



Poland: (Precarious) Stability in Crisis?

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Introduction

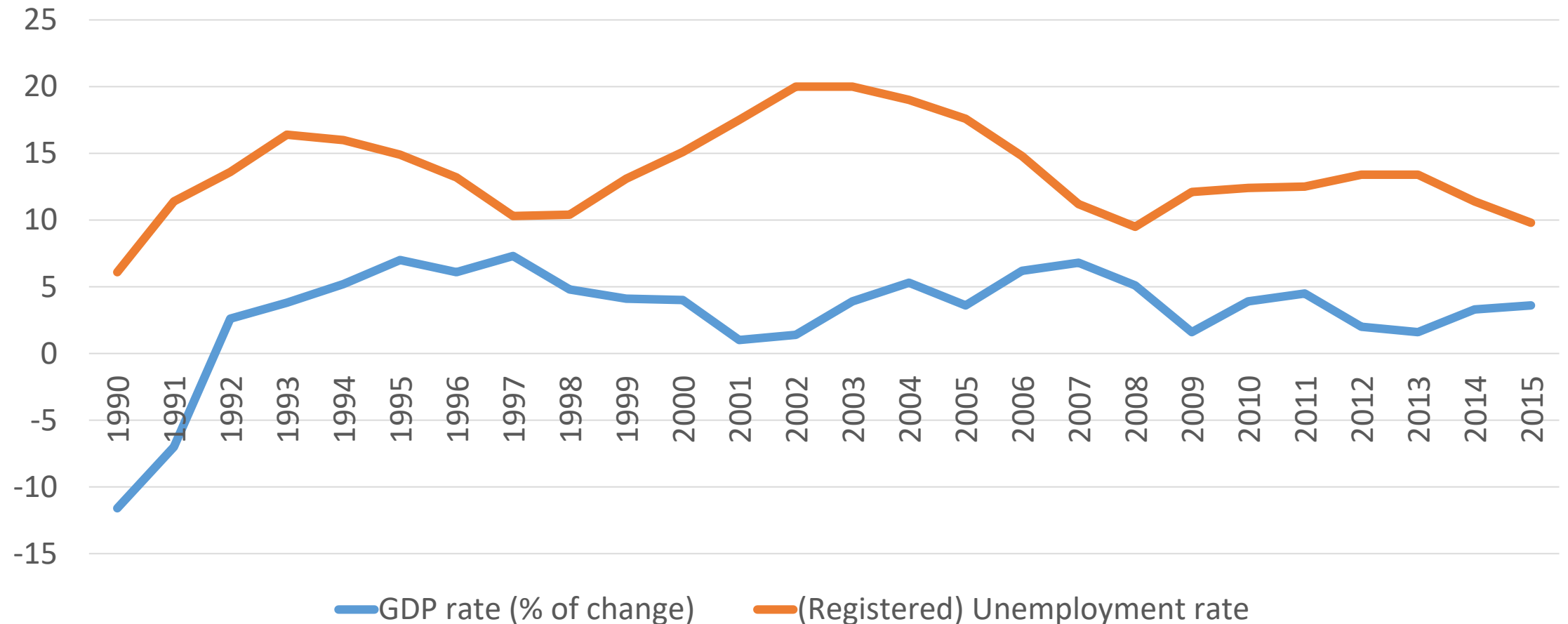
- Janus face of the labour market and economic situation in Poland
 - Poland as a country to lesser degree affected by the global financial and economic crisis: positive GDP growth rate in 2008-2016, some unemployment growth, but currently the lowest rates since 1991;
 - Poland as country with the highest share of temporary employed in the EU (28%), in particular among young (18-30 y.o.) people;
- The question of trade union responses to the problems of precarious employment in Poland?
 - EC DG Employment funded PRECARIR project - in 5 sectors (health care, steelworks, construction, TWAs, retail)
- The question of the collective and individual agency of young precarious workers (NCN/DFG PREWORK (2016-19) project)?
 - WP4: Biographical narrative interviews with young precarious workers (ongoing, tentative observations)

Background: the silent crisis in Poland

(Maciejewska et al. 2016)

- Long-term and gradual character of precarisation a feature of the Polish “dependent market economy” (Nölke&Vliegenthart 2009)
 - Legal changes aimed at increasing labour market flexibility in the context of very high unemployment in early 2000s, the preparation for Poland’s accession to the EU and the goal of attracting the FDIs
 - Increasing weakness of industrial relations actors and institutions and problems with law enforcement (UD=12%, CBC=15-25%)
 - Economic slowdown (2008+) used to stabilise and reinforce earlier policies *despite* good economic performance thanks to low dependency on exports, stable public spending, resilience of financial sector & high migration
- Political changes in 2014-15 in the wake of presidential & parliamentary elections: the outburst of the “precariat anger”?

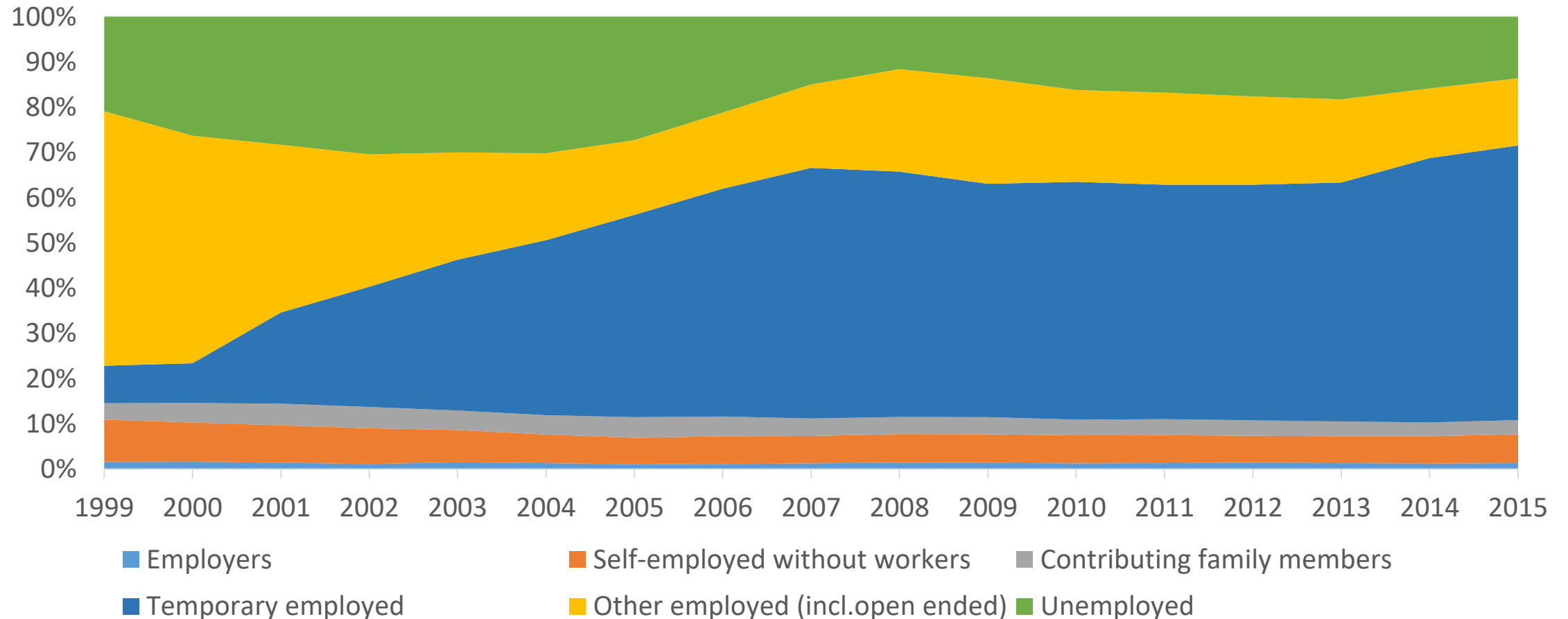
GDP & registered unemployment rate



Source: Central Statistical Office, Poland, Maciejewska, Mrozowicki, Piasna 2016

The expanding zone of temporary work

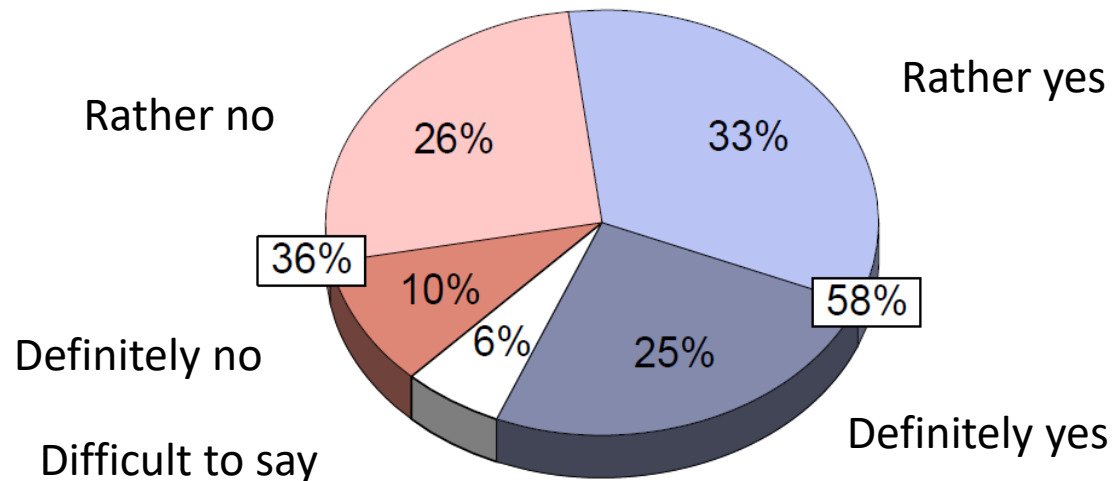
Economically active population in Poland aged 20-29 by the type of activity



Outraged Poles ?

CBOS

Would you personally count yourself as a part of the outraged, thus the people who are unhappy and frustrated by the economic crisis and worsening living conditions and want to express their discontent?



The most outraged:

- Farmers
- Unskilled workers
- Unemployed
- Supporters of the Law and Justice
- Aged 45-64

Economically better off and younger tend to be more outraged by the political situation than economic situation.

Trade union responses: national level

- Context:
 - Low trade union density, low CB coverage, search for new topics and tools
 - Precarious employment as a challenge for union legitimacy and organisational survival
 - Crisis of national-level tripartite social dialogue after 2009
 - Elections in 2015 (!) – “junk contracts” as a political topic
- Tactics/strategies:
 - Building **discursive power** (e.g. “junk contracts”) through public/media campaigns
 - Inter-union cooperation and coalitions with social movements– **external solidarities**
 - Legal pressure at the national and international levels (“externalising domestic conflicts” (Greskovits, 2015) – **institutional power**
- Outcomes:
 - Changes in Labour Code regarding temporary contracts (2015)
 - Constitutional Court’s verdict on unionisation of self-employed and civil law workers (2015)
 - Changes in the Act on Social Security system (2014/2016)
 - Changes in the Public Procurement Act (social clauses, 2014)
 - Impact on further legal changes following the victory of Law and Justice in 2015 (in particular, the role of NSZZ Solidarnosc linkages with the government)

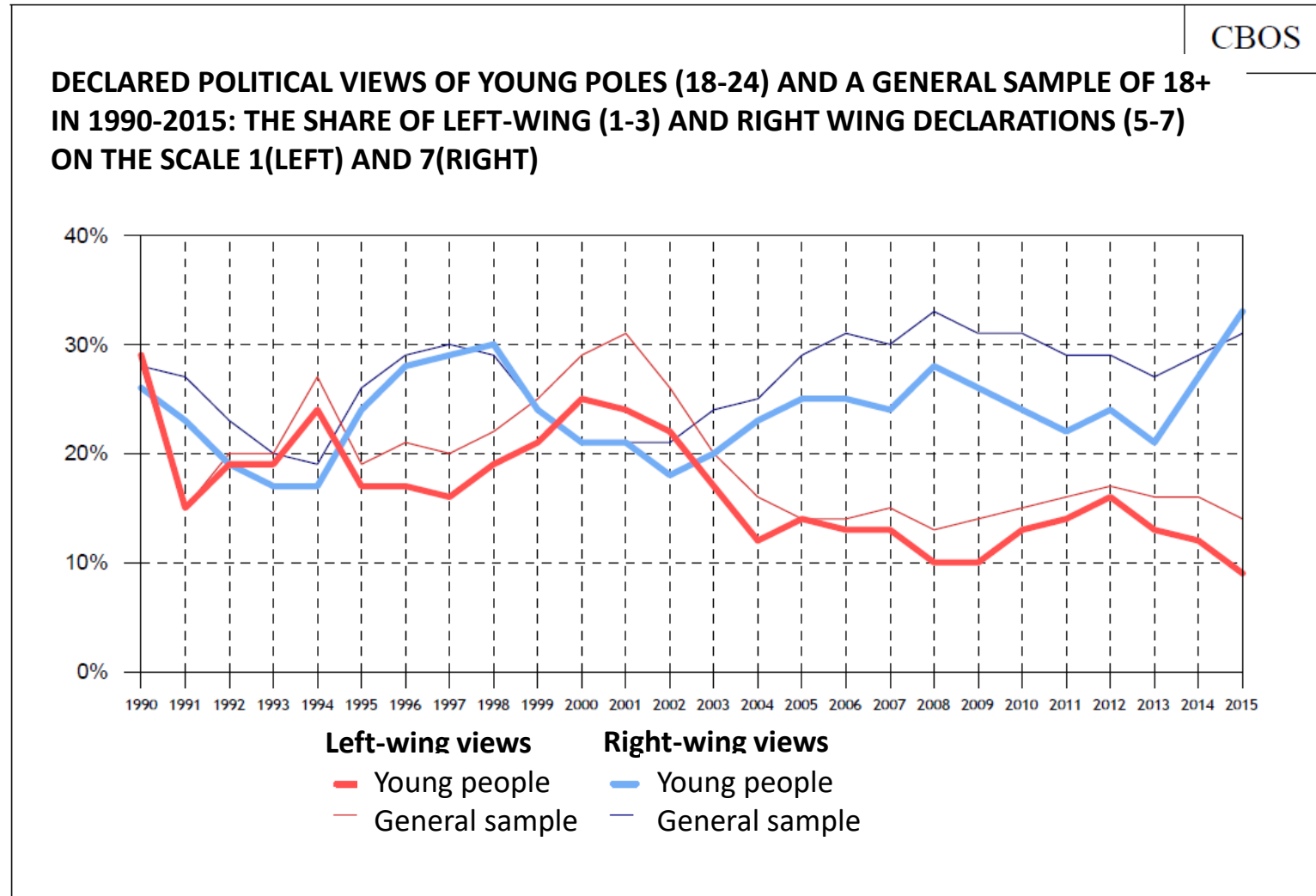
Trade union responses: sectoral level

	Steelworks	Health Care	Construction	Retail	TWA
Union density	50%	21%	3%	2%	No TWA unions
Trade union organising	Important (covering TAW in inter-company TUs)	Limited	Limited	Important, but not covering atypical employees	Limited (radical unions)
Collective bargaining	Important (company level, legacy of sector-level)	Important (company and occupational level)	Limited (soft measures)	Limited (company level)	Non-existent
Political&legal instruments	Historically important, nowadays limited	Important (tariffs, minimum wages for the sector)	Important (changes in public procurement act)	Limited (potentially important – work on Sunday)	Important (regulation drive, tripartite team)
Media-oriented instruments / social campaigns	Limited	Limited	Limited	Very important (social campaigns & protests)	Important (social campaigns)
Outcomes	Inclusive (wages, coverage of TAWs)	Occupationally segmented	Segmented, but also potentially inclusive (social clauses)	Segmented (MNCs large chains vs. rest), potentially inclusive	Not yet visible except for changing discourse

Social movements and political actors confronting precarity in Poland

- Revival of right-wing movements and attitudes in Poland
 - Heterogeneous support for far-right: less skinheads, more women, pupils and students (Kajta 2015); greater post-2015 institutionalisation (the All-Poland Youth among the Kukiz '15 MPs); situational cooperation with right-wing trade unions
 - The lack of coherent economic programme: the issue of economic insecurity appear, but they are secondary to identity-related conservative agenda
- Political measures to limit the scope of civil-law and temporary contracts and limit precarity undertaken by Law&Justice (PiS) since 2015
 - Minimum hourly wage for freelancers and self-employed (2017), the unilateral (!) raise of minimum wage (2016); reinforcement of Labour Inspectorates, 500+ programme supporting income of families (unconditional for those with 2+ children)
- Weakness of left-wing social movements, BUT: unexpected success of newly created “Together” (Razem) party (3,62% of votes in 2015)

Turn to the Right



Source: Kazanecki, Wojciech (2015) Zainteresowanie polityką i poglądy polityczne w latach 1990-2015. Deklaracje ludzi młodych na tle ogółu badanych, CBOS 135/2015.

Young precarious workers: a (missing) actor of counter-movements?

- “Normalisation of precariousness” (Mrozowicki 2016): three discourses
 - **Transitory type:** related to a phase in a life cycle, softened by biographical coping mechanisms based on family and private resources
 - **Post-Fordist type:** Market-liberal discourse of resourcefulness, self-confident individualism, life long learning, entrepreneurship
 - **Anti-Fordist type:** Reflexive choice of “unstable life” to fulfil life projects in the sphere of work or beyond it, the rejection of “corporate careers”
- Some (rather weak) potential of collective mobilization among those within the anti-Fordist pattern?
 - Distance of trade union bureaucracy, normalisation of flexibility combined with the opposition to social injustice of “junk contracts” and support for various, often incoherent political and economic views

Conclusion

- Silent and crawling crisis: the expansion of precarious employment as a side effect of the model of capitalist transformation in Poland;
- Trade unions as the first social actors to politically frame and address the problem of precariousness
- Visible shift from collective bargaining to political and media-oriented instruments: the limits of new union “discursive power” in the context of weak other forms of associational and structural power of unions
- The Right as a true political winner of reframing precariousness as political problem and the disillusionment with (neo)liberalism
- Political volatility of young people: the history is not yet finished...