

Lost in transitions? Biographical experiences and life strategies of young precarious workers in Poland

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Overview

- Introduction
- Precarity and precarious employment: theoretical debates
- The case of Poland: precarity, silent crisis and the youth
- Normalisation of precarity among young people
- Life strategies of young people: tentative typology
- Conclusions
- **More information:** www.prework.eu (!)

Introduction

- Young precarious workers as a buffer of labour market changes in PL:
 - Very high level of temporary employment (15-24 y.o. - 73%)
 - High level of involuntary part-time (15-29 y.o. - 34%)
 - Greater economic exclusion as a result of precarity
- Despite insecurity, relatively high level of life satisfaction (Czapiński, Panek 2015; CBOS 2017) & limited involvement in protests
 - Normalisation of precarity? Exit through migration? Fragmentation of protest?
- The question of the collective and individual agency of young precarious workers (NCN/DFG PREWORK (2016-19) project) – its conditions, specificity and socio-political consequences
 - WP4: Biographical narrative interviews with young precarious workers (ongoing, tentative observations) + an earlier pilot study

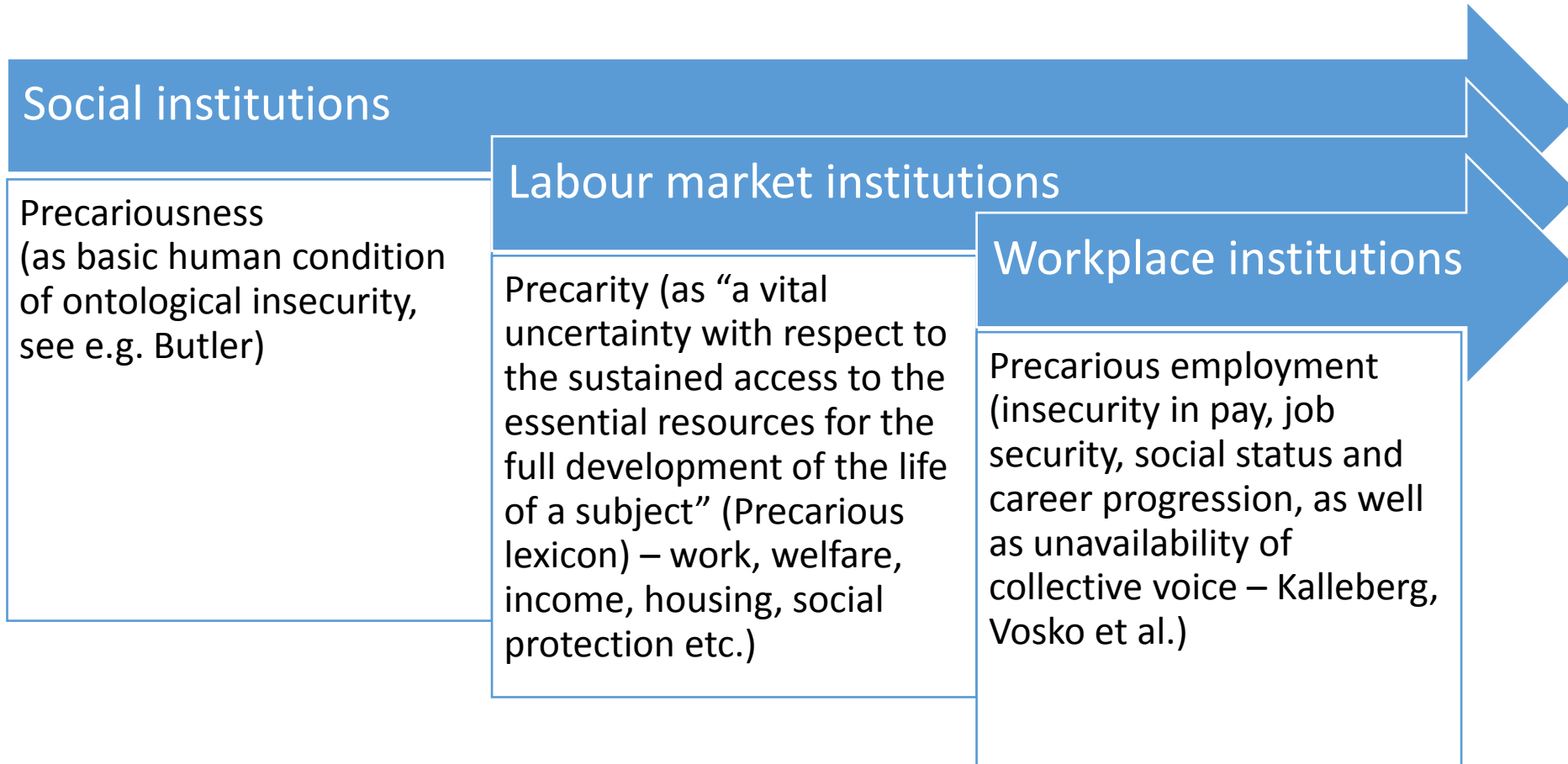
Background I: Life strategies and biographical transitions

- Youth studies: the social, class, gendered, political... nature of the “transitions” agenda
 - No universal rationality accompanying the choices, no unambiguous ends, not necessary focus on the life of work and school in young people’s lives (Maguire&Ball 2012)
 - Institutional action schemes (Schuetze 2008) of “normal biographies” vs. uneven, fragmented, extended transitions to adulthood of young people today;
 - The “negotiated” character and shifting boundaries of youth and adulthood (Furlong 2013)
- Realist biography approach to the “agency of the weak” – negotiating individual choices in a context of economic and symbolic constraints
 - **Social agency** as the outcome of the interplay of powers pertaining to subjects (reflexivity, intentionality...) and those pertaining to social structures and culture (temporal priority, relative autonomy, causal efficacy *vis-a-vis* members of society) (Archer 2003)
 - The relevance of **resources** (Bourdieu 1986) – including cultural, social and economic capital – in shaping the initial conditions for developing life projects: the youth as a **socially divided** category
 - The importance of **reflexivity** (Archer 2007) and biographical work (Strauss 1993; Schuetze 2008) accompanying biographical choices, coping strategies and resilience

Background II: Precarity & changing employment

- Changing employment – in particular, its precarisation, deeply affects biographical status passages of young people (e.g. Furlong 2013)
- Precarious employment – work for remuneration characterized by uncertainty, low income, limited social benefits, statutory entitlements and collective voice (Vosko 2010, p.2)
- The question of the meaning of precarity in the context of new Eastern European capitalism - Is precarity really new?
 - The peculiarity of state-socialist/authoritarian variety of industrial societies and socialist welfare states;
 - The lack of a historical experience (and narrative) of the “Fordist” compromise;
 - The relationships with the old forms of LM segmentation and poverty (e.g. women, peasant-workers, ex-state farm workers) ;

Background II: Precarity & changing employment



Emergent, processual, historical and relational nature of precarity and its relationship with institutional and class orders (Hardy 2016)

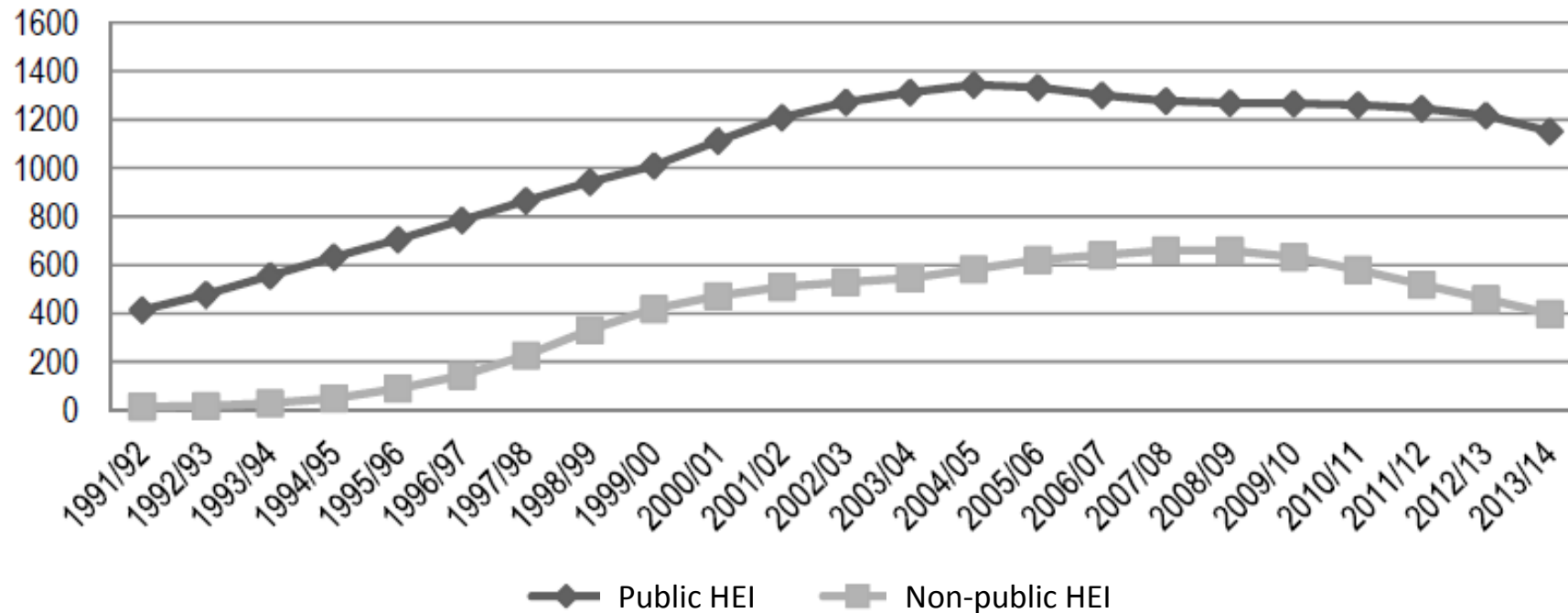
Background III: Precarity & systemic change

(Maciejewska et al. 2016; Mrozowicki et al. 2016)

- Long-term and gradual character of precarisation a feature of the Polish “dependent market economy” (Nölke&Vliegenthart 2009)
 - **1st wave of precarisation:** shock therapy, the re-emergence of unemployment, “pensioners’ welfare state” (Bohle and Greskovits) and the myth of the market
 - Limited “voice” (protests) and the dominant “loyalty” strategies (entrepreneurship)
 - **2nd wave of precarisation:** legal changes aimed at increasing labour market flexibility in the context of high unemployment in early 2000s, the preparation for Poland’s accession to the EU and the goal of attracting FDIs
 - Increasing weakness of industrial relations actors and institutions and problems with law enforcement (UD=12%, CBC=15-25%)
 - the “loyalty” strategies (educational boom) and “exit” strategies (migration) – in both cases affecting young people

Educational boom at the tertiary level

The number of students in public and non-public higher education institutions (in 1000)

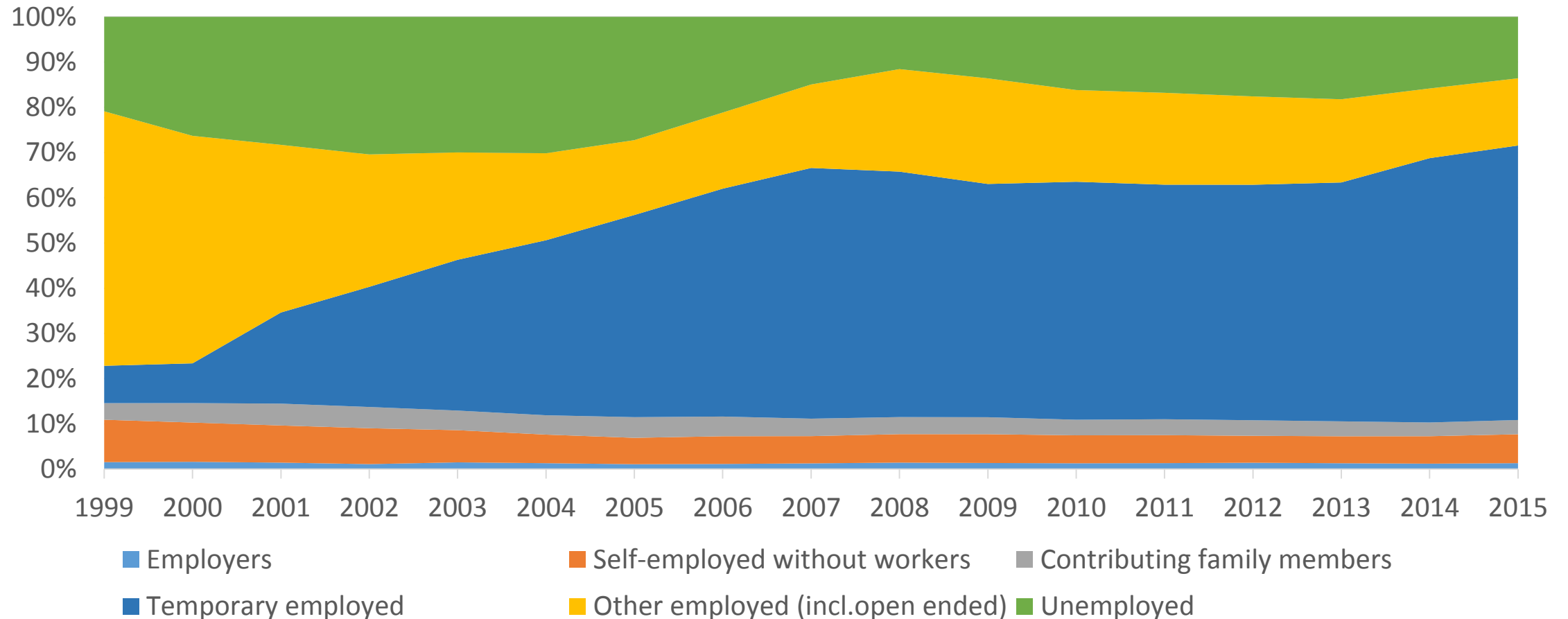


Source: GUS (2014) Szkoły wyższe i ich finanse w 2013 r., Warszawa: GUS

- The myth and reality of higher education
- 40% of people aged 20-24 studying in HEI
- Downgrading vocational education
- Mismatches between education and LM
- Limited protection against precarity, but rather high against unemployment

The expanding zone of temporary work

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



Precurity & systemic change (III)

- **3rd wave of precarisation:** economic slowdown (2008+) used to stabilize and reinforce earlier policies *despite* good economic performance → flexible regulations move from ‘exception’ to normality
 - Political changes in 2014-15 in the wake of presidential & parliamentary elections: the outburst of the (young) “precariat anger”?
 - From ‘exit’ and ‘loyalty’ towards ‘voice’? (Meardi)

13 zł

**... I NIE!
KOMBINUJ!**

Od 1 stycznia 2017 r. obowiązuje minimalna stawka godzinowa dla umów zleceń w wysokości **13 zł brutto**.

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**KONIEC Z WYZYSKIEM
I NIEWOLNICZĄ PRACĄ!**

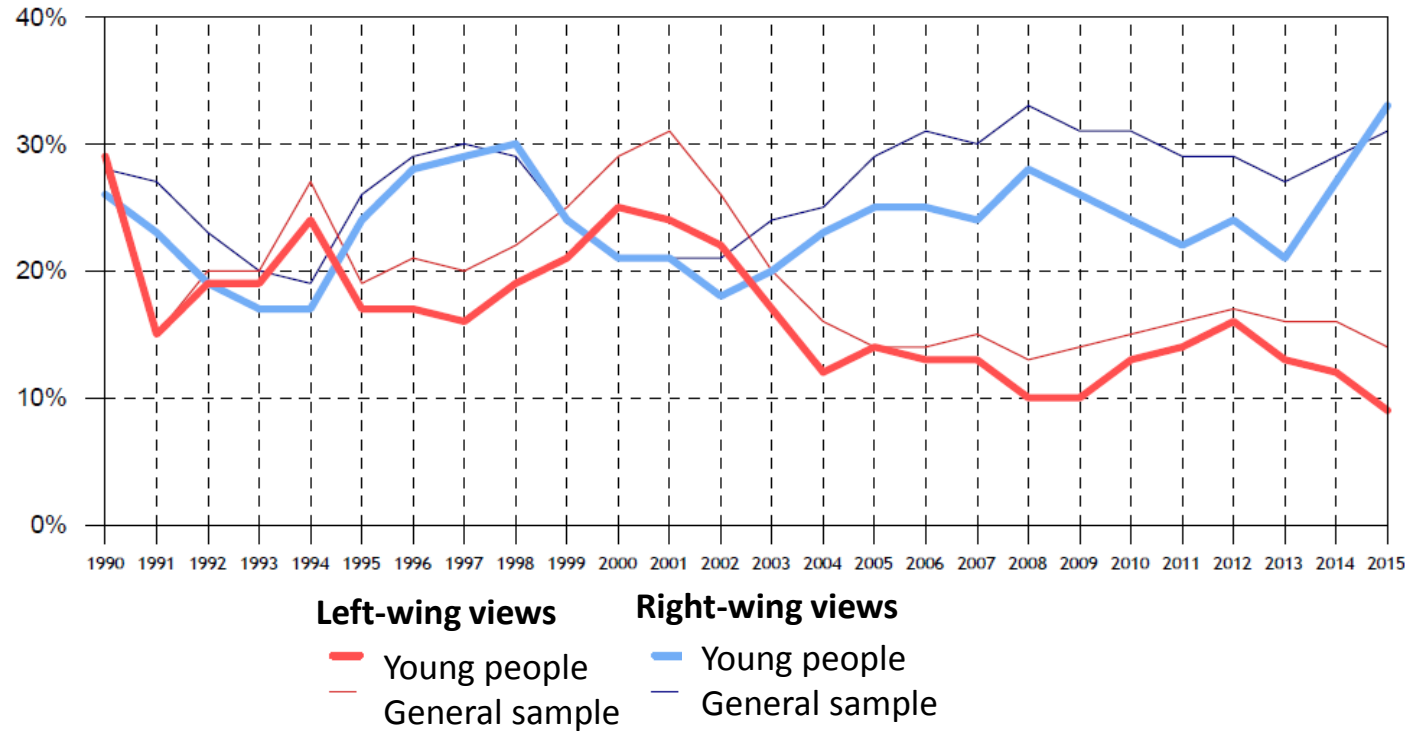
LISTONOSZE WROCLAW



Turn to the Right – yes, but it is still minority...

CBOS

DECLARED POLITICAL VIEWS OF YOUNG POLES (18-24) AND A GENERAL SAMPLE OF 18+ IN 1990-2015: THE SHARE OF LEFT-WING (1-3) AND RIGHT WING DECLARATIONS (5-7) ON THE SCALE 1(LEFT) AND 7(RIGHT)



- 55% - not interested in politics
- Greater tendency to no views and centrist views than general population (CBOS 2013)

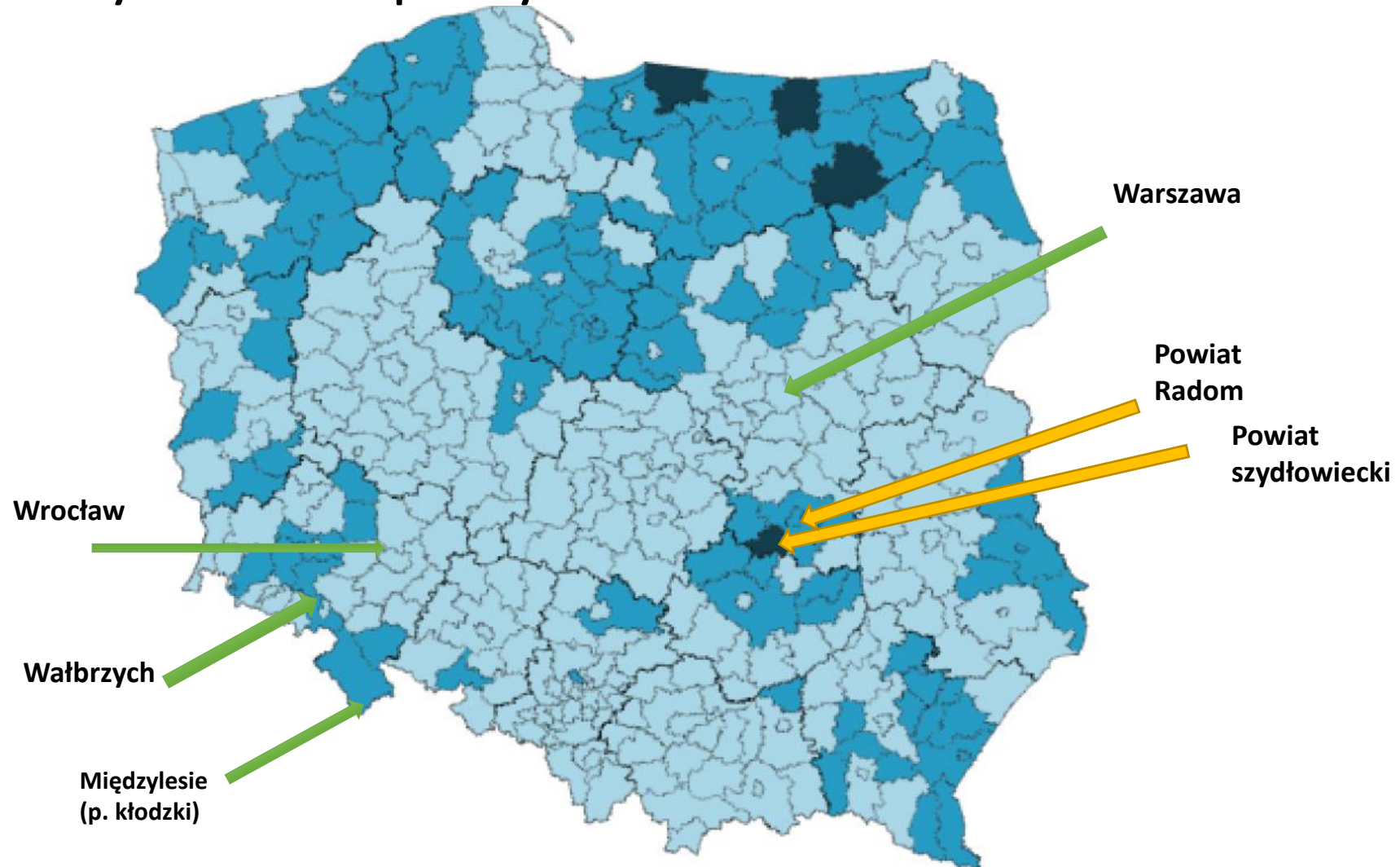
Counter-movements or/and normalisation?

- Normalisation of precarity (Lorey 2015)? No, rather **ambivalence and volatility**
 - Tendency to downplay differences between stable and instable forms of employment (Polawski 2012; Desperak and Smialek 2010, Rog-Ilnicka 2015) – full-time, open-ended contracts seen a sort of „award” (Polawski 2012)
 - Anti-corporate careers (Mrozowicki 2016); “anarcho-capitalism” (J. Gardawski): “state as an enemy” (K. Messyasz) – **but** 89% (!) thinks that the government’s responsibility is to secure jobs for everyone who wants to work and 71% criticizes excessive income inequality, even if 60% argues that many welfare beneficiaries do not deserve help (CBOS 2013)
 - Political indifference (majority) and right wing turn (minority)
- Mediating role of class (Strzelecki, 2012; Gdula 2012; Mrozowicki 2017)
 - Post-Fordist narrative endorsed to greater extent by the representatives of middle classes
 - Self-censorship (Gdula) regarding negative aspects of flexible employment by those with middle class origins
- Mediating role of resources/ biographical experiences/reflexivity → PREWORK

Biographical research: data and methods

- Pilot study on young precarious workers in Wrocław: 24 narrative biographical interviews > 30 years old, unstable employment in Wrocław (2013)
- The NCN/DFG PREWORK (2016-19) project “Young precarious workers in Poland and Germany: a comparative sociological study on working and living conditions, social consciousness and civic engagement” (UMO-2014/15/G/HS4/04476)
 - 40 (60) narrative biographical interviews with young workers (18-30 years old), non-standard employment, unemployed and in precarious forms of VET, in Wrocław, Warsaw, Wałbrzych, Międzylesie (and Radom, Szydłowiec – planned) – 2016-2019
 - **Sample differentiation:** type of job (low-skilled/high-skilled), gender, educational level (with higher education/no higher education) → **theoretical sampling**
- Full life stories from childhood till the present (Schütze 1983) supplemented by additional questions in the 3rd part focused on themes such as economic activity, social ties, civic activism, class identities and the images of socio-economic order
- Data analysis based on open coding and selective coding (GTM)

Overview of the current sample – poviats studied by unemployment rate

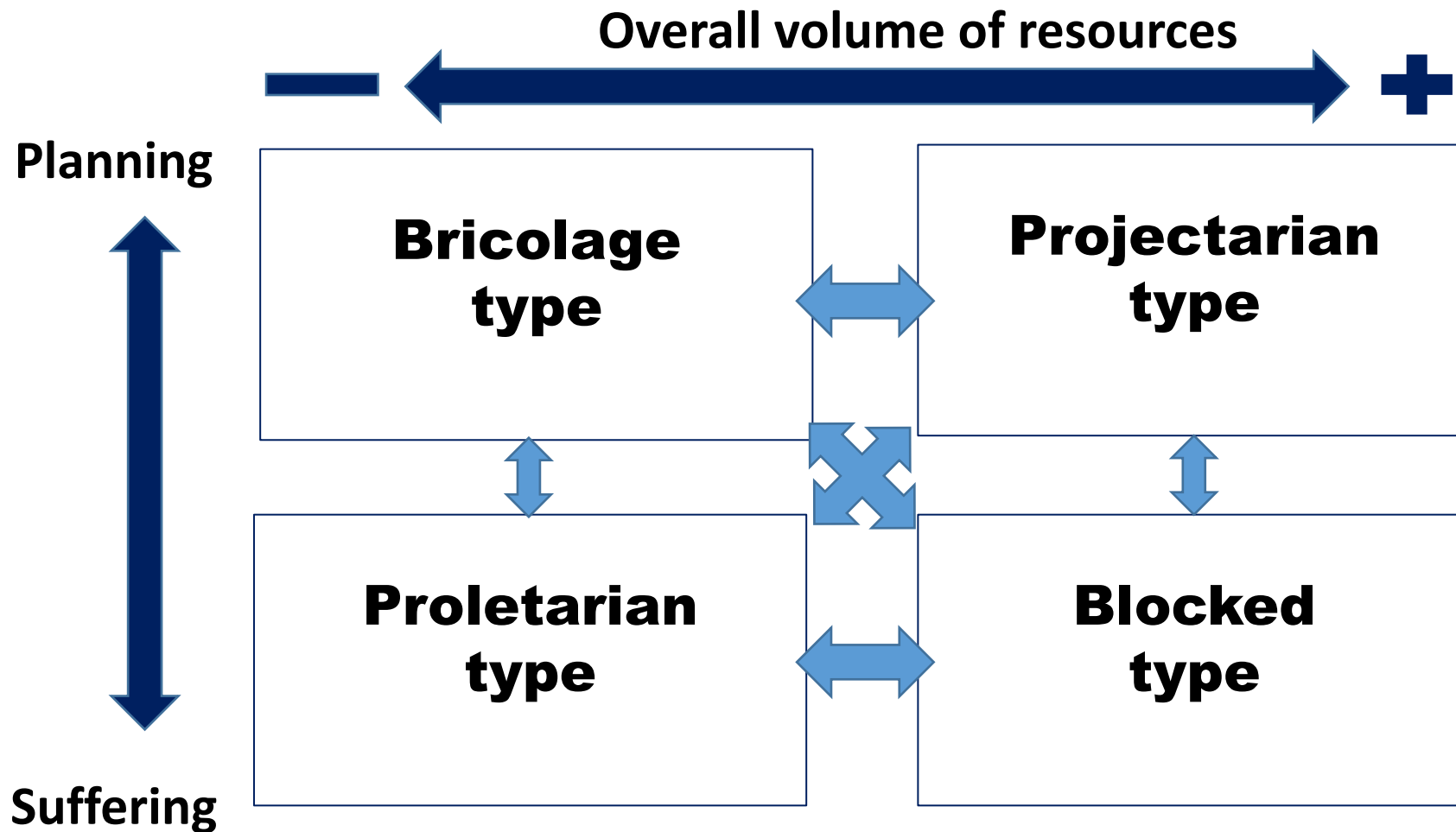


Basic information about research sites (2016)

	City of Wrocław	City of Wałbrzych	City of Warsaw	City of Radom	Kłodzko powiat	Szydłowiec powiat
Unemployment rate (1)	2,8%	9,0%	2,8%	16,2%	16,2%	28,8%
Average wage in PLN (2)	4118,21	3735,14	5226,05	3523,34	3200,48	2950,92

Sources: (1) GUS, <http://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/rynek-pracy/bezrobocie-rejestrowane/liczba-bezrobotnych-zarejestrowanych-oraz-stopa-bezrobocia-wedlug-wojewodztw-podregionow-i-powiatow-stan-w-koncu-grudnia-2016-r-,2,53.html>; (2) Wojtalik, Mateusz (2017) Gdzie w Polsce żyje się najgorzej, a gdzie najlepiej. Newsweek online, <http://www.newsweek.pl/polska/gdzie-w-polsce-zyje-sie-najgorzej-a-gdzie-najlepiej-ranking-powiatow,artykuly,351712,1.html>

Analytical scheme / tentative typology



Tentative typology (II)

- **Proletarian type:** limited educational resources combined with the reproduction of the underprivileged status, erosion of community ties (disaffiliation), forced individualisation and high risk of exclusion – 'non-transition'
- **Bricolage type:** the recombination of (limited) resources for new purposes, autonomous reflexivity (Archer), individualism, resourcefulness – post-Fordist transition
- **Blocked type:** incapacity to make use of educational resources due to the series of biographical contingences and structural constraints – the state of 'limbo', sometimes "nesting" at family home, broken transition
- **Projectarian type** (Szreder 2016): the combination of relatively strong educational/cultural capital (acquired or inherited) with meta-reflexivity – rediscovery of collective good, solidarity combined with search for freedom against bureaucratic limitations, anti-Fordist transition

Projectarian logics: the case of Alicja

- Born in 1987, in a small town in Upper Silesia (mining region), into the working-class, Silesian-Polish family of a miner and shop attendant, 1 sister;
- Attends primary school in the rural part of W.-town, upper secondary school – in urban part; involved in various social and cultural activities.
- Leaves Upper Silesia for university studies in Wroclaw – environmental protection; also attends the post-secondary school Animator (uncompleted) and goes for Erasmus exchange to DK
- Gets involved in various ecological NGOs & urban movements and starts an NGO – “Receptor”
- Attends various trainings in NGOs and gets a three years project job in „Pomoc” Association working as cultural animator with children at risk of exclusion
- In 2015, she moves to S-village close to Wałbrzych, creates Gamma Workshop for local kids thanks to funding of a Telecom Company, under auspices of the Receptor association
- Bought (cheaply) a small flat in S-village with her partner (a designer) and plan to get married
- The joint income of their household is less than 3000 PLN (750 EUR)

Projectarian logics: core categories (Alicja)

- The main biographical process structure: biographical planning / mobility as a way of coping with biographical problems (“escape” to Wroclaw, next to S-village)
- The role of family resources (father’s income in the mining sector) converted by the means of planning/reflexivity into cultural and social capital in the NGO milieu in Wroclaw – from the bricolage patterns into the projectarian patterns
- Work-centred, project-oriented biography, blurred boundaries between work and private life; readiness of pay biographical costs of insecurity;
- Permanent networking – *co-opetition* combining cooperation and competition (Brandenburger, Nalebuff 1997) – the social world of NGOs as a safety belt protecting those who are in against precarisation; being all the time “in circulation”
- The biography fitting the new spirit of capitalism (Botlanski, Chiapello 2006) based on constant (institutional) innovation; distance of the corporate world (never experienced, but kept as another ‘security belt’ just in case)

Projectarian logics: core categories (Alicja)

- Identification with precariat, voting for the Razem/Together Party

„Lack of stability by definition, zero labour rights, this uncertainty and fear, because the fear for your functioning is always there, right? Because I feel that I am in a comfortable position because I am socially surrounded by people, so this is a great support for me, it is not so dramatic for me. But among some of my friends, this is rather a kind of a joke that we are the precariat here ((laughter))”

- The project of “community work” combining solidarity and self-fulfilment – also as a way of coping with biographical misfit between (working class) habitus and (new capitalist) context (Bourdieu)

„I still want to do something, try to animate. Hell, I am a bit idealist, I live my dreams and we are starting a new project as well, also here in B. There is not much business thinking in it all, it was never about that, maybe that is why I do not earn a lot and I do not work in places where salaries are high, but it gives me a great satisfaction, no? So I will probably continue with this self-employment in NGOs. We will see. For now I have submitted billions of applications for this year so ((laughter)) hoping that maybe one will go through. On the other hand, maybe there will be a moment when everything will go to hell and I will be looking for work in some corporation ((laughter)) which probably is not so bad, only new to me, never experienced to be honest. So I keep meeting good people and maybe that is why I still want to do it.”

Proletarian logics: the case of Julita

- Born in 1994, in T-town (family farm, childhood with 2 sisters and 1 brother)
- Experience of labelling at school as peasants' daughter
- Following the farm closure, the father starts working in Germany
- High school in a larger town, A-town – anonymity (2010-2014), commuting
- Internship at a local franchised shop (2014)
- Unplanned pregnancy, abandoned by her boyfriend (and father of the child who leaves abroad), death of brother in a motorbike accident (09.2015)
- Her daughter is born in 02.2016, since then on maternity leave, living with her parents
- The joint income of their 5 persons household is 3000-4000 PLN. (750-1000 EUR)

Proletarian logics: core categories (Julita)

- The main biographical process structure: trajectory; proletarian, but not passive
- The experience of loss/disaffiliation (R. Castel) overlapping with precarisation & migration/family experience (father, friends, ex-boyfriend, sister...) - immobility
- The combination of class disidentification (B. Skeggs) with biographical experiences of class constraints – labelling, symbolic exclusion at school;

“When you do not have the right surname (...) then you are... neglected. (...) And only in secondary school I have discovered that everybody can be equal, that there are no such surnames”

“I have never wanted to be classified”

- The experience of a “social jungle” (W.Narojek) or “dirty community” (A. Podgórecki) - dense networks as both safety belt and curse;

“People can destroy you here in T. Very much, not only us, my brother rode a motorcycle and they could say a lot of unpleasant things... (voice cracks) (...) Many people. Even (voice cracks) our priest could tell me that he would not agree to baptise my daughter, because I do not have the right godparents.

Proletarian logics: core categories (Julita)

- The franchised shop as a metaphor of new work environment engaging the reserve army of labour (lone mothers, elderly workers, trainees) combined with manor, paternalistic, authoritarian culture
 - *my boss he... he does not like criticism. Everything has to be like he wants it.*
- Limited agency – symbolic escape from overwhelming, insecure, ‘lost’ locality into the national community based on the exclusion of the imagined ‘Others’ (the narratives about refugees)
 - *“I know that refugees are popular right now and all, but when I see that for example, my sister who works legally with her bro... with her boyfriend, has lesser rights than a person who comes to Poland, then, well (Ad: Mhm, mhm), I do not know if you can say that I am a patriot, because then... I would extradite such persons from here”*
- Civic engagement at the local level – sitting at electoral committee, Kukiz’15 voter
- The plans of starting own business in the future
 - *“I would like to, I do not know, maybe I will achieve that, have my own shop. I do not know, with clothes or with shoes. ”*

Conclusions

- The double effects of the structural and biographical diversity of young precarious workers strategies
 - Normalization of precarity (Lorey 2015) / institutionalization of insecurity
 - Challenging the established solidarities related to class, generation,
- The re-construction of collective reference points – a core alternative:
 - The emergence of new logics of solidarity combined with individualism – meta-reflexivity, mostly within (but not limited to) the projectarian type
 - The emergence of new logics of exclusion as a way of counteracting the fragmentation of social ties → neotraditionalism
- The question of socio-political implications