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Between Normalisation and Resistance. Life Strategies of Young Precarious Workers[1]

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Abstract

In recent years, the experience of precarious employment and uncertain employment conditions has become the subject of an increasing amount of sociological studies, both in Poland and worldwide. The research places a particularly strong emphasis on young people who, more than other social categories, tend to be excluded from stable segments of the labour market. However, the conclusions drawn from the analyses are ambivalent – on the one hand, we observe a process of normalisation of precariousness m

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which may create framework conditions for the emergence of some expected professional career models; on the other hand, we also notice the process of contestation demonstrated by the precariat, the 'class-in-the-making'. In this article we discuss the problems of precarious work by analysing a range of life strategies of young Poles. The empirical basis for the study was provided by the Beethoven PREWORK project funded by the Polish National Science Centre (NCN) and its qualitative part which consisted of biographical narrative interviews with groups of individuals aged 30 or younger, employed on fixed-term contracts, working as unpaid interns or temporarily outside the labour market, from the three large cities and four small towns of Lower Silesia, Mazovia and Łódzkie regions. In this article we present a preliminary typology of life strategies reconstructed in the course of the analysis of the collected data. In each of the four distinguished types we can notice a tension between the normalisation and the contestation of precarity, which adds dynamism to the career choices made by the individuals and – at least in some of the cases – may contribute to the development of diverse forms of resistance to precarious employment.

Keywords: precarisation of work, Poland, young people, biographies, life strategies.

Introduction

The flexibilisation of employment leading to the precarisation of work became a widespread phenomenon after 1989 i.e. during the systemic transformation in Poland. The process then intensified in the first decade of the 21st century. Sociological studies of the phenomenon indicate that there are groups with specific socio-demographic characteristics that prove to be more vulnerable to the negative effects of the changes in the work environment resulting from the transformation.

In Europe it is especially young people, next to women and migrants, who struggle with the challenges specific to the work model based on temporary, flexible and underpaid forms of employment (e.g. ETUI 2017, Standing 2014). In 2015, 73% of Poles aged between 15 and 24 worked on different types of temporary work contracts (Eurostat LFS), including civil law contracts and fixed-term contracts, compared to 14.2% in 2000 (Eurostat LFS). Over a half of the young people who entered the labour market (and were employed) on temporary contracts, civil law contracts or without a contract continued to be employed under the same conditions in the following years (Kiersztyn 2015). This demonstrates that non-standard employment does not lead to standard employment, and that in Poland the age-dependent duality of the labour market appears to be expanding.

This article analyses life strategies of young Poles facing aforementioned situation and contributes to the debate on the situation of young precarious workers and the measures taken by such workers in order to improve their life and employment conditions. By 'precarious work' we mean here 'work for remuneration characterized

by uncertainty, low income, and limited social benefits and statutory entitlements' (Vosko 2010: 2). We assume that the definition of precarity has a relational character and cannot only be reduced to lack of standard forms of employment, but also incorporates a fear of a 'loss of status' resulting from socio-economic changes among the employees who used to be protected by standard employment relationships (Dörre 2015: 49).

The conclusions drawn from the analysis of the social responses to the increasing labour uncertainty are equivocal. On the one hand, we can observe a process of normalisation of precariousness which may create framework conditions for some expected professional career models, and may become an instrument of disciplining and controlling employees (Dörre 2015; Lorey 2015). On the other hand, we also notice a process of resistance to unstable employment conditions demonstrated by the precariat, the 'class-in-the-making' or the 'new dangerous class' – the group that seems to be especially receptive to populist activity of political leaders (Standing 2014).

By posing some questions concerning the biographical conditions for the normalisation of precarisation and the potential for resistance to unstable, low-paid work, this article aims at developing a better understanding of the tension between the agency of young workers and the structural constraints they have to face in the course of realisation of their life strategies. The strategies have been conceptualised here in the vein of Margaret Archer's work as 'the individual's way of achieving his/her desired 'modus vivendi' (Archer 2007: 88) – as the individuals strive to achieve what they care about the most in their lives, in their individual configurations of their 'ultimate concerns' (Archer 2007: 6). We analyse our informants' life strategies and consider some possible biographical consequences (impacting their life plans) and socio-political consequences (impacting their political activism or withdrawal).

This article is composed of two parts. In the first part, we briefly outline the theoretical context for our thoughts feeding into the debate on the notion of normalization of precarisation and precariousness. In the second part, which is preceded by methodological information, we present some preliminary findings from the biographical study of young precarious workers in Poland and in Germany. The study was conducted as part of the Polish-German project entitled 'Young precarious workers in Poland and Germany: a comparative sociological study on working and living conditions, social consciousness and civic engagement'. In the article's conclusions we once again address the problem of social and biographical conditions and delimitations of the process of normalization of precarisation in Poland.

Normalisation of Precarisation: Theoretical Approaches and Polish Experience

In the literature on precarious work of young people two phenomena are frequently indicated. On the one hand, researchers point at the advancing normalisation of precarisation which leads to acceptance and regarding instability as obvious and normal (Lorey 2015). On the other hand, it is among the young educated people working below their qualifications that researchers look for the vanguard of the precariat. According to some theorists, thanks to collective action and participation in social movements the vanguard will lead the transformation of the existing social order and work relations (see Standing 2014).

Although the normalisation of precarisation is a broader phenomenon affecting not only young people, young precarious workers constitute the largest part of the economically active population which has not experienced any other form of employment than non-standard employment. Normalisation of precariousness can be temporary or permanent. In the temporary scenario, the assumption is that any form of employment, including temporary and informal work, will lead to permanent work in the future (the stepping stone hypothesis). Furthermore, such informal or temporary employment is currently perceived as a necessary, common and widely accepted first step in the career (see Giermanowska 2013). In the permanent scenario we refer to a broader phenomenon of the expansion of precarious life and working conditions to the areas previously immunised against precarisation, which turns the threat of precarisation into a social control instrument (Dörre 2015; Lorey 2015).

In Poland, the precarisation of young people has progressed across a few phases and taken different forms. The most widely discussed one has been employment on the basis of civil law contracts (Mrozowicki, Krasowska, Karolak 2015). In 2016, 53.3% of all vocationally active persons aged 15–29 [in Poland] worked with temporary contracts (according to Eurostat LFS), which was the EU's second highest percentage after Spain. Panel studies conducted in Poland have shown that for most of young Poles non-standard forms of employment are not the first step to stable employment (Baranowska, Gebel, Kotowska 2011, Kiersztyn 2015). Moreover, temporary employment (in particular, employment based on civil law contracts) is linked to a higher probability of unemployment and lower remuneration (Poławski 2012, Pilc 2015). However, despite the processes indicated above, young Poles currently

show an unprecedented level of satisfaction with their lives (Badora 2017; Czapiński, Panek 2015). This may seem paradoxical, and may result from the second possible type of precarisation identified in the literature, which we suggest can be referred to as permanent precarisation.

By permanent normalisation of precarisation we understand a complex process of a purposeful rejection of the Fordist, bureaucratised and rigid model of work rooted in the deep-reaching transformation of capitalism and the new models of subjectivity, as well as the progressing empowerment of working individuals. In contrast to the institutional approaches which focus on the negative consequences of the erosion of standard employment in the neoliberal context, in post-operaist thought both standard and non-standard work regimes are analysed as means of disciplining employees (see Armano, Bove, Murgia 2017: 2). According to Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello (2005), a new ideology legitimising the involvement in flexible capitalism emerged as a response to the counter-culture and worker movements of the 1960s and 1970s. They referred to it as the 'new spirit of capitalism'. Its key tenet was an artistic criticism of capitalism emphasizing the necessity of autonomy, freedom, and authenticity – which are impossible to achieve in hierarchical, bureaucratised structures based on exertion of direct control. The emergent demands may not have shaken the foundations of capitalism but they have managed to lead to a transformation of the basic model of management into a more flexible one. The changes were reflected in the popularisation of the so-called lean management and lean production, and have led not only to increased production flexibility, but also to increased employment flexibility. From then on, the paradigm and the desired model of work has been project work. On the one hand, it assumed a lot of flexibility, on-going self-development and management of own competences. On the other hand, it has imposed more uncertainty on workers, often upon their approval (Armano, Bove, Murgia 2017: 5).

In her attempt to explain the advancing normalisation of precarisation (which she also refers to as self-precarisation), Isabel Lorey (2009) uses Michel Foucault's conceptual apparatus and focuses on the employees of the culture sector as exemplary for late capitalism. Contrary to Boltanski and Chiapello, the German researcher looks for the root causes of the present situation in the 18th century's modernist treatment of the individual. According to Lorey, as the capitalist work relations became more widespread, the questions of health and longevity of the population became of key importance for those who wanted to multiply their capital. As a result of these changes, a new biopolitical mode of governance emerged which focused on facilitating a relative well-being of the society, i.e. the well-being that enabled the

people to become hired workers. However, the knowledge of the causes of the well-being (such as better hygiene, diets, physical exercise) had to be complemented by active participation and involvement of particular individuals. In other words, there was an increasing expectation that individuals would self-manage or even become self-entrepreneurs. The art of management shifted from external and repressive to '*inwardly held* self-discipline and self-control' (Lorey 2009: 191).

According to Lorey, precarisation was already present in the golden era of work. Initially, it was an anomaly experienced by those not fitting in the 'norm and normalizing of a free, sovereign, bourgeois, white subject, including its property relations' (Lorey 2009: 194). Currently, however, 'Precarization is increasingly a part of governmental normalisation techniques and as a result, in neo-liberalism it transforms from an inherent contradiction to a hegemonic function' (ibidem: 195). Self-fulfilment has become the new social norm, requiring individuals to accept precarious conditions in the current system. Precarisation is therefore becoming a social control instrument. Importantly, Lorey (2015: 104) notices that due to the dependence of the precarisation processes on individual actions, the control is never complete:

'At many moments in the processes of precarisation, something unforeseen, contingent, and also in this sense precarious arises. It is this aspect of precarisation that harbours the potential of refusal, producing at the same time a re-composition of work and life, of a sociality that is not in this way, not immediately, not so quickly, perhaps not even at all, capitalizable. These kinds of re-compositions can effect interruptions in the process of normalization, in other words, in the continuity of exploitability and governability'.

Claims of normalisation and deep internalization of the coercion to achieve self-fulfilment and flexibility lead to the question on the conditions facilitating resistance to the negative consequences of precarisation. It seems that based on post-structuralist theories the answer to the above question is not obvious, as it repeats the 'oversocialised conception of man' (Wrong 1961), which has been criticised by Margaret Archer (2003), among others. According to Archer (2007: 1), in order to understand the agency of people it is necessary to assume the existence of a mechanism of reflexivity, relatively autonomous and independent from social environment, understood as 'the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa.' It is the reflexivity, according to Archer, that 'makes (most of us) 'active agents', people who can exercise some governance in their own lives, as opposed to 'passive agents' to whom things simply happen.' In other words, the reflexivity which

materializes as the ability to formulate and carry out life projects pertaining to what we care about the most in life, is an indispensable mechanism for understanding the internal contradiction within social mechanisms such as the 'normalisation of precarisation'.

Although the process of structural harnessing of precarious individuals has been recognised, me must not forget about the fundamental ambivalence of social coercion and freedom of empowered individuals. In Lorey's work, 'agency and activity may be an expression of complete conformism and manageability' (Bednarek 2015). In other cases, however, it is the agency of precarious workers that is perceived as an opportunity to change the current situation. For example, Guy Standing (2014) sees a potential for change in young, educated 20- and 30 year-olds who increasingly come to realise the stability of their instability. The vanguard of the precariat are, according to Standing, the people '[who] plunged into a precariat existence after being promised the opposite, a bright career of personal development and satisfaction' (Standing 2014: 30). The frustration they are developing is supposed to lead them to subversive action and mobilization of other groups of precarised workers. On the other hand, trade union density remains low in most European countries (Hodder, Kretsos 2015). In Poland, despite the fact that the percentage of precarious workers is one of the highest in the EU, organised and vocal resistance to precarisation has so far been marginal. Does the above mean acceptance of precarisation under the cover of flexibility, or is it rather a departure from the traditional forms of resistance and a sign that young precarious workers are seeking new forms of disagreement which can better match the flexible model of work?

In the following part of the article we offer a closer look at the relationship between the normalisation of precarisation and the agency of young precarius workers, rendered through the lens of their biographies. We will analyse the life strategies of young precarious workers developed as their response to the structural status quo, and as a path to achieve what they understand as good life and decent work in practical terms. As we have already mentioned, what we understand as their life strategies is not only their explicitly declared values or opinions, but also the 'logic of their biography' reflected in the structure of their stories (Mrozowicki 2011). Following Margaret Archer, we have assumed that a life strategy is an individual mode of striving for one's unique lifestyle, i.e. the *modus vivendi* (Archer 2007: 88). Additionally, we also assume that life strategies are developed in a refllexive way and created with reference to subjectively perceived (yet objective) structural and cultural circumstances of their actions (Mrozowicki 2013: xxvi)

Method

The basis for the empirical part of the article was our analysis of the biographical narrative interviews conducted as part of the Polish-German Beethoven PREWORK project funded by the Polish National Science Centre (NCN). The project aimed at investigating the experiences of young precarious workers. The project team carried out interviews in accordance with the biographical methodology developed by Fritz Schütze (1983). In order to access information about the life strategies of our informants we first asked them to tell the interviewer the story of their life, starting from early childhood until the present. Subsequently, in the second part of the interview the informants were asked additional questions concerning some important biographical threads that they had not elaborated on at the stage of the initial spontaneous narrative. In the final part of the interview we asked about the topics linked to the lead subject of the project, including the experience of work and the informats' idea of decent work, good life and social activity.

The empirical part of our research began in 2016. Initially, the interviews were held in the group of informants aged 18 to 30 who worked informally or on a non-standard employment contract, or who were-self-employed or temporarily unemployed at the time of the interview. In time, as prescribed by the principles of theoretical sampling, we addressed persons whose specific social and demographic features (including age, sex and education) or selected aspects of life strategies (e.g. involvement in trade unions and social protests) would let us better understand the biographical and structural conditions of the emerging typology of life strategies. Our informants came from a variety of locations, including the largest cities with low unemployment rates (Warsaw, Wrocław) and towns and cities affected by de-industrialisation and systemic transformation, with relatively low employment rates (such as Radom, Wałbrzych, Łódź), as well as small towns (Międzylesie, Szydłowiec) and one village (S.). The informants were recruited through leaflets, Internet fora, Facebook ads, networking and job agencies (such as the Voluntary Labour Corps [OHP], job centres for the unemployed, trade unions). Eventually we were able to collect data from 70 narrative interviews.

Each interview was recorded, and the majority (approximately 60 interviews) were transcribed. Our data analysis was performed along two parallel paths: firstly, it was the standard pathway of the procedures within the methodology of the grounded theory (Glaser 1978) i.e. open coding, memo writing, selective coding and theoretical

sampling. As a result of the application of the procedures, analytical summaries were created for all interviews. Secondly, some of the interviews (as of December 2017, around 20) were analysed in line with the approach by Fritz Schütze (2008), as part of a joint interpretation procedures taking place during a series of workshops co-organised by the Polish and German project teams[2].

Following the combination of the two analytical methods, we developed a proposed typology which is applied in the following sections of this article. The typology is based on the following dimensions: (1) the importance of work throughout the person's biography; (2) the relationship between professional life and non-professional life; (3) the specificity of perception of precarisation of work (normalisation vs. restistance/problematisation of precarisation); (4) coping strategies for dealing with precarisation (both individual and collective); (5) the importance of different biographical resources, including capital types (see Bourdieu 1986) as a means of immunisation against precarisation; (6) the importance of reflexivity and its types (Archer 2007). Due to the constraints of the current stage of our analysis the presentation of the typology in the following sections of this article will focus on dimensions 1 to 4, in particular on the work-related strategies. The remaining aspects will be quoted only to the extent necessary to understand the logic behind the particular types. It must also be noted that the types of life strategies are not types of informants, and particular individuals may move along the continuum of the types in their biography and experience. However, an analysis of the dynamics of the particular types goes beyond the scope of this text.

Precarious Working-Class Type

The precarious working-class type, hereafter referred to as the 'working class type' or the 'proletarian' type in the previous versions of the typology, combines the longing for stable employment resembling the 'factory-type employment' with

[2] The typology presented here has been developed in collaboration with the German team composed of the following researchers: Professor Vera Trappmann (Leeds University Business School) and dr Jule-Marie Lorenzen, Alexandra Seehaus, Dennis Neumann (Freie Universität Berlin). The German team has so far collected 44 biographical interviews with young workers from Germany. Apart of Adam Mrozowicki and Mateusz Karolak, the following researchers took part in the works on the typology: dr Agata Krasowska, Aleksandra Drabina-Różewicz, Jacek Burski (University of Wrocław) and Magdalena Andrejczuk (Warsaw School of Economics).

relatively small and educational resources, or educational resources of little market value. This type is the precarious version of the traditional type of working-class consciousness described by David Lockwood (1975: 17) as a combination of solidarity and professional pride with the bond with local communities based on 'closely knit cliques of friends, workmates, neighbours and relatives'. Unstable, low-paid and precarious employment is perceived within this type as problematic, both from the point of view of the values assigned by informants to 'decent work' and in terms of the consequences for other biographically important life domains such as family life or relations within the local community. The dominant type of reflexivity here is the communicative reflexivity as a kind of internal conversation of the individuals who 'complete their thoughts about themselves in relation to their circumstances by talking them through with other people' (Archer 2007: 101).

For this type, precarisation means (in accordance with Robert Castel, 2000) not only economic uncertainty but also the erosion of stable points of reference within the community ('disaffiliation'). Increased geographical mobility (due to migration), fiercer competition on the labour market and in the workplace and an acutely perceived status gap reflected in the 'conspicuous consumption' (including the gap between children from the 'proletariat' and children from the middle class), or different opportunities depending on the 'name' (Julita) – all of these factors lead to an increasingly acute feeling of symbolic exclusion.

While in the traditional type of working class consciousness there was a strong ethos of work and group solidarity, the precarised type is marked by a growing instrumentalisation of both work and social bonds. The desired model of work is most of all well paid work 'Monday to Friday, single shift' (Patryk) and work that 'doesn't overtax my strength' (Arek). Work still functions here as a significant element of social integration, but the ideal concept of 'decent work' increasingly often diverges from the real experience. In extreme situations, as in the case of the 19-year-old Helena who works at a franchise shop, life begins to resemble a never-ending struggle, with life choices entirely subordinated to the logic of survival:

Helena: 'Unfortunately I feel like I'm blocked. The choice I had was: either I go to school and I don't have things to wear, to eat, even the little amounts to top up my phone so I can call my close family and relatives; or I go to work and I can afford some [basic] stuff. Having said that, even though I work I still can't afford anything. Because I work for little money, and the work I do is completely wearisome... I'd really do anything to escape this place. But I can't, there's nowhere to go for me. I'm blocked wherever I turn.'

In Helena's case, her traumatic family experience including her father's mental illness and extreme poverty she and her many siblings suffered, combined with her low-paid and wearisome job augment the feeling of being trapped and unable to act in the reality of a small town at the Polish-Czech border. The fundamental point of reference in reactions to precarisation processes is the family, whose support replaces ineffective state support and fragmented communities which do not offer much assistance, making the processes of precarisation of work even more acute and painful. Precarisation carries with it familiarisation, and dreams of good work are also dreams of peaceful family life – as in the narrative on the future plans of the 19-year-old Adela who took part in a vocational activation project run by the Voluntary Labour Corps (Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy, OHP):

Adela: 'Then I'll find some work, yes. Then I'll finally rent a small studio flat, I'll adopt a cat and it'll be cool "laughter" That's the plan, that's what it's going to be'... Peaceful life, no surprises. So I know what I will be doing tomorrow, and in a month's time... I'll know exactly at what time I'll wake up, everything'll be perfectly planned. We're leaving for work, love, why don't you make me some breakfast. And a kid has to be there, too, I'll give myself some time to achieve all of that. The wedding. That's the way I want it all to look like, the normal way'

In Adela's story, the dream of the 'normal life' takes its extreme form, as she had gone through some traumatic family experience and then ended up at a care facility for homeless women. However, the dream is also present in other interviews. A means to achieve the 'normal life' can be emigration and finding work in the West, or even finding a job in Czech Republic – in the case of some informants living in one of the Polish border towns in the south-west of the country. In both cases the point of reference, often turned almost into a myth, is the material wealth supposedly guaranteed even if you do a menial job abroad. In the words of Wiktoria who works at a clothing shop in a shopping centre, if you work abroad (contrary to Poland) 'allegedly, the more tedious the job is, the more they're willing to pay you'.

In this type of life strategies there is only a weak presence of references to investment in formal education. Even in the case of the persons who made an attempt at starting university studies, the educational path is perceived as unattractive and the perception is that there is little that real work situations have in common with formal education. Such a line of thinking can be seen in Julita's story who works at a small shop and who says 'I've done school, I graduated as a technician. I don't know why I need the degree because I've ended up as a shop assistant anyway (laughter).' Similar arguments are present in Radek's account. Following his family's advice, Radek completed studies in administration in one of the cities in the east of Poland

but he is now working at a discount store. He appreciates the most a good working relationship with his colleagues and adds that he is 'not interested in an office job'.

In our interviews with the representatives of the working class type the references to collective action or participation in protests organised by trade unions were rather rarer. Radek, one of the few informants employed at a unionised workplace, claims that trade unions are perceived as 'redundant' because 'you can get the same results by acting individually, and you don't have to pay any trade union membership fees'. This instrumental approach to workers' organisations is also present in Antek's memories of his work for a municipal transport company where the benefits of being a trade union member are reduced to the possibility of taking out a preferential loan. In the case of Arek, a former assembly line worker at a Wrocław-based household appliances manufacturer, the point of membership boils down to 'defending workers' rights of those who are full-time contract employees'. Despite the sentiment for the ethos of the Solidarity union movement (NSZZ Solidarność), trade union membership is driven by pragmatic reasoning and the servicing model (see Kubisa, Ostrowski 2015). Its aim is to guarantee trade union members a better position in comparison with those employed by temporary work agencies.

Finally, it is also important to note that in some cases of the working class type there were also clear references to higher level communities such as the national community which for some of the informants was the point of reference for their criticism of liberal political elites and the alleged 'privileges' for immigrants (among others). Such 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1983) can be interpreted as an answer to the feeling of uncertainty resulting from the fragmentation of local communities, also from politically inspired concerns about those who are culturally alien. It must be emphasized, however, that contrary to some interpretations (e.g. Dörre 2017), support for extreme right wing political discourse, including, in particular, the anti-immigrant discourse, is not particularly strongly represented in the working class type. It is also present in the types discussed later in this article i.e. the bureaucratic and entrepreneurial types, and in the creative type (in only one case).

Precarious Bureaucratic Type

The initial name of the precarious bureaucratic type which emerged during a discussion within the Wrocław research team was the 'post-etatist' type. The

name reflects the characteristic longing for the mythic stable and 'pure' full-time employment within a well-organised (in Max Weber's interpretation) bureaucratic organisation, office, public services institution or a large corporation. The prefix 'post' indicates the processes of erosion of such stable employment resulting from, among others, liberalisation and privatisation processes in the public services sector (see Kozek 2011), as well as the growing competitive pressure in internal labour markets within large corporations. In the course of our comparative analysis that we performed with the German team we decided, however, that the more generic adjective 'bureaucratic' better reflected the specificity of the life expectations of the informants from the group.

In some of the analysed biographies the bureaucratic type appeared either as a dream of 'office work' (Aldona), 'clean work' (Marianna), 'work at a desk' (Wojtek), contrasted with dirty, manual work, or simply physical work. In other biographies, much more emphasis is placed on debunking the myth of a 'stable full-time position', which is reflected in more intensive work and the necessity to do a few part-time jobs at public institutions. Some biographies also contain information on the lost belief in the meaningfulness of the work done. Contrary to the working class type, the bureaucratic type is not clearly attached to reflexivity types, which may indicate the fact that it normally emerges as the effect of the experienced social mobility processes[3]. Precarisation of work is either temporarily normalised as a necessary stepping stone on the path to a stable bureaucratic job, or rejected and criticised, which is particularly clearly seen in the case of those who have been waiting very long for their stability, i.e. people in their thirties. Their dissatisfaction with the extending uncertainty is present in Zuzanna's story. She is 28, a volunteer learning to become a therapist who earns a living by offering private tuition in English:

Zuzanna: 'It's a sad story really, I work as a therapist... At the beginning you have to work for free before you do the proper job... I've now been at X psychiatric hospital for a year now, working at the hospital's walk-in centre. Um, and I guess it's also been a year that I've been working at Z. health centre at U. Street... On the one hand I'm doing what I'm doing for free but I know I want to deal with it in future... On the other hand I also need to earn somehow so I teach those private English classes... It's

[3] In a sense, the types linked to contextual discontinuity would be more typical here, including the met-reflexivity type ('reflexive upon their own reflections', cf. Archer 2007: 127) and 'autonomous reflexivity' (initiating 'their own inner dialogues, conduct lone deliberations and come to conclusions for which they are solely responsible', cf. Archer 2007: 114). However, due to their striving to achieve stability, elements of the previously presented communicative reflexivity are also very clearly visible.

not normal for an adult, a uni graduate, not to be able to live on their own and move out of the parents' place because they can't afford it... I'd like to work at mental health centre, with a set number of hours, etc. I'd welcome more stability.'

Contrary to the working class type, the bureaucratic type attaches a subjectively high autotelic value to education, despite the experience of the discrepancy between formal education and the precarious nature of the work they do. In this type, the ideal of a job, as shown in Zuzanna's account, is based on clearly delimited lines between money-making and private life, and between regular working hours and free time which can be spent in the family or pursuing some cultural activities. Work itself is perceived as an autotelic value, also associated with one's material status. The ideal of good work, however, is rarely implemented in practice. Finding a full time position requires the person not only to go through a series of unpaid or low-paid apprenticeships, sacrifices; the candidate must also be lucky and have a sufficient social capital (especially in smaller communities) in the form of family-based and personal contacts with the 'right' people. Another case worthy of quoting here is Julian's story. He is currently a librarian and a culture animator. After a series of disappointments resulting from his work at school, this is how he tells the interviewer about his 'lost trust in public institutions':

Julian: 'I take work highly personal. Even more so because I was brought up in the ethos of work, possibly even the cult of work, where it was believed that work makes you human, it forges your character, provides you with dignity. I've been growing up with this motto, 'work provides dignity' all my life... At some point, I guess about 2 years ago, in 2015, I worked on a programme for the unemployed where I was employed at a secondary school... I remember one day the local authority representative who managed the school asked me to carry out a stock-taking project, let's call it this way... I agreed to perform that task. I actually spent a lot of time to deliver the project, my evenings, Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. Um, and when I submitted the material I learned that it was actually not an additional job, but that it was part of my duties as an employee... It turned out I was dealing with some smartasses.'

In Julian's case, the contrast between the expectations and the reality of a school job led, among other things, to him joining the trade unions in his next job at a library in a bigger town nearby (to which he has to commute every day). In the post-etatist type, similarly to the creative type presented below, we can see cases which typically (in our sample) represent some forms of civic activity. Its representatives try to find some fitting forms of social involvement, be it trade union activism, participation in

worker's movements, or activity in right-wing or leftist-liberal identity movements (such as the feminist movement, the nationalist movement, etc.). Daniela is an example of a person who has followed the path of left-wing activism. This 27-year-old sociology graduate worked at an HR company until recently. Now she links her involvement in the movement not only with the realisation of the values she believes in, but also with her need for collective agency:

Daniela: 'When I was a student I really wasn't that active because I mostly focused on studying or I cared too much about collecting the right bullet points on my CV, and so on. I thought at that time it made sense. Although in reality it didn't, really. I think it was after studies that I got involved for real, because I guess I needed to get active... I needed some space for self-fulfilment. And so I got involved, already when I was a student I attended the Manifa marches [feminist marches].... Then I became involved in other initiatives like the grassroots Workers' Initiative (Inicjatywa Pracownicza), also because of the people I met in the March 8th Initiative (Inicjatywa Ósmego Marca); together, we established a local committee in W. where it had not been present before. That's how it all started.'

In Daniela's case, her social activism is a form of compensation for her lack of self-fulfilment in corporate work. For Marcin, an architect from Warsaw, joining the leftist Together Party (Partia Razem) was a response to the lack of employment stability. However, Marcin admits that he does not have enough time to become fully involved in party activity. Verbal support for the need to organise as workers and join trade unions can also be found in other interviews within this type, although it is also accompanied by doubts regarding the efficiency of the union format for those in unstable employment, and by claims that trade unions 'aren't interested in the problems of temporary workers' (Maja). Slightly different motivations for social activism, other than the ones within the domain of economic interests, are visible in the cases of Asia and Jan who are involved in right-wing identity movements, where a large emphasis is placed on the autotelic value of, for example, the remembrance of national heroes (e.g. the Polish 'cursed soldiers') and a negative approach to liberal political elites.

Although there are important signs of civic engagement in the bureaucratic type, it is worth underlining that support for social movements is often only verbal, and the informants' involvement in collective action is usually accompanied by individual strategies. Such strategies include, first of all, intensive education in order to become better qualified combined with a temporary acceptance of the unfavourable working conditions as the price for professional experience. Secondly, emigration plans are

clearly verbalised in the interviews. Thirdly, we also see cases of total withdrawal from the job market where the existing employment opportunities do not let the person perform work that is at least close to their type of education. That is the case of Eryka, a pedagogy graduate who has been unable to find work in her locality, a town at the Polish-Czech border. After a brief period of employment at a factory she became pregnant and had a child. She decided to stay at home to look after the newborn as there were no prospects on the local labour market. Although the situation experienced by Eryka and some other informants may seem temporary, it clearly indicates the limits of acceptance of precarious employment, which may in turn drive the 'exit' strategy as defined by Hirschman (1970).

Precarious Creative Type

The precarious creative type is the first of the two types in which temporary normalisation of precarisation takes place. In this type, flexibility is accepted as a 'conscious choice', based on rejecting work within a rigid and bureaucratic framework. It is an 'anti-Fordist' (cf. Mrozowicki 2016), 'projectarian' (cf. Szreder 2016) type in which the rules of 'the new spirit of capitalism' (Boltanski, Chiapello 2005) are best reflected. The creative type places a high, autotelic value on work which is the centre of informants' life strategies. Also, similarly to the bureaucratic type, a key importance in this type is attached to the cultural capital, including educational resources, which gain an autotelic value as a gateway to the social environment of 'projectarians'. It is common within the type to look for jobs in the third sector or as project work, as this allows for personal fulfilment and enables the individual to avoid the 'trap' of bureaucracy or the corporate world with all its limitations. This is consistent with the 'meta-reflexivity' which is typical of the type and which has been defined by Archer (2007: 95) as an individualistic kind of reflexivity based on 'reflecting upon one's own acts of reflexivity'. It results in, among other things, a criticism of one's own actions and of the way the society functions.

The life strategy of the creative type involves reluctance towards traditional entrepreneurship perceived as a manifestation of excessive pragmatism and disregard of the social value of work that should be 'useful and interesting' (Miłosz). The logic of seeking a creative job is illustrated by the words of a 29-year-old Miłosz who runs projects for an artistic foundation in Lower Silesia:

Miłosz: 'Ever since I was a child I have been active in a socio-cultural association called 'Znajomi' ['Acquaintances']. That is where I ran my first project. I think that I have always known what I want to do professionally. When I was a child I always wanted to have a job like the women who worked the community centre and organised all sorts of things. Back then, it seemed to me that their job was so strange, irregular and interesting. And I have always felt like doing something related to art'.

Project-based professional activity is becoming an important element of life: not only within the world of work, but also beyond it. The boundary between work and the things that happen after work becomes blurred, i.a. due to the fact that private resources, including the social capital with its personal, useful relationships, are a key part of performing work (cf. Gorgoń et al. 2013). The representatives of the cultural and third sector, particularly in larger cities, also form a specific social milieu, a 'projectarian bubble' or 'enclave' (Miłosz), which is both an important anchor and an arena of constant competition and cooperation (coopetition, cf. Szreder 2016: 60–62).

The creative type also involves seeking new forms of citizenship, cooperation and solidarity. Despite the fact that much importance is given by the type to post-materialistic values and identity politics, the issues of employees' rights are not ignored. Sensitivity to social injustice as well as personal costs of short-term project work result in the fact that this type exhibits the most explicit manifestations of criticism of precarisation of labour. Moreover, direct identification with the precariat as a group can be found in the interviews with the informants representing the creative type. The objection to some undesirable effects of the flexibility of freelance professions is visible, for instance, in the words of the 25-year-old Szymon. He is an architect who realised the negative aspects of his work in Poland thanks to, among other things, the fact that he had worked abroad. Importantly, Szymon is eager to share his impressions with other colleagues, but he is held back by the lack of understanding and the fact that others often do not think in terms of collective interests:

Szymon: … Basically, if I hadn't had that holiday job in Ireland, I wouldn't see all those differences now, for example when it comes to respecting working relations, and it turns out that there is a huge difference in that regard… Money is important but you have more time and less stress and responsibility is not shifted on you as a worker… I started to talk about the fact that I'm trying to do it, I'm trying to talk to my colleagues. This is one thing but I can see it at work that there is no… there seems to be no language, people don't know the language to describe certain phenomena that take place; there is some frustration, people talk about things that don't seem

right but it is very unconscious so… people should get organised and fight for their interests.'

Despite a strong emphasis on individual 'agency', the diagnosis of one's own situation also involves the feeling of running out of steam, suffering, being burnt-out with project work and, importantly, a moral criticism of the precarious world. At the same time, the representatives of the type actively adapt to the world they have critically diagnosed. At an individual level, the adaptation may involve attempts to professionalise and commercialise project work. At a collective level, we can see tendencies towards civic engagement, looking for a new form of employee representation and, interestingly, looking for alternative, enclave lifestyles 'beyond the system' (cooperatives, artistic and eco-villages etc.). For instance, a 26-year-old Halina, despite having completed engineering studies, rejects full-time well-paid work at international corporations as she claims they are an element of oppressive capitalism based on exploitation and consumption. However, rather than confining herself to criticism, in response to the apparent systemic instability she pursues an alternative lifestyle, putting into practice the 'lifestyle politics', under which the boundaries between what is personal and political become more fluid (cf. Portwood-Stacer 2013).

Halina: 'Together with a group of friends we've started another co-housing project which is a bit more defined in terms of politics. We have a manifesto and we want to organise some events related to certain topics, but for me it's important that we live in a big group and do some things together. For example we eat together. We are all vegetarians or vegans so we are more or less consistent when it comes to our beliefs. For me it is already a form of activism that this is not limited to a mum, dad and a kid but in which different relations between people take place.'

Similarly to the other types of life strategies, the creative type is internally diversified. On the one hand, it is represented by those who work on projects by choice, often as a result of a social promotion from the proletariat. This kind of work is, in a sense, of an emancipatory nature when compared to what our informants observed in the generation of their parents (i.e. workers of the Fordist world). On the other hand, within the type discussed, the biographies may also reproduce intellectual and artistic elites, though at a different level. In that scenario, the feeling of degradation and relative deprivation may be more explicit, particularly if high cultural capital does not guarantee stable and well-paid employment.

Precarious Entrepreneurial Type

The life strategies of the entrepreneurial type are characterised by the *anything goes* attitude, which was described in the 1990s by Marek Ziółkowski in terms of adaptation 'by hook or by crook', based on the lack of trust in people but also rejecting a demanding attitude towards the state' (Ziółkowski 2000: 238). It is mostly oriented at the accumulation of economic resources, with work being treated instrumentally as a means of earning a livelihood and a way to facilitate consumption which is a symbol of status. Precarious work relies in either taking up different, often unrelated jobs, without the necessary capital to efficiently develop one's own business, or in accepting a flexible (in terms of time, finances and contracts) activity as an employed person in the form of entremployment (cf. Pongratz, Voss 2001), which requires self-control, self-commercialisation and self-rationalisation at work. The strategy discussed can also be described in terms of the ability of bricolage (cf. Levi Strauss 1968), understood as the ability to re-combine limited resources in order to actively adapt to a flexible and precarious labour market. Of fundamental importance here is the 'autonomous reflexivity', which is an individualistic variety of the 'self-contained internal conversations, leading directly to action' (Archer 2007: 93).

The life strategies of the entrepreneurial type combine faith in individual agency with an attempt to adjust to the existing rules in a way which is optimal from the individual point of view – rather than attempting to change the rules. Despite the declared distinction between private and professional life, the boundary is blurred due to overtime work, earning extra money in 'free time' or, in the case of small entrepreneurs, being on a stand-by mode and available 'on call'. The entrepreneurial strategy is linked to the normalisation of precarisation, where precarious employment and work intensification are considered as the price paid for being independent from the employer, and from the support of the family or the state. For Jarek, a 29-year-old unemployed who used to take up different jobs (e.g. a part-time job in a game store, or a grey economy bar job) and now lives off his savings, the most important thing in life is to be 'independent from the support of others'. A 24-year-old Dawid who is currently taking part in a course organised by the Voluntary Labour Corps (OHP), works in a restaurant kitchen without a contract and develops tracks and beats for hip-hop artists. He openly says:

Dawid: 'My mindset doesn't allow me to be an average person who goes to work every day, works in a factory for 20 years, retires and gets PLN 700. That's not for me. Someone once said that it is not for me to be anyone.'

Despite the difficulties encountered, the representatives of the entrepreneurial type are convinced that their efforts and resourcefulness are ultimately rewarded. An important element of their individual strategies, in addition to taking up any job or money-making opportunity, is also migration, which is treated as a way to make money. The cultural capital of the type, including formal education, is usually not extensive in objective terms, and it is not considered as particularly important by the informants. To be more precise, the respondents within the type place much value on practical skills while depreciating the importance of formal education. The lack of confidence in formal education as well as the emphasis on the role of on-the-job learning and social capital in the form of contacts that can be used to seek job are present in the narrative by Bartek, a 21-year-old restaurant worker who is planning to start a business in the computer games sector on top of his catering job:

Bartek: 'This is my second job and I think that I can get somewhere in my life, achieve something... As a second-grade student of a technical secondary school I worked for some time at a computer service shop… This made me realise that I can learn more things when I work and gain experience rather than when I'm buried in books… [I took up studies – AM] because my mum wanted me to. I thought that getting a diploma was indispensable, everyone said so. In fact, the experience of my friends shows that even if you have two master's degrees it can still take you two years to find a job'.

Importantly, the informants who undermine the importance of education are often those who did not complete their studies or dropped out. This kind of rationalisation can be treated as a discursive attempt to cope with unfulfilled expectations of the formal education system. Nevertheless, in the narratives of those who represent the entrepreneurial type, precarisation is not depicted as an obstacle to pursue their life strategies due to the fact that, according to the informants from this group, anyone who works hard can achieve a lot, even without a university diploma. Such arguments can be found for instance in the narrative of the 21-year-old Marian who, motivated by potentially higher earnings, ran into debt and enrolled on a paid course to retrain to become a software developer and shift away from his former profession of the electrician. In the interview, he also criticises those who show a demanding attitude or depend on the work of others or on state benefits. The criticism corresponds with a negative view of migrants and people who rely on state support

and social assistance. Here, social engagement is not a consequence of resistance to precarisation; rather, it is linked to the expectation of a further marketisation of social life, which is supposed to facilitate a real and quantifiable appreciation of individual resourcefulness and hard work. Marian, an active participant of far-right marches staged on Poland's Independence Day, consistently presents his views that combine laissez-faire with reluctance towards refugees:

Marian: 'I have nothing against them, they can come with their families, but they have to get down to work rather than expecting something for free because in Poland you get nothing for free even though you are Polish-born. Besides, I also have no respect for Poles who live off benefits even though they don't need them… I really hate parasites… You know, I've never received anything for free. Everything I have, I've worked for it. I've worked hard for it, and all I have is thanks to my hard work and not thanks to luck… The state should not be a guardian that helps you find a job and leads you by the hand. Everyone should cope on their own.'

Marian is not the only representative of the entrepreneurial type whose narrative incorporates some 'anarcho-capitalist' elements which are based on the perception of the state as an obstacle to individual entrepreneurship. However, in most cases, the level of genuine social engagement is quite low among the representatives of the type. They value family and small close-knit groups of friends highly. For them, a perfect life is a small house on the outskirts where they have peace and independence: 'I prefer to go about my business' (Rafał), 'I've not attended [the protests – AM]… You have to take over the reins and be a man' (Paweł). It should be noted that in its pure form, the type is not represented by any women, which suggests a link between the entrepreneurial, independent, self-steering type and masculinity[4]. It should be added that as a result of objective precarisation, the entrepreneurial strategy is by definition incomplete, i.e. at least at the time of the interview, it had not lead to a stable, profitable own business or a highly valued status of a flexible expert. Thus, entrepreneurship is often a temporary strategy which allows one to make a living (for instance during studies) and then to accumulate further resources which will allow for a reorientation of the strategy.

[4] Cf. the article of Krasowska and Drabina-Różewicz in this issue of WFES.

Conclusion

The aim of the article was to present preliminary research findings from an analysis of biographical interviews with young people in Poland who face unstable working and living conditions, conducted under the PREWORK project. The reconstruction of the typology of life strategies that emerged as a result of the analysis of the material and discussions held on the project allowed us to analyse the tensions between the tendencies to 'normalise precarisation' (e.g. Lorey 2016) and the criticism of undesired effects of unstable employment within biographically and structurally diverse life situations of young precarious workers. We have identified four fundamental life strategy types. They are different in terms of, for instance, the perceived importance of work in the life of a given person (autotelic – instrumental), a clear distinction or a lack of distinction between work and private life, or the attitude towards precarisation. In the light of the analysis conducted, it is the differences pertaining to the extent and form of subjective normalisation of precarisation that seem to be one of the factors which are crucial for the understanding of the existing disintegration of the precariat and the weakness of collective actions aimed at changing its situation in the labour market in Poland.

On the one hand, the working-class type gives no consent to the instability of employment and low wages but, due to the lack of cultural, economic and social resources as well as considerable reluctance towards the idea of trade unionism, its representatives tend to focus on family life or decide to go abroad. On the other hand, within the entrepreneurial type, the discourse of a *self-made man* who seizes any opportunity is stressed, and the disadvantages of flexible employment are seen as a natural consequence of market competition which is fair in so far as it allows those who are the most hard-working and resourceful to make a career. Within that type, the normalisation of precarisation and broader social inequalities results in rejecting collective forms of action as well as state intervention which is perceived as harmful. Between those two extremes there are the bureaucratic and creative types, where the normalisation of precarisation is only temporary. While under the bureaucratic type precarisation is accepted as a stepping stone on the way to achieve economic stability, the creative type values mobility and professional flexibility, but only if the conditions are laid down by employees and not by the market. In both types, the experience of long-term precariousness and its undesired effects may lead to a growing workers' awareness and the potential of collective resistance.

In the light of the above considerations, it seems equally problematic to treat young workers in Poland as a coherent political subject, a potential avant-garde of social movements against the precarity on the one hand, and to claim that they fully accept their fate of the 'normalised precarisation' on the other hand. The types of life strategies discussed here may be interpreted in terms of a clash of the early-capitalist (the 'entrepreneurial' type) and the post-modern (the 'creative' type) ideologies of work with the expectations of those who refer to the vision of organised capitalism (cf. Marody, Lewicki 2010: 127). The consequences of the above contradictions can be, firstly, a hybridisation of individual strategies based on maximising profits from the functioning within diverse institutional logics in the labour market, and secondly, the attempts at organising a collective mobilisation and building alliances within the heterogeneous population of precarious workers. From the perspective of labour, the most desired scenario would probably be an alliance of the working-class, bureaucratic and creative types who, in a strong state that ensures and enforces workers' rights, would be able to pursue different scenarios of coping with flexibility in the labour market. However, the question remains open whether in Poland there currently is a political force able to articulate diverse interests under the types identified. From the point of view of methodology it is also necessary to perform further analyses of life strategies linked to work in the context of non-professional activities and ultimate concerns of young Poles, as these activities and concerns can also impact the level of civic activism or passiveness in this group.

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