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## Introduction: Social boundaries of work

The main topic of this first special issue of *Forum Socjologiczne/Sociological Forum* concerns the shifting social boundaries and meanings of work and employment in the 21st century. We understand work very broadly as a social activity aimed at transforming natural, social, economic and cultural environments (cf. Kozek 2000, 174) which is usually (but not exclusively) related to “making a living” (Watson 2008, 3) and/or carrying out reproductive work beyond the sphere of paid employment. Following Kathy Weeks (2011, 14), work can be defined as “productive cooperation organized around, but not necessary confined to, the privileged model of waged labor”. Yet, what counts as work and non-work, is the matter of historical, social, cultural and political contexts which change throughout space and time (Grint 2005, 11). The need for new theoretical approaches and empirical research which would address the shifting boundaries of work and employment in contemporary societies is reflected in the selection of articles included in this volume.

The idea to explore the “social boundaries of work” emerged during the discussions of the Sociology of Work Section of the Polish Sociological Association during the 15th National Congress of the Polish Sociological Association in Szczecin in 2013. Initially linked to the debates on the social consequences of precarious and non-standard employment, the theme quickly expanded to cover other aspects of contemporary working lives and changing employment. As a result, we intended to discuss the experiences of work in which the clear-cut distinctions between paid and unpaid work, formal and informal employment, and productive and reproductive labour are called into question and trigger new social processes, cre-

ate new social phenomena and contribute to identity changes of those involved/affected. Firstly, we wanted to explore the social consequences of the flexible and “non-standard” forms of employment which contribute to the shifting boundary between work and “leisure time” and imply the redefinitions of traditional notions of work organisation, employment relations and occupation. Secondly, we aimed at covering the “grey zone” of reproductive labour, unpaid jobs, informal employment and work beyond a “workplace”, which are all a “soft underbelly” of capitalist production and capital accumulation. Thirdly, as board members of the Sociology of Work Section of the Polish Sociological Association, we were interested in initiating a debate about the changing field of interest and expertise of sociology of work which increasingly reaches beyond the topics linked to traditionally understood workplace, labour market and labour process. Finally, as critical social researchers, we asked political questions about the scope of rights granted for (and increasingly divested from) workers, unemployed and those “outside” the labour market in contemporary capitalist countries. Concerning the latter issue, we wanted to link the analysis of the social boundaries of work with the critical studies of social policies and support instruments developed by states and civil society actors to address the problems of the people “in” and “out of” formal and standard employment.

The articles included in this volume address some of the aforementioned issues. Our starting point, as the editors, has been a general observation of the changes taking place in the debates on work and employment in contemporary societies. Even though waged work has been a primary means of social and economic integration in the West (Weeks 2011, 8), contemporary scholarship has noted the limitations of reducing work to paid employment and voiced the need to rethink the relationship between work and non-work in a broader, systemic-political context of a changing capitalism. In this context, Guy Standing (2011, 13), referring to an earlier discussion by Hannah Arendt (1958), distinguishes between work (as a “reproductive” activity done “for its own sake, to strengthen personal relationships, to be combined with public participation in the life of community”) and “productive” labour (done to ensure survival, mostly in economic terms). Standing (2011, 120) claims that the precarisation of employment makes it necessary to perform increasing amount of “work-for-labour”, including activities such as searching for jobs, queuing, commuting, networking or doing endless trainings, often outside office hours, to retain individual “employability”. This might lead to a conclusion that the boundaries between work and non-work become blurred. It is nowadays obvious to say that in “post-Fordism” an increasing number of people work for our employment outside regular office hours and workplaces. As observed by some authors of this special issue (see the articles by Krasowska, Róg-Ilnicka, Pina and Desperak, in particular), some people might find this experience liberating (especially those who are in a *social position* to afford what can be seen as “boundaryless careers”). Others find it precarious, un-

stable and limiting, yet another form of exploitation which is based on the commodification of what was previously considered the “free” time to be devoted to “leisure”. In any case, the issue of subjective interpretations of a work situation is crucial for understanding of the process of production and reproduction of the social boundaries of work.

Yet, as noted by Silvia Federici (n.d.) following other feminist and poststructuralist researchers, the relation between work and non-work has always been political and historical. Consequently, our subjective interpretations are socially (and politically) shaped. Firstly, it is because social, political and cultural factors influence both our subjective perceptions of work (and its boundaries) and our structural possibilities (and constraints) to make choices with respect to performing (or refusing to perform) productive and reproductive labour. Secondly, it is due to the fact that the “boundary work” (or work on the social boundaries of work) remains one of the primary conditions of capital accumulation. For instance, unpaid, reproductive labour, historically (and still contemporarily) performed mostly by women, has always been the basis of productive labour. The crisis of Fordist welfare states, which (at least in some countries) partially took over traditional family roles of women, reopened the question of who, under which conditions and on whose expense will perform the caring and reproductive work in the future (see the discussion by McEvoy and Sahraoui in this volume). Similarly, the flexibilisation of the labour market raises the question about its long-term social costs. More broadly, the analysis of the social boundaries of work needs to be linked to research on the production and reproduction of intersecting social inequalities (based on gender, age, race and other factors). Without questioning the vital role of social agency in maintaining and transforming social order, it “brings back” social structure to the exploration of seemingly “boundaryless” world of work. The focus on the interplay of agency and structure also confirms the vital contribution of sociology to the research into changes in contemporary capitalist system(s).

The main axis of theoretical and empirical articles included in this special issue are social boundaries and meanings of work in the 21st-century capitalism. The volume has been divided into four parts and supplemented by three conference reports and two book reviews. The first part, entitled “New dimensions of work and social science research”, includes the articles which focus on the conceptual and theoretical discussions. The article written by Adam Mrozowski, Paul Stewart and Violetta Zentai explores the evolution of critical labour studies (CLS) in three countries: the United Kingdom, Poland and Hungary. The CLS is defined as an explicit socio-political collaborative, participatory research agenda committed to those excluded, whether socially, economically or culturally, from access to variant forms of power in contemporary capitalism. The authors suggest some revival of the CLS in all countries studied which they link, *inter alia*, to the changing nature of work and employment. Tackling the issue of social

boundaries of work from a political science perspective, Hal Colebatch examines the range of activities in governing, the extent to which they become “work-like”, and the tension between involvement and professionalisation. In the context of societies, in which the clear distinction between the “rulers” and the “ruled” becomes increasingly questioned as a useful analytical tool, Colebatch demonstrates how different sorts of work are mobilised in the construction of governing. The diffusion of nation-state hegemony and its consequences for the social boundaries of work are also discussed in the article written by Olga Nowaczyk. Contributing to the debates within the military sociology, Nowaczyk explores the impact of new management practices, including the new public management manifested in outsourcing and increasing use of private military companies, on work organisation, autonomy, social identities and work ethics of soldiers. In the final article of this part, Umut Omay and Esmâ Gültüvin Gür Omay engage in a critical debate about the nature of work in consumer societies. They note that the concept of work is nowadays increasingly linked to the capacity for earning and the capacity for consumption, which makes it necessary to rethink the traditional, work-based notions of social classes and stratification.

The second part of the volume is entitled “New workplaces and labour market experiences” and brings together the articles focused on the evolving characteristics of contemporary workplaces and labour markets. Based on the analysis of the European Working Conditions Survey (2005 and 2010), Agnieszka Piasna focuses on the boundaries between standard and non-standard working hours. She explores the relationship between working time arrangements and work intensity and suggests, among other things, that highly flexible hours of work are characterised by particularly high levels of work intensity. Following up on the issue of work intensification, Gwen McEvoy presents the results of her qualitative research into in-home eldercare in the public sector in Poland. She concludes that the consequences of low levels of financing in this sector are both declining hours of care and intensified work. While McEvoy observes a high level of discontent among carers, Marcos Roberto Mariano Pina, focusing on Party Promoters and DJs in the city of São Paulo, notes that in this group the negative aspects of intermittence and informality appear “naturalised” and counterbalanced by the notions of “artistic independence”. Sylvie Contrepois’s article is focused on student workers in France, but her conclusions seem to be similar. Her informants proved to be very reluctant to act to improve their working conditions and distanced to trade unions; if they are a new “proletariat”, they are relatively silent and, indeed, “invisible”, which is linked to rather instrumental perceptions of work. Two remaining articles of this part bring us back to the more classical topics of the sociology of work and economic sociology. Focusing on the intriguing question of “why we go to work”, Jan Czarzasty explores the organisational culture of small and medium enterprises in Poland. He discovers two types of organisational culture, a “hierarchy” type and a “community” type, and links them to workers’ perceptions of

their work. Although Czarzasty does not explore it in detail, it seems that his typology can be also used to examine the strategies of precarious workers in this sector. Krešimir Žažar, in turn, explores the changing economic, employment and educational structure in the Krapina Zagorje County in Croatia. An important observation made by Žažar is that economic and labour market changes need to be studied in a broader context of developmental trends at local, national and global levels.

The third part of the volume, “Precarious work and precarious social worlds”, combines the empirical analysis with theoretical considerations. Iza Desperak develops her approach to study precarious work based on theoretical considerations by Zygmunt Bauman, Karin Knorr-Cettina, Robert Castel and Jarosław Urbański. She applies it to research on two groups of workers: young, well educated university graduates in Łódź performing various precarious jobs and assembly line workers in a factory in the Łódź Special Economic Zone. Judit Csoba examines the expansion of precarity and the field of research on it in Hungary. Importantly, she notes that precarious situations appear in Hungary in a broader sense than connected with labour market conditions. They also emerge as a result of shrinking welfare state protection which affects those outside employment. In the context of the Marxian theory of alienation, Agata Krasowska reports on the tentative results of research on young precarious workers in Wrocław. She concludes, in a similar vein to Csoba, about the difficulties to mobilise precarious employees within traditionally understood labour movements. She links the demobilisation of precarious workers with their ways of interpreting their labour market situation which they see (similar to the French students studied by Contrepois) as either temporary or “normal”. Carrying on the problem of precarisation of high-skilled employees, Karol Muszyński examines to which extent the notion of the bifurcation of working time, understood as the division of the working hours by shortening the working hours for the low- and middle-skilled workers and lengthening them for the high-skilled, can be applied to the situation in Poland. The author concludes that the bifurcation has not occurred in Poland, but there is some evidence that the trends may be similar to Western “highly cognitive” economies, such as the USA or the UK. Finally, Joanna Róg-Ilnicka, drawing on three editions of her qualitative research in Lubuskie region in Poland, develops an empirically grounded typology of occupational careers of employees in non-standard employment. In a similar manner to Krasowska’s distinction between “do-it-yourself biography” and “forced precarisation”, she argues that the subjective dimension of careers might involve the interpretation of non-standard employment either as a “choice” or a “chance”, in the latter case indicating the feeling of constraints and the lack of their options.

The last part of the volume includes the articles which deal with the consequences of migration and mobility for working conditions, social identities and subjectivity of workers. Nina Sahraoui examines qualitatively the work experi-

ences of racialised care workers, either born in the UK or coming from outside the EU, and employed in for-profit care homes for the elderly. Her article exemplifies very well the aforementioned need to explore the changing employment patterns from intersectional and systemic perspectives. Her research confirms that employment and care regimes play a crucial role in shaping experiences and coping strategies of precarious workers in the sector studied. Rachid Belkacem and Isabelle Pigeron-Piroth explore the patterns of mobility in the Greater Region Saar-Lor-Lux. They conclude, among others, that temporary work is a main factor of labour flexibility in the region and examine its positive and negative effects for regional development. Finally, Radosław Polkowski reports on the results of his qualitative study on the Polish migrant workers in the United Kingdom. He links the coping strategies of migrant workers in the UK with the transformations of values in Poland, in particular the expansion of neoliberal ideas of individual success, self-maintenance, independence, consumption, and self-enterprise. Polkowski demonstrates that these values persisted in the host country context and shaped individualised and depoliticised workers' strategies abroad.

The variety of theoretical approaches, methodologies and empirical data used by the authors of the articles demonstrate the links between the shifting boundaries of work and shifting boundaries of work-related social sciences. The authors representing nineteen academic institutions worldwide draw not only on various national research traditions, but also on diverse methodological and theoretical backgrounds; they also offer variegated political interpretations of the phenomena studied. Yet, contrary to “the end of work” thesis (Rifkin 1995), the majority of them would probably agree with Weeks (2011, 8) that work remains “the primary means by which individuals are integrated not only into the economic system, but also into social, political, and familial modes of cooperation”. If the latter is true, we are obliged, as social scientists and citizens, to continue empirical research to understand better the consequences of changing work and employment and define more precisely both the social constraints they create in relation to the existing social structures and the new spaces for social, individual and collective agency they offer. Having said that, handling this special issue to its Readers, we hope that it will become a source of inspiration and critical debates within a broad field of sociology and social sciences dealing with work and employment in contemporary societies.

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