities created by new institutional order which began to reward high qualifications, entrepreneurship and flexibility on labour market. This type is typical of business people, especially middle and upper level owners and managers, but it can be also observed in the case of young ambitious and career oriented workers²⁷. On the grounds of construction type work may be treated instrumentally (as means of achieving certain goals) or as value in itself (work ethos connected with striving at professional self-improvement). In new conditions aspirations for advancement need to be accompanied by careful career planning, where long term goals are given more importance than short term profits.

Marek: “At a certain point I realized that... that money isn’t important as long as work opens a career path. (...) And a broking office was an absolute wall, one couldn’t do anything more (...) and then I decided that I don’t care, I don’t care about money I’d get as long as my position gives me a chance to show myself and on the other hand it would just open... a way that I could achieve something.” (a director in bank, M, 43) [B-43]

Adam: “I’ve been stuck at this place for almost five years. And I roam a bit in the firm and I feel, you know, I feel a bit of a stagnation and that firm starts irritating me. (...) I’d expect something more from life. I don’t even talk about money, but about something else, to do something else (...) I’ll tell you, I’d like to try doing something that would earn me more responsibility. I’d like to feel more responsible for something. I think I’d

of patchwork type, it is because of lack of purposeful planning connected with it. As a result, professional biography resembled more a chaotic mosaic than an “up-climbing” path.

²⁷ In the case of workers, construction type is less common. On the one hand, the weak educational resources and unstable work positions make “the switching strategy” more risky; on the other hand, the organizational advancement is perceived as unattainable because of widespread convictions that one cannot be promoted without a “strong backing”, and that advancement possibilities are limited to others, who are younger and at the starting point better educated.

manage. [...] I think that it's been a good training that I've got to know everything from the very bottom and I'll open the doors for me. I think I'll manage to do so and finally, you know... I'd be able to manage a group of people." (A car assembler in automotive industry – proposed to a low management position, M, 25) [W-2]

The main pattern of organizational advancement assumes investment in own education which becomes a part of biographical plan. In most cases it is the craft-based technical education which creates the foundations for organizational promotion without losing the contact with practical skills gained in the previous stages of occupational career. At the level of middle and upper management technical knowledge needs to be supplemented by management knowledge, which requires extra learning. In other words, along with the successive steps technical career becomes more management oriented.

Constructive type of career is also characterised by willingness for risk taking connected with advancement, need for changes and new challenges, and the strategy of opening many parallel opportunities. When a career line is in danger of being brought to an abrupt end, then other kinds of careers may be prepared for or entered. According to Strauss this enables one to change the career route with a minimum of psychological strain (Strauss, 1975: 92). Constructive career planning is significantly facilitated by the possessed resources, which explains why this type of career is more typical of business people than workers.

Conclusions

Our research was aimed at illustrating the impact of radical social change on professional biographies of workers and business people. We began with the reconstruction of institutional rules shaping the sphere of work in socialism and at the present moment. In the second part, we have sketched the tentative typology of career patterns developed in the context of ongoing changes in this sphere. Our analysis indicates the coexistence of two distinct and incompatible realities. The first one is the pre-transformation reality, which is the heritage of socialism; the second one is the transformation reality, which is shaped by economic marketization and the influences of global capitalist economy. The typology documents on biographical level the ambiguities of postsocialist order in Poland. It conceptualizes the processes of de-institutionalization and re-institutionalization of career patterns in the course of systemic change, in which the models of "normal biographies" (cf. Kohli, 1988) established in the past are systematically redefined and replaced by the new ones, fitting better the requirements of new institutional order.

If we assume that modern biographies can be defined as open, diversified, reflexive and individualized (cf. Berger, Berger, Kellner, 1974: 77-79), we can also conclude that system transformation in Poland has significantly contributed to the specific modernization of biographical careers in both investigated milieus. First, we observe systematic pragmatization of careers, which refers both to the necessity of continuous learning and monitoring of changing institutional rules, and to the need for purposeful shaping of own destiny in occupational sphere. Second, we have to do with the autonomization of professional lives which can be understood as the process of loosening their bonds with social and institutional environments of specific workplaces, and the growing conviction that the shape of own career is no longer institutionally reinforced. Finally, the marketization of careers indicates their greater dependency on rules and the resources which are generated and verified under market conditions. Marketization modifies the impact of two former processes, since individual autonomy and reflexive reshaping of own professional life depends also on the economic and cultural capital one can mobilize in order to intentionally plan own career.

The changes of career patterns among workers and business people confirm the importance of global tendencies connected with the transition towards more reflexive, but also more risky "modernity" (cf. Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1995). At the same time, they document biographical significance of the unequal resources distribution, questioned by some advocates of "reflexive modernization" thesis (cf. Beck, 1992: 131-137). The predominance of externally conditioned types of careers among workers points out the consequences of systematic resources devaluation and lowering social position in the course of systemic change. The significance of construction type in case of business people, who under conditions of market economy were able to considerably multiply possessed capital, indicates the results of the opposite situation. In the course of time, the importance of resources increases since the possibilities of access to certain position are no longer as open as at the beginning of transformation, but more and more institutionalized, requiring specific cultural, social and economic assets already at the starting point of career. If the tendencies observable in the present situation hold, the need for stronger resources will redefine also the anchor type, reducing its scope to the best qualified and flexible employees. Finally, the patchwork type shall become much more "normalized", reflecting to smaller extent the specificity of transitional period and to greater the global trends on capitalist labour market, marked by the categories of flexible job, out-sourcing and self-employment.

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