



Precarious lives and new solidarities: normalisation and resistance against precarity in the consciousness and biographies of young workers in Poland and Germany

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Overview

- Introduction
- Theoretical inspirations
- Socio-economic consciousness of young workers in Poland and Germany
- Life strategies of young precarious workers in Poland and Germany
- Conclusions /discussion

Introduction

- Germany and Poland and their different pathways to precarisation
 - Dualisation in Germany (Thelen 2014) affecting young people
 - Destandardisation of employment in Poland (Muszynski 2018) in the course of three waves of precarisation after 1989
- Relatively high level of life satisfaction and limited protests of young people (Szafraniec et al., Albert et al. 2015)
 - Low participation in trade unions in both countries (growing in DE)
 - Trade unions campaigns against precarious work and representation without membership phenomenon (Keune 2013; Martiskova&Sedlakova 2017)
- The PREWORK project studying working and living conditions, social consciousness and civic engagement of young people

Research questions and methods

- To which extent the changes on the Polish and German labour market were reflected in the normative visions of well-ordered economy?
 - The normative visions of economy (Gardawski 2017) as the indicators of class consciousness and a basis for collective mobilisation and demobilisation
 - The hypotheses about (habitus-related) durability and homology of economic mentality of young Poles and Germans (Bourdieu 1984; Gardawski 2018)
 - CATI survey on a random sample of young people (N=1000 in Poland and Germany), the index of well-ordered economy (15 variables), 2016-2017
- How is precarisation experienced and evaluated by young people in Poland and Germany? If, when and how does it become a problem?
 - 130 biographical narrative interviews with YPW in PL (70) and DE (60) using F. Schuetze method, in non-standard employment, unemployed or precarious forms of VET, aged 18-35, in locations varying by their economic development
 - The abductive logics of research (Kelle 2005); the typology of life strategies as individual ways of achieving desired modus vivendi (Archer 2007)

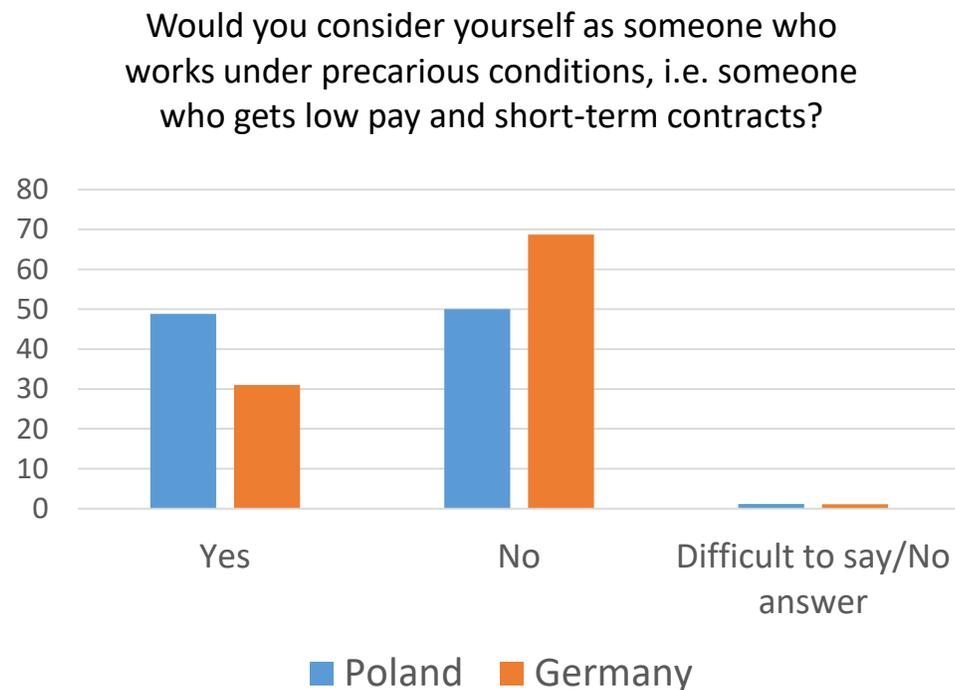
Theoretical sensitivity (I)

- **Why do young workers do not resist precarity (more)?**
- **Limited structural power and associational power** (Silver 2003) – labour market outsiders' status (37,3% in DE and 50,5% in PL of people at 15-29 working with temporary contracts); limited, even if (in DE) growing TU density (DE: 18% [18-25], PL – 5% [18-25])
- **„New spirit of capitalism”** – precarity as a consequence of searching for autonomy, freedom, and authenticity; project-work as an opposition to the Fordist model (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005)
- **Stepping stone hypothesis** – precarity as a stage during the transition to adulthood; temporary acceptance of precarity (Giermanowska 2013, Furlong 2013)

Theoretical sensitivity (II)

- **Institutional drift and conversion** – decreasing differences between precarious and non-precarious conditions due to extension of SER protection to non-standard work and construction of precarious work as alternative to unemployment in ALMP (Rubert et al. 2018, Muszynski 2017)
- **Fatalism and withdrawal** – even if not welcomed precarity accepted as an unavoidable condition; structurally imposed precarity (Bourdieu 1984, Strzelecki 2012)
- **Work as secondary motive** – precarity as irrelevant due to changing concerns in generation Y/Z to post-materialistic (Hurrelmann and Albrecht 2014; Andrejczuk 2013) or reorientation to non-work related areas of social life in case of lack of work satisfaction (Thomas 1989)

Self-perception of workers under precarious conditions



	Poland		Germany	
	V-Cram.	Sign.	V-Cram	Sign.
Gender	0,125	,031	0,077	,377
Age	0,135	,015	0,130	,031
Education	0,216*	,000	0,174*	,000
Type of contract	0,457*	,000	0,275*	,000
Self-perceived income	0,526*	,000	0,207*	,000

Source: PREWORK CATI surveys, Weighted data; Poland n=574; Germany n=528 (only those in employment)

Economic consciousness: main observations

- **Similarities** between PL and DE: mix of liberalism and welfarism
 - high support for **market competition** (72% in PL and DE)
 - high support for **free of charge health care** (76% in PL and DE)
 - high (PL: 88%,) to moderately high (DE - 68%) support for **giving indefinite contracts** if workers wish
 - moderate support **for the role of trade unions in policy** (50% in PL and DE)
 - limited support for buying domestic companies by foreign capital (16% in PL, 14% in DE)
- **Differences** → **the vision of ‘open social market economy’ in Germany**
 - High support for **worker co-determination** in DE (78,3% in DE, 47,5% in PL)
 - High support for **worker mobility in Europe** in DE (88% in DE, 66% in PL)
 - Higher support for **solidaristic tax policies** in DE (65% in DE, 54,4% in PL)
- **Precarious status in DE:** greater support for social egalitarianism (solidarism), lesser support for competition and using tax money for creation of companies and R&D activities, but otherwise: not much changes, **the only significant relationship concerns competition (!)**
- **In East Germany** – less acceptance for egalitarianism, participation, greater for liberalization of labour market (closer to Poland)

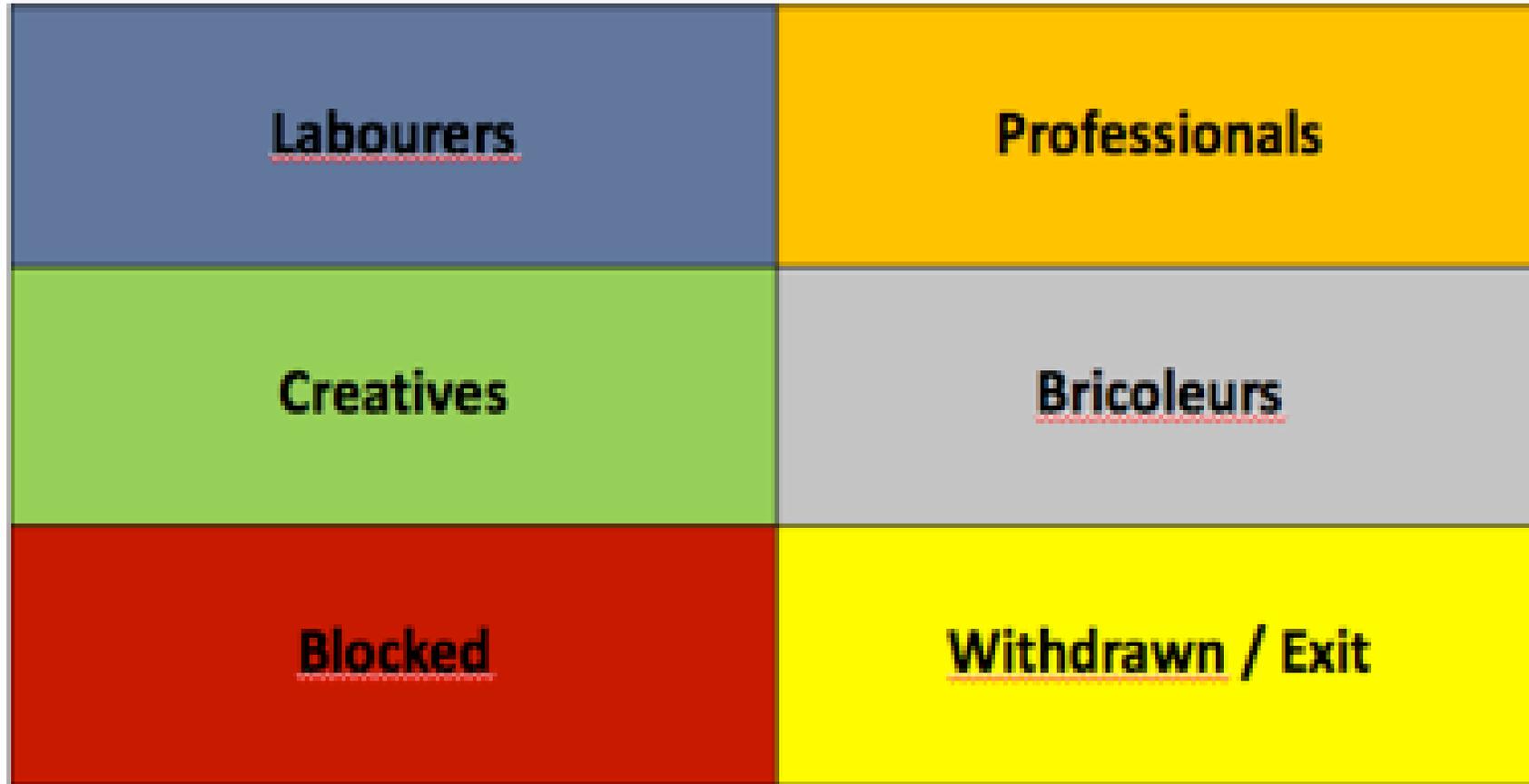
Economic consciousness: main observations

- **Differences → in Poland, economic consciousness divided**
 - **Domestic developmental capitalism:** strong support for **state intervention in economy** – protectionism over domestic companies (77% in PL vs. 35% in DE), **financing of national development centres** (75% in PL, 58% in DE), **offering workers indefinite contracts** if they wish (88% in PL, 68% in DE)
 - **Anarcho-infantile orientations** - support for **private financing of public services** (46% in PL vs. 19% in DE) and for **voluntary pension contributions** (52% in PL vs. 12% in DE) – despite limited support for other liberal principles (dismissing workers' without compensation & allowing foreign capital to purchase domestic companies without limits – 16,4% in PL and 14,9% in DE)
- **Precarious employment status:** lesser support for competition & more support for trade union influence and co-determination, but in general differences rather small and inconsistent.
- **Thus:** 1) economic consciousness still reflects the major aspects of institutional orders (habitus hypothesis); 2) it is not a solid (class) basis for collective action as it either reproduces dual status quo (Germany) or is internally divided; 3) greater support for protectionism and trade unions (in Poland) and lesser for “competition” (in Poland and Germany) by precarious workers - --> **does it create some ‘mental space’ of resistance ?**

Typology of life strategies

- the **relative biographical relevance** (and, at times, irrelevance) of **work** as compared to **non-working life** and other biographical concerns;
- the **subjective meaning of objectively precarious employment** – normalisation vs. questioning/ resistance/problematisation of precarisation, opposing it;
- the **importance of** biographical, social, economic and cultural **resources** (Bourdieu 1986, Trappmann et al. 2018) as **means of immunisation** against the precarity (Lorey 2015)

Types of Coping with Precarious Employment



Labourers

- **Longing for stability** - expectations of work in a “Fordist” context
- Meaning of work: **Social integration**
- **Precarity is not normatively accepted, but coped with**
 - Searching for stability in other life domains, e.g. family
 - Redefining precarity as temporary
 - Fatalism / Discipline of necessity:
 - **Mesut**: I think you can scrape by, no matter what you get, because you adjust yourself to it. (.) That you (.) can forgo some things maybe, that you don't really-, of course you have needs that you want to take care of, but there are things, that you don't need in reality, necessarily. (...) I got a really small car, don't pay a lot of taxes, insurance is also extremely cheap. (2) that's totally enough for me. (M, 20, DE)
- The (limited) cases of opposing precarity (Polish sample)
 - **Pragmatically** oriented trade union involvement
 - **Disaffiliation** leading to the anti-systemic critique
- In the German sample, much more emphasis on education, self-limitation and generally accepted status quo

Professionals

- **Longing for stability** – full time job, high income, good career prospects, in some cases also **self-fulfillment**
- Meaning of work: Status conservation
- Precarity is **not normatively accepted, but endured and coped with:**
 - Immunisation through embeddedness in social bonds
 - Redefining precarity as temporary, the matter of being ‘novice’
 - On-going investment in cultural capital:
 - *“I still believe that with appropriate degrees at some point you will have a real, steady job”*
(Anna, DE)
- Two subtypes: 1) focused on stability at any price and 2) focused on both self-fulfillment and stability → greater potential of critique
 - Additionally: **status factors incongruity** (in the Polish cases) as a source of opposition against the precarity

Creatives

- Voluntary rejection of Fordist model of employment
- **Longing for self-fulfilment**, searching for flexibility and autonomy
- Meaning of work: Self realization, authenticity
- **Precarity is endured/tolerated:**
 - Necessary cost for flexibility and self-fulfillment
 - Redefining precarity as temporary → Endured as a transitional period
- **Important role of cultural and symbolic capital + social bonds**
- **Searching for new solidarities** capable of reflecting experience of instability and also offering self-fulfillment through activism – in PL
 - **Daniela:** I really needed it. Something which would allow me to fulfil myself, to develop outside work to which it is difficult to commit yourself (...) My friends from the studies were involved in it and they involved me, too (...) Then I became involved in other initiatives like the grassroots Workers' Initiative, also because of the people I met in the March 8th Initiative ,together, we established a local committee in W. where it had not been present before. That's how it all started.

Bricoleurs

- **Voluntary rejection of the Fordist model of employment**
- **Normalisation of precarity**
 - the normative acceptance of flexibility – ‘anything goes’ (Ziólkowski)
 - Necessary cost for independence (from employers, families, state)
- Subjectively **minimised role of cultural capital and formal education**; central role of economic motives at work
- **Own resourcefulness** → recombining scarce resources for new purposes - experimenting with various forms of employment, also informal or illegal
- Potential of critique in the PL sample – more market rather than less market need, anti-welfarism
 - Marian: “You know what, **nobody ever gave me anything for free**. Many things I have, for many things I have worked, and, well and. **I have worked and this is only my work**, and sometimes if I got lucky, you know. Some things, some things had more impact on where I work now, but I think that **everybody has their own hands**.”

Blocked

- **Work has a central role in their lives**
- Awareness and fear of precarious working conditions
- **Precarity as unwanted necessity:** the (subjective) feeling of being stuck in precarious conditions:
 - criticism of the rules of the games which an individual needs to follow to overcome precarity
 - Externalising sources of precarity, de-individualising precarity or psychologising them
 - but no steps are undertaken to move out of it: **Helena:** „I can't cope with myself, with my past and present, with this in which I'm stuck in“;
- **Ressources are almost absent**
 - Coping through shifting commitments beyond work – e.g. immunisation through emotional investments in relationships

Withdrawn/ Exit

- **Work and employment have no biographical significance.** Important things in life cannot be pursued through work
- **Critical** of precarity, **but not resisting** as world of work is considered irrelevant for self
 - **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
- Retreat from working life is not seen as problematic but liberating from obligations and control
 - **Noah:** I had a totally different lifestyle. I was juggling on the street, for money as well, lived by dumpster diving. I really had a different lifestyle, I didn't need much money and it was alright. It was okay to sleep outside. It was the way I wanted to live
- Retreat into early parenthood, new communitarian spaces, decommodified communes or illegality

Tentative conclusions

- Young people in Poland and Germany **feel precarious but usually do not challenge or critique precarity**
- **Normalisation of precarity** reflected in the limited relevance of precarious status for some aspects of young workers economic consciousness
 - At times, some traces of economic consciousness of the youth in Poland even contradict their economic interests ('anarcho-infantilism')
 - Despite precarisation, in particular in Germany, economic consciousness of the youth largely reflects the existing (dualised) institutional order
 - **Potentially precarious workers in Poland favour more protectionism and trade union influence on policy making, which does create some space for resisting precarity. Some other aspects of precarious workers consciousness in Poland call for changes in the society (the plea for 'developmental capitalism') and also in Germany the support for the core market-related variable, competition, is lower among those precarious. Yet, in both countries the consciousness is divided.**

Tentative conclusions

- **Greater reliance on institutional order in case of German informants** as compared to young Poles? VET, belief in meritocracy, ...
 - The source of potential critique of precarity is the divide between those **withdrawn** (refusing work-centred values) and the rest of the sample
- **In the Polish sample**, greater feeling of incongruence of status factors (creative and professionals) and disaffiliation (labourers) can lead to the **critique of precarity → the space for organizing** ;
 - Twofold source of critique: 1) ultra-liberal, anti-welfarist (and anti-union), distrustful towards the state; 2) creatives, professionals and withdrawn, disillusioned with market ideologies and searching for new solidarities (perhaps within 'developmental model of capitalism', but also beyond it)