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The "precarity trap" of Poland's youth labour market: flexible employment a barrier or opportunity?

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Precarity is a condition of people who are forced to make a living by taking up low-quality work, i.e. jobs that may be i.a. temporary, low-paid, with no prospect of promotion, and most often without the security of a contract. Young people unable to find permanent employment very often accept any available job, usually unrelated to their qualifications and of a transient character. This paper analyses the situation of young people (under age 29) on the labour market in Poland compared to that of other European countries in the context of the risk (based on data from Eurostat) of falling into the "precarity trap". The dual-market theory is applied as theoretical background. Polish youth is somewhat more at risk of precarity than their peers in other Central and Eastern European countries, but their situation is much better than that of young people in the Southern European countries.

Key words: precarious employment, youth, Polish labour market, dual-market theory

Introduction

Young people who are just at the outset of their professional careers are the most severely affected by the economic crisis in many European countries. They are the most vulnerable to falling into the employment "precarity trap". In his definition of this trap, Guy Standing notes that youth often bear high transaction costs arising from entering the labour market: "These costs include the time it takes to apply for benefits if they become unemployed, the lack of income in that period, the time and costs associated with searching for jobs, the time and cost in learning new labour routines (…). The total may be substantial by comparison with expected earnings. This creates what could be called a 'precarity trap'" (Standing, 2011: 48).

At the beginning of their careers many young people in Poland (but also in Spain or Greece for example) take up temporary employment, often based on so-called junk work contracts. Unable to find permanent employment, they will accept any available job, usually unrelated to their qualifications, and of a low-quality character. In this way they start their careers in a "worse" segment of the labour market and have great difficulty in later shifting to a "better" segment. Apprenticeships and internships last longer and longer, and underpayment for the services of these young people becomes a more and more frequent phenomenon. The result of these low wages is the increasing proportion of so-called working poor, who despite being employed are often not fully able to support themselves.

Until now research on precarious employment has been mostly conducted in liberal welfare states such as the USA, Canada (Kalleberg, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000; Lewchuk, Clarke, & de Wolff, 2011), Australia and New Zealand (Hannif & Lamm, 2005; Underhill & Quinlan, 2011). However, precarious employment is an issue gaining more and more attention in European countries because of increasing flexibility and the polarisation between "good" and "bad" jobs, in these labour markets (Fernandez-Macias, 2012; Standing, 2011; Degiuli & Kollmeyer, 2007; Vives et al., 2011; Duell 2004).

This paper analyses the situation of young people on the labour market in Poland in the context of the "precarity trap" as compared to other European countries. The trend towards precarisation is relatively modest in Poland, which may explain why there is a lack of

research on the issue concerning Poland. Thus the comparisons presented in this paper attempt to answer the question: *What similarities and differences does the Polish case exhibit in comparisons with other post-Soviet countries on the one hand, and with South-European ones (the area most strongly hit by the economic crisis) on the other?* Though we should mention here the empirical study on young precarious workers in Poland by Izabela Desperak (2010), this was conducted only in one city (Łódź) and doesn't include international comparisons. Thus the precarity phenomenon is still a relatively new research issue in Poland in general.

Thus there are several relevant questions worth asking in this context: Is the Polish case typical in Europe? To what extent is the situation of young people on the Polish labour market essentially worse in comparison to other countries (are youth in Poland more likely to get into the precarious condition than their peers from other countries)? Why (and to what extent) does Poland differ from other transition countries, and why is it similar to Southern Europe in terms of precarisation of young workers?

I use the "dual market theory" as the basis of my theoretical framework. In light of its advantages and disadvantages, it seems to suit the analysed issues best. Therefore my sources of reference are both theoretical discussions from the relevant literature, as well as available secondary data regarding nonstandard employment in Europe.

This text consists of two main parts. The first comprises a theoretical introduction in which ideas concerning precarious employment and precariat, as well as the main assumptions of the dual labour-market theory are presented. The second part of the text is devoted entirely to an analysis of the problem I am investigating, and to an attempt to verify my research questions. My conclusions and a summary are presented in the last part of the article.

Who is in the precarious condition?

Precarity is a condition of those people who are forced to make a living by taking up low-quality work, i.e. jobs that are most often temporary, low-paid, with no prospect of promotion and without the security of a contract. Uncertainty about the future, which does not allow life planning, and pay so low that one cannot afford a decent life, are the most common characteristics of precarious jobs. Those in the precarious condition are people suspended between prosperity and poverty, deprived of material security and constantly threatened by degradation of their status in society.

Among the reasons for the precarisation of work are emphasised neoliberal globalisation and the related quest for new sources of competitive advantage both by businesses and national governments (Sowa 2010; Standing 2011, 2014). The need to cope with global competition becomes in a sense an excuse for increasing the flexibility of the labour market ever further. On the other hand, the precarisation of work is associated with cultural and political changes experienced by Western countries. Mrozowicki et al. write: "[…] in the 1960s the generation of [the] counterculture rejected the 'iron cage' of Fordism, questioning standard employment and related politics of class compromise within the welfare state. Soon afterwards the economic crisis of [the] mid-70s brought to power conservative politicians inspired by neoclassical economy, first in the USA and UK and later in other countries. The collapse of the Soviet bloc at the turn of 1980s deepened the conviction about the lack of alternatives to the neoliberal model of capitalism" (2013a: 39).

In the current Polish debate about the precariat there are authors who reject highlighting this category as such, but there are also activists calling on those in the precarious condition to unite and fight for better working conditions. Thus there are different ways of defining this category in the literature. Among them the best known are by Rogers & Rogers (1992), Standing (2011), Kallberg (2009), Vosco (2006) and Bosmans et al. (2016). We can also identify several meanings for precariousness in the national debates, e.g. precariousness as a "degree of precarity" based on the combination of features on multiple dimensions of the

employment situation (Louie et al., 2006). Whereas in the French debate it traditionally applies to the living conditions of lower-class households and families, by contrast today it is the *social and legal status of individuals* as related to *employment precariousness* that is expressed in terms of pay, types of contracts and career prospects, and by extension the precarisation of the workforce as a whole (Barbier et al. 2002).

Rodgers and Rodgers suggest that there are several dimensions to precariousness and different degrees of precariousness. The dimensions, or characteristics, of precarious jobs are: the degree of certainty of continuing work – precarious jobs may have short time horizons, be in some way of limited duration, or have a high risk of termination; the aspect of control over work – the less the worker controls working conditions, wages or the pace of work, the more insecure the work is; protection – to what extent workers are protected by law, collective organisations, or customary practices, against e.g. discrimination, unfair dismissal or unacceptable employer practices (1992: 3).

Also other authors stress that precarious employment is characterised by uncertainty, lack of control, low income, and limited access to regulatory protections. It is shaped by employment status (self-employment or paid employment), the form of employment (temporary or permanent, part-time or fulltime), social location and social context (Vosko 2006).

Kalleberg adapted Vosco's approach in referring to *precarious work* as uncertainty, instability, and insecurity of work, the risk of which the employees must bear (as opposed to businesses or the government) and for which they receive in turn limited social benefits and statutory entitlements (Kalleberg and Hewison 2013). He also draws our attention to the fact that that the character of precarious work is the dominant feature of the social relations between employers and workers in the contemporary world. Understanding precarious work is essential because the problem leads to serious negative work-related (e.g. job insecurity, economic insecurity, inequality) and non-work-related (e.g. individual, family, community) consequences (Kalleberg 2009: 1). My vision of precarious work is very close to Kalleberg's.

The other approach often taken by Polish researchers assumes that people in the precarious condition are only those whose work is based on atypical contracts (Knapińska 2014). The "European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions" has adopted a working definition of precariousness for its studies on precarious employment and working conditions under atypical contracts (Letourneux, 1998). This is however problematic insofar as many people, e.g. freelancers, take jobs under temporary contracts and get great satisfaction out of the fact that they are not bound permanently to one employer. It can be accepted that, as long as an atypical contract is in line with the needs and expectations of the employee, we shouldn't include such employees in examples of the precariat.

In turn, Munoz de Bustillo (Poławski 2012b) and his team propose a better operationalised way to measure the precarity of work by establishing an index consisting of salary level, fringe benefits, autonomy in performing tasks, job-to-qualifications match, stability of the contract, safety and health conditions, and the ability to balance work and family life. On this basis Paweł Poławski concludes that Poland is ranked in the group of countries with the lowest perceived quality of employment, that is, with the highest level of employment precarity.

Another group of researchers interpret the phenomenon of precarity in terms of its being a social movement, and link it to the activities of trade unions (Urbański 2014, Mrozowicki et al. 2013b, Woolfson et al. 2014). The work of this research community understands those in the precarious condition very specifically as employees who protest against their "exploitation" by the firm or employer. These are employees who as a principle fight for a better life for all those employed on junk contracts (in Poland).

The above list of research approaches to the precariat is far from complete, but gives a brief glimpse of the treatment of the issue. Many authors concentrate only on those social categories of people who are more vulnerable than others to falling into the precarity trap. These include most often young people, migrants and the former socialist working class.

For purposes of this analysis I define *precarious work* as something very close to *precarious employment*, though there are differences between them. I describe precarity of employment as atypical forms of employment. In particular, indicators for this are the temporary employment rate, part-time employment rate, unemployment rate and mean monthly earnings. While these indicators define (at least in part) precarious employment, they are also typical of the secondary segment of the labour market.

In the analysis the focus is on young people (up to age 29) employed in one of the flexible forms of employment. In order to get a full picture of their situation on the labour market, the unemployment rate as well as mean monthly earnings of this age group are included. The analysis uses data from Eurostat, though with the obvious limitations associated with using existing data. Another problem with measuring precarious employment through atypical employment is that there is no common understanding among countries of how "atypical" or "non-standard" employment should be defined.

Better and worse labour-market segments

There are numerous theoretical frameworks used to explain the phenomenon of youth precarity. Among them the most popular theories are: segmentation theories, efficiency wage theory, insider-outsider theory, contract theory, queuing model, decline in union power, flexibility and labour-market deregulation, flexibility at the level of the firm and precarious employment, and the general degradation of the employment relation (Duell 2004: 8). None of the above theories can fully explain all the dimensions of precarious employment and differences among countries. In my analysis of the problem I apply one of the segmentation theories (the dual labour-market theory) because it seems to best explain the issue of youth precarity. What is more, it has been validated for the women's labour market (Meyer and Mukerjee 2007), whence I assume it is also a proper theory to explain the situation of a different category of people (youth), though aware of certain weaknesses in this assumption (see Wachter 1974), as well as the fact that other researchers might apply a different theory to explain the same problem. The concept of dualisation – the process by which society's insiders and outsiders are treated differentially – is clearly explained by Emmenegger, Häusermann, Palier, and Seeleib-Kaiser (2012).

In many cases, approaches to atypical/non-standard employment refer to a "standard employment relationship" as a point of reference (Clarke, Lewchuk, de Wolff, & King 2007; Hannif & Lamm 2005; Lewchuk, Clarke, & de Wolff 2008; Rodgers 1992; Tucker 2002; Vosko 2006).

In considering the situation of those in the precarious condition (one market segment) from the perspective of the labour market, we can see it as in opposition to that of those not in the precarious condition (the other segment) (Kryńska, Kwiatkowski 2013: 205). The description provided by the theories of the labour market of the process caused by that opposition employs the concept of segmentation. Segmentation theories make a distinction between partial markets and justify the diversity of ways in which these parts (segments) operate. Segmentation theories seem to better explain the worse situation of some categories of people on the labour market than do other theoretical frameworks.

One of the sub-theories of segmentation is the dual labour-market theory (Doeringer, Piore 1971; Reich, Gordon, Edwards 1973, Dickens, Lang 1985; Launov 2004). The basic hypothesis of this concept is that the labour market is divided into two parts, in which employees and employers each operate on totally different principles and are characterised by different identifiable features (Kryńska 1996: 95). Doeringer and Piore (1971) described the American economy as having a dual labour market, and many other authors later adapted their theory to the labour market in general. Jobs fall into either the primary or the secondary sector.

The dual labour-market theory divides the economy into a primary and a secondary segment. The primary sector consists of a series of so-called internal labour markets, whereas

external labour markets constitute the secondary segment. Internal labour markets provide regular paths of advancement for employees, whereby wages are based on job evaluations instead of individual bargaining. In internal labour-market employers prefer long-term relationships with their employees, because stable, permanent employment encourages the formation of firm-specific skills. External labour markets, in contrast, are characterised by competitive wages. Vacancies are filled by the market instead of by internal promotions. These jobs require only general skills, which makes hiring and firing easy. Therefore external labour markets act as buffer stocks, allowing companies to adjust to business cycles. If we aggregate internal labour markets to define the primary segment, the typical job description features high wages, attractive working conditions, voluntary payments, employment stability, job security and good prospects of advancement. The secondary sector instead is characterised by less attractive jobs with lower wages, poor working conditions, unstable relationships and fewer opportunities for advancement (Garz, 2013).

In more detail, the primary segment offers jobs in large, profitable businesses which to a large extent are monitored and influenced by trade unions. Those employed in this sector are protected from arbitrariness of employers, have guaranteed job stability, opportunities for promotion, possibilities for expanding their professional knowledge, and stable working conditions (Kryńska, Kwiatkowski 2013: 213).

The second segment offers jobs that are unattractive, with relatively low wages, modest working conditions, little chances of career advancement, lack of skill-development opportunities and lack of job security. These jobs are characterised by a high turnover of employees and ease of moving from one job to another. In these aspects the jobs offered in the secondary segment seem to be similar to precarious jobs.

The essence of the problem, however, is not the existence itself of two labour markets, but their lack of cross-over capability. Taking a job in the worse segment at the beginning of professional life can to a great extent determine the entire career of an individual (Bednarski 2012). According to Piore (1971) and Doeringer and Piore (1971), mobility barriers between the two segments are caused by many factors, among which the most important is that workers in the secondary sector have fewer chances to acquire job-specific skills and experience because their unstable employment restricts their access to on-the-job training. In relation to youth, this may be one of the reasons they "get stuck in the precarity trap".

In relation to the work experience of youth in Poland, it can be seen that their first-time entry into the labour market most often locates them in the secondary segment. This is due to several factors. Firstly, without having any professional experience they cannot apply for the jobs that require a certain seniority, or specific professional skills. In the vast majority of cases, however, employers expect a "ready-made employee", which puts young persons without experience, compared with senior workers, at a disadvantage right from the start.

Secondly, the education system in Poland is largely unsuited to the expectations of the labour market. Despite the fact that over the last few decades schools and universities have achieved a lot in terms of adapting curricula to the needs of the labour market, the list of to-dos in this respect remains long. Moreover, the extraordinary dynamics observed in the labour market make it increasingly difficult to predict which occupations or industries will be offering jobs in the future (even the near future).

Thirdly, employers complain that graduates of various types of schools (including higher education) do not have the relevant competencies and skills to make them good-to-have employees. Though young people may be very knowledgeable indeed, it is often only a theoretical knowledge, lacking in practical and the so-called soft skills.

Fourthly, many young people upon graduation still do not have a vision of their future careers. Since in many cases they already have to earn their living, they take up temporary jobs which can be accessed more easily and usually are not related to their qualifications and education.

The above arguments are important for understanding the youth labour market in Poland. Additionally, work in the secondary segment is also characterised by interruptions in employment. Many available jobs are seasonal, which is also why many young people

alternate periods of employment and unemployment. Because of this situation on the labour market young people may also increasingly delay starting their own family, and at the end of their educations many still live in their family homes.

In accordance with the assumed concept of the analytical framework, I understand the precarisation of employment as the mechanisms which create, reproduce and possibly extend the disadvantaged (worse) segment(s) of the labour market, mostly in terms of instability of employment. This might be best measured by the following indicators: temporary employment rate, part-time employment rate, unemployment rate, and mean monthly earnings. These indicators are essential to defining precarious employment as well as to characterising the secondary segment of the labour market. On the other hand there are more characteristics of precarious employment (e.g. working conditions, the presence of trade unions or other representations, potential for advancement to better jobs, etc.) that, due to the availability of data, can't be taken into account here.

Situation of young people on the labour market

Labour-market flexibility is the ability to rapidly adapt to changes in market conditions and technologies. Flexibility, entrepreneurship and individual ability to adapt to the continuous change have become desirable features of today's employee, as promoted by the educational system, in the workplace and by the media. The lack of these qualities points to an inability to adapt to change, and in Polish conditions among others, as Mrozowicki et al. (2013a) argue, testifies to the persistence of the mental legacy of communism.

From the point of view of social policy, atypical forms of employment is the way to activate professionally those for whom full-time work would be difficult or impossible, for reasons of family circumstances (care of children or the disabled), educational considerations (learners or students), geographical factors (people living distant from the place of work), health conditions (disability), or other.

In principle, upon entering the labour market young people should take employment precisely in its atypical forms (e.g. part-time or specific task-related contracts), firstly to get additional income and, secondly, to gain the experience necessary for the further stages of their careers. From the perspective of the state, atypical forms of employment are a way for young people to make an entry into the labour market and thereby avoid marginalisation. The potential problem of precarity only arises when young people cannot find jobs beyond the secondary segment. That is, when after several attempts, they are not able to shift to jobs more in line with their education, better paid and based on a permanent job contract. Instead, each new flexible-term job, rather than bringing them closer to the full-time, permanent contract so much dreamt of in Poland, may actually distance them from it only further. Previous research (Bednarski, Frieske 2012) confirms these assumptions: young people often have no other work experience than flexible-term jobs, which makes them consider – judging their own careers and those of their peers – atypicality of employment to be the norm.

The analysis is based on the assumption that precarious employment may be explained in the light of dual labour-market theory, and in particular by the characteristics of the secondary segment. This stems from a very important similarity between the secondary segment and precarious employment – job instability – that in my research is measured by such indicators as temporary employment, part-time employment and the main reasons for part-time employment. Additionally I have used the unemployment rate for youth because secondary segment characteristics show periods of employment interrupted by periods of unemployment and lower mean monthly earnings in fulltime employment and part-time employment.

The analysis applies Eurostat data for the age group 20-29 years and between 2007 and 2015, chosen because this age range is the specific period in which most young people finish their education and enter the labour market – the years in which they gain their first professional experience which to a large extent can influence their later careers.

Even with this available data in mind, anyone's definition of "precarious employment" is embedded in the ideological and political discourse of a given country, its present national regulatory and institutional context and its production model (Duell, 2004: 4). As there is no common definition of precarious employment among EU countries, it is difficult to find a common set of indicators to measure it, and that is why so few indicators were chosen. On the other hand the chosen indicators are typical measures of the secondary segment in the dual labour-market theory. The primary indicator of the situation of young people on the labour market is the share of people in temporary employment among all employees. Detailed data for Europe is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Share of temporary employment in all employees aged 20-29 in 2007-2015

Country	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
European Union	26.9	26.3	26.0	27.6	28.4	28.3	28.5	29.1	29.5
Belgium	17.6	16.8	17.2	17.5	18.5	18.3	18.2	19.1	21.5
Bulgaria	7.0	6.4	6.2	6.3	5.1	6.8	9.2	8.5	7.0
Czech Republic	10.6	9.5	11.2	13.9	14.2	16.2	18.3	20.1	20.7
Denmark	18.9	18.4	18.5	19.0	20.0	19.1	19.8	18.9	19.6
Estonia	3.2	4.0	5.2	6.5	7.8	6.0	6.8	5.9	7.0
Ireland	11.3	12.2	14.3	17.6	20.3	19.6	19.0	19.1	18.7
Greece	18.7	20.7	21.3	21.2	19.2	18.6	19.3	23.2	23.1
Spain	**46.5**	43.8	40.7	43.1	45.7	45.5	48.5	51.4	**54.2**
France	30.6	30.5	29.3	32.0	33.1	33.6	33.8	33.5	35.5
Croatia	26.8	23.9	24.0	26.9	31.3	33.1	35.0	39.1	45.8
Italy	29.5	31.1	31.1	32.6	35.4	37.9	38.8	41.6	41.9
Cyprus	14.4	13.8	13.1	13.8	12.3	12.1	17.7	21.3	21.6
Latvia	5.1	4.5	5.9	8.1	7.5	6.2	5.5	4.8	5.0
Lithuania	6.1	3.8	3.1	3.9	5.3	4.8	4.5	4.4	3.3
Luxembourg	18.4	20.5	20.1	18.9	19.7	20.6	19.6	21.2	25.5
Hungary	11.7	12.6	14.4	17.1	15.0	15.4	17.3	17.2	17.2
Malta	7.0	6.0	7.1	7.5	10.4	9.8	11.2	11.9	11.4
Netherlands	29.8	29.4	30.8	32.7	33.2	35.8	38.4	40.4	37.3
Austria	11.1	11.0	11.4	11.6	11.8	11.5	12.1	13.1	13.6
Poland	**48.2**	45.0	44.4	46.7	47.6	48.6	49.5	52.5	**53.3**
Portugal	**40.6**	42.2	41.7	43.8	44.6	43.6	46.8	47.5	**50.8**
Romania	2.6	2.1	1.9	2.4	3.0	3.1	3.3	3.7	3.0
Slovenia	**44.7**	44.5	44.9	46.2	46.7	47.0	46.8	47.9	**51.3**
Slovakia	8.8	7.3	6.6	9.3	11.3	11.3	12.3	16.8	18.8
Finland	31.1	30.1	29.1	31.6	31.8	31.3	31.2	32.1	31.6
Sweden	36.6	33.5	32.9	35.9	36.3	36.2	36.4	36.4	35.6
United Kingdom	7.7	6.9	7.2	8.5	8.2	9.0	8.7	8.7	8.7
Iceland	23.4	18.5	21.0	25.9	25.4	27.8	30.9	26.3	26.2
Norway	19.1	17.9	16.4	18.4	17.0	18.0	17.9	17.4	18.0
Switzerland	19.9	20.8	23.4	22.4	22.6	23.2	23.3	23.6	23.4

Source: Eurostat database

These data show that the temporary employment rate between 2007 and 2015 increased in most European countries (except Lithuania). The second conclusion is that there are huge disproportions between countries in relation to the rate of this indicator. In the Baltic countries Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, as well as Romania and Bulgaria, in general temporary employment is very uncommon. In other former Soviet bloc countries, e.g. the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, in general temporary employment is also not particularly common (with rates below the average for all of the European Union).

The exception is Poland. Data for all years show an extremely large share of transient employment there among all employees: in 2015, 53.3% worked on the basis of temporary contracts; similar proportions (and even higher) were observed in Spain and only a slightly

smaller share in Slovenia and Portugal. Data on the huge scale of temporary employment in Poland may contribute to explaining why Polish youth especially are prone to fall into the precarity trap. Mrozowiecki's thesis of the mental legacy of communism in the former Eastern-bloc countries and their inability to adapt to changes in neoliberal globalisation is largely confirmed – except in the case of Poland, where, like other countries with high rates of temporary employment, youth are employed mostly in the secondary segment with small chances of "moving up" to the primary segment.

We might find it surprising that the Polish labour market in this respect is more similar to that of South-European countries than to that of post-Soviet bloc countries. Despite the fact that Poland and other East-European countries have a similar historical background, and that economic reforms were conducted at the same time (changing the planned economy into a market economy), there are huge differences in the temporary employment rate. Taking into account that the rate has been stable in Poland for the last nine years – we may suspect that this is a stable feature of the Polish labour market.

We may also be able to explain the similarities between Poland and South-European countries over the last nine years in this respect by the following arguments. First, in relation to the economy these countries all rely heavily on seasonal jobs (especially in tourism and agriculture), and there is relatively weak industrial development and a lack of big international companies offering many workplaces. Secondly, there is little progress in R&D and innovation initiatives in comparison to other European countries. Thirdly, there are some similarities shared by the societies: many people still remember well the period under the totalitarian regimes (Franco, Salazar or Soviet), as well as the great opportunity offered by EU accession.

In relation to dual-market theory it is significant that temporary employees in Poland regardless of occupation earn less than permanent workers – by around 30% on average (Kiersztyn 2012). And workers with contracts of limited duration experience significantly more often financial exclusion, economic deprivation or poverty. Moreover, the transition to permanent (standard) employment is difficult (Kiersztyn 2012; Strzelecki et al. 2013). For instance, the "Social Diagnosis Survey" (Strzelecki et al. 2013: 126) suggests that only 36% of interviewees employed on fixed-term contracts in 2011 had managed to get permanent contracts by 2013. What is more, in Poland temporary employment tends to be "involuntary".

These conclusions, however, don't bring us closer to answering the question of why Poland does not show more similarities to other post-Soviet bloc countries. Perhaps the answer can emerge from an analysis of the second indicator – part-time jobs.

Equally large differences between countries can be seen in relation to part-time employment in the period 2007–15 (Table 2). The highest part-time rate is noted for young people in the Netherlands (over half of people age 20-29) and Denmark (over 40%). The lowest value in this age category is recorded in Bulgaria and Hungary. In the Czech Republic, Latvia and Slovakia it is only a little higher. A look at the other countries of the former socialist bloc shows that part-time work, even among young people, is not common there (nor is it in Poland). Again, this points to a model of employment formed in these countries under "real socialism", which has shaped the labour market to this day. There are no similarities in this respect between Poland and Southern European countries.

Table 2. Part-time employment in ages 20-29 in 2007-2015

Country	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
European Union	15.2	15.3	16.3	17.4	18.1	19.0	19.9	20.0	20.1
Belgium	15.6	14.8	15.9	16.7	16.8	17.9	17.7	18.0	19.0
Bulgaria	1.6	2.1	2.5	2.9	2.8	2.8	3.5	3.6	3.1
Czech Republic	3.5	3.5	5.0	5.3	5.0	6.0	7.8	6.7	6.5
Denmark	28.6	28.9	33.8	34.7	36.0	38.0	39.8	41.1	**41.2**
Estonia	8.1	7.4	11.2	12.5	11.5	12.1	11.9	12.2	14.7
Ireland	12.3	13.9	19.4	23.5	25.8	26.4	25.9	25.8	25.2
Greece	7.5	8.0	8.8	9.0	10.5	12.6	13.4	15.3	16.9
Spain	13.6	14.1	16.0	18.5	20.3	22.6	25.8	26.6	26.8

Country	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
France	16.2	15.8	16.1	16.2	16.5	16.7	17.4	17.9	18.3
Croatia	4.5	3.9	4.0	5.6	5.1	3.3	3.4	6.5	7.6
Italy	15.6	16.5	16.5	18.2	18.8	21.9	23.1	24.5	24.6
Cyprus	7.1	6.9	9.3	9.9	11.0	13.5	18.7	20.4	19.0
Latvia	6.0	6.2	9.1	10.1	9.4	9.6	7.9	6.7	6.8
Lithuania	7.3	6.1	6.8	7.3	8.9	10.5	9.1	9.2	7.8
Luxembourg	7.7	7.2	11.6	9.7	11.0	12.4	14.7	16.7	14.9
Hungary	3.2	3.7	4.9	5.7	6.8	6.9	6.4	5.4	5.0
Malta	7.4	7.8	7.1	8.2	8.4	9.4	11.6	14.0	11.8
Netherlands	43.0	43.5	45.7	47.8	49.7	51.3	52.8	54.1	**54.6**
Austria	18.7	19.1	19.8	21.1	20.0	20.9	21.9	23.7	23.9
Poland	9.0	7.6	7.6	8.0	7.9	8.3	8.5	8.6	8.1
Portugal	7.2	7.8	7.8	8.2	10.9	13.6	14.4	13.7	13.4
Romania	8.4	8.5	8.0	10.3	10.1	9.4	9.5	9.2	9.4
Slovenia	12.5	15.2	17.8	19.3	18.3	18.2	18.1	19.3	20.1
Slovakia	2.1	2.0	2.7	4.0	4.4	4.3	5.0	6.0	6.4
Finland	20.2	19.5	20.9	21.3	21.1	21.2	21.2	23.1	23.6
Sweden	24.0	27.9	30.4	30.9	30.3	31.5	31.1	32.1	31.0
United Kingdom	17.4	17.6	19.7	21.1	21.9	22.8	23.3	22.4	21.6
Iceland	22.7	22.8	30.1	31.3	27.9	28.7	29.6	31.2	32.9
Norway	31.0	31.4	33.8	34.2	34.7	35.6	35.1	34.4	**35.9**
Switzerland	24.1	28.0	29.7	28.7	27.3	28.6	27.6	32.4	31.4

Source: Eurostat database

According to Eurostat, contrary to EU trends the share of part-time employees among youth in Poland declined from 9% in 2007 to 8.1% in 2015 (in the EU: from 15.2% in 2007 to 20.1% in 2015). The reason for the difference in the relevance of part-time employment in the EU countries and Poland is related to (among other things) low (average) wages which make it difficult for part-time employees to support themselves (Oczki 2012: 218). This is confirmed by the fact that the in-work risk-of-poverty rate was 9.7% of employed fulltime workers as compared to 20.2% of part-timers in 2013 (Mrozowicki, Maciejewska 2016). What is more, in all post-Soviet bloc countries the part-time rate among youth has increased, but only in Poland has it decreased. Thus on the one hand Poland shows similarities to other East-European countries (the rate of part-time youth employment), but on the other hand, the trend is reversed.

Table 3, in turn, contains data showing what percentage of people among those who work part-time chose that job scheme because they could not find full-time work (which is in many cases similar to or the same as "involuntary" part-time employment). It appears that in many cases the choice of such a flexible form of employment is not dictated by the person's own needs and expectations, but by the lack of job opportunities in full-time employment. This is true for the countries most affected by the economic crisis, i.e. Greece and Spain, but also for others such as Cyprus, Romania and Italy (in the latter case, 82% of young people in the database period took these jobs because they could not find full-time work).

In many countries, e.g. Ireland, Greece, Spain and Italy, we note the great increase of this rate among youth. In general in Southern European countries this rate is very high, which proves that part-time jobs tend to be "involuntary" there. In Poland the rate is close to the average for the European Union. On the other hand in recent years a visible growth in "involuntary" part-time employment has been observed among youth in Poland: from 29.3% in 2007 to 43.9 % in 2014 (in 2015 there was a gentle decrease).

Table 3. Involuntary part-time employment in ages 20-29 in 2007-2015

Country	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
European Union	32.3	34.5	35.5	37.5	36.7	38.5	39.2	40.0	38.9
Belgium	35.5	36.9	29.0	27.7	25.1	23.1	21.1	24.8	23.9

Country	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Bulgaria	No data	No data	36.6	32.7	51.7	53.4	54.8	50.0	58.5
Czech Republic	13.9	9.3	10.4	12.7	21.4	21.4	18.0	18.7	13.8
Denmark	15.5	13.9	17.1	18.6	17.5	18.1	17.6	16.0	14.9
Estonia	No data	No data	18.4	No data	8.9	8.5	9.1	No data	9.8
Ireland	16.7	19.7	32.8	43.2	46.7	47.4	47.8	46.6	44.8
Greece	55.9	56.8	60.0	63.8	68.0	72.8	74.4	77.6	**76.3**
Spain	36.0	39.5	47.2	58.6	60.4	68.5	70.4	70.5	69.5
France	47.0	49.3	48.3	51.2	49.5	53.0	56.9	57.9	60.9
Croatia	37.8	34.1	38.7	44.6	42.2	32.9	32.0	46.0	34.8
Italy	54.7	55.9	62.8	66.4	72.0	73.8	80.0	81.8	**82.2**
Cyprus	55.7	52.9	52.9	56.4	66.4	63.3	68.8	76.6	**79.1**
Latvia	8.1	15.3	38.2	36.7	39.8	29.5	26.9	23.0	21.9
Lithuania	No data	No data	No data	37.1	35.1	23.8	27.0	25.7	No data
Luxembourg	25.8	28.8	21.3	21.5	27.3	27.9	27.6	28.8	28.4
Hungary	36.4	35.2	43.0	51.2	55.2	53.6	53.7	51.5	47.0
Malta	26.6	27.3	29.9	33.2	32.9	30.9	21.2	20.3	18.0
Netherlands	10.7	9.4	13.6	12.1	14.1	17.6	19.0	20.7	18.7
Austria	19.6	14.0	14.2	16.1	14.1	11.4	15.1	15.0	15.4
Poland	29.3	22.8	27.5	28.8	36.8	36.1	39.9	43.9	38.7
Portugal	53.1	55.1	56.0	60.6	57.8	59.5	61.0	58.8	58.8
Romania	66.3	68.7	66.3	71.6	67.1	73.2	75.7	76.3	**79.7**
Slovenia	5.1	5.5	8.5	7.9	7.0	9.4	12.0	11.4	14.2
Slovakia	No data	19.1	26.0	34.5	36.7	43.4	40.9	40.6	29.5
Finland	22.1	26.6	27.0	29.9	32.6	27.5	24.9	30.4	31.0
Sweden	47.1	45.7	48.4	48.8	48.2	49.7	48.8	47.4	45.3
United Kingdom	19.7	No data	No data	No data	31.4	33.0	33.6	33.2	32.0
Iceland	No data	8.1	16.2	20.1	21.5	16.1	12.7	15.3	10.7
Norway	21.2	18.3	17.2	21.3	23.7	18.2	20.7	21.9	22.0
Switzerland	11.5	10.7	10.3	11.3	13.0	12.2	10.6	12.1	11.9

Source: Eurostat database

These data show that young people are very likely to take up part-time work despite their own expectations and needs. The situation of young Italians and Greeks is particularly difficult, as the analysed index indicates a high probability of these young people falling into the precarity trap. In Poland this situation is probably less serious.

In addition to the indicators on flexible forms of employment, the situation of young people on the labour market is also reflected in the unemployment rate. In reference again to the dual labour-market theory, secondary-sector workers are likely to alternate between their segment and unemployment, because companies use these jobs to adjust to business cycles and fluctuations in demand (Saint-Paul, 1996).

Table 4 below contains unemployment rate data from 2007 to 2015 for those of age 20-29. It is highest in Greece and Spain at 40.9% and 34%, respectively. High unemployment rates are largely a result of the economic crisis, the effects of which have been most conspicuous in Southern Europe. But on the other hand in most of the analysed countries there was gentle decline in the unemployment rate between 2014 and 2015, which might suggest that the consequences of the economic crisis 2008–2010 have begun to be overcome.

Conspicuous is the distribution of the unemployment rate in Greece and Spain: before the crisis the unemployment rate for youth was 17.5% and 10.9% respectively; in the worst statistics for 2013 the rate was almost three times higher for Greece and over 3.5 times higher for Spain.

Even in 2015 the youth employment situation in South-European countries was still difficult. Not only Spain, Greece and Italy, but also Cyprus, Portugal and Croatia had trouble finding enough jobs for the youngest employable generation on the labour market. By contrast the youth unemployment rate in Poland is even below the EU average. What is more, we notice the gentle decline in the index between 2007 and 2015, with the worst situation observable in 2013 (as in the whole of Europe). Youth unemployment in Poland is at a level similar to that of other post-Soviet countries but relatively better than that of Southern Europe.

Table 4. Unemployment rate in the age-group 20-29 in 2007-2015

Country	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
European Union	10.6	10.5	13.8	15.0	15.3	16.6	17.3	16.2	14.7
Belgium	11.9	10.9	13.0	13.5	11.4	12.1	14.2	14.2	14.0
Bulgaria	9.6	8.3	10.4	15.2	17.7	19.1	20.4	16.8	13.5
Czech Republic	6.6	5.5	10.6	12.0	10.7	11.9	11.5	9.7	8.1
Denmark	4.9	4.5	8.8	10.5	10.6	10.9	9.7	9.6	8.6
Estonia	5.6	7.3	18.5	22.5	16.0	14.2	12.7	10.9	8.0
Ireland	6.4	9.7	18.5	21.5	23.2	22.5	19.8	18.3	15.3
Greece	17.5	16.3	18.7	24.2	34.5	42.7	47.4	44.3	**40.9**
Spain	10.9	15.2	24.9	28.5	31.4	37.1	39.2	37.0	**34.0**
France	12.2	11.7	14.9	14.9	14.8	15.5	16.4	16.9	16.9
Croatia	15.7	13.7	15.6	20.5	25.2	27.8	30.2	29.0	27.1
Italy	13.4	14.1	17.1	18.8	19.0	23.8	28.0	30.4	**28.5**
Cyprus	6.2	6.3	8.6	11.3	14.6	21.1	28.9	28.0	24.6
Latvia	7.5	9.7	24.2	26.3	21.5	19.1	15.6	13.6	11.9
Lithuania	5.6	8.7	20.1	25.9	22.2	18.9	16.8	14.2	12.2
Luxembourg	8.8	11.1	7.0	7.4	7.9	8.6	9.2	11.9	10.1
Hungary	11.2	12.0	16.4	18.1	17.1	18.6	16.6	13.0	11.3
Malta	6.6	5.3	6.8	7.3	7.2	7.0	6.7	7.0	6.7
Netherlands	2.6	2.4	3.7	5.0	5.2	6.4	8.1	7.9	6.7
Austria	5.8	4.9	7.0	6.4	5.7	6.6	6.9	7.4	7.1
Poland	14.9	11.6	13.6	16.2	16.8	17.6	18.2	15.8	13.6
Portugal	13.1	12.3	14.4	15.9	19.4	25.4	26.5	23.4	20.9
Romania	11.5	10.2	12.1	14.0	14.5	14.3	14.7	14.2	13.2
Slovenia	9.1	8.0	10.9	13.3	14.6	16.4	18.6	18.6	15.7
Slovakia	13.7	12.8	17.8	21.9	21.5	22.6	23.0	20.0	16.4
Finland	9.1	8.6	12.6	12.1	11.7	11.0	12.0	13.1	14.6
Sweden	8.9	9.0	13.0	13.1	11.2	12.1	12.0	11.1	9.8
United Kingdom	7.3	8.4	11.6	11.5	12.5	12.5	12.1	9.7	8.0
Iceland	2.9	3.6	11.7	11.1	10.3	9.6	7.7	7.0	5.1
Norway	3.7	3.5	5.0	5.4	5.0	5.1	5.6	5.3	6.0
Switzerland	4.3	4.5	6.8	5.9	5.5	6.0	5.5	6.0	5.5

Source: Eurostat database

The final indicator that defines precarious employment and the secondary segment of the labour market is income. Table 5 gives the mean monthly earnings in euro of persons under 30 working fulltime and part-time in 2006, 2010 and 2014.

Table 5. Mean monthly euro earnings of under-30s in 2006, 2010 and 2014

Country	2006		2010		2014	
	Fulltime	Part-time	Fulltime	Part-time	Fulltime	Part-time
European Union	1,606	742	1,670	758	1,912	808
Austria	1,688	707	1,831	775	2,044	832
Belgium	2,160	1,166	2,342	1,086	2,497	1,193
Bulgaria	164	60	320	106	405	175
Switzerland	No data	No data	3,659	1,990	**4,591**	**2,313**

Country	2006		2010		2014	
	Fulltime	**Part-time**	**Fulltime**	**Part-time**	**Fulltime**	**Part-time**
Cyprus	1,226	563	1,339	632	1,223	568
Czech Republic	627	366	793	475	755	403
Germany	1,733	751	1,841	736	2,128	719
Denmark	2,779	843	3,128	950	**3,248**	932
Estonia	652	253	792	351	1,008	450
Greece	1,069	579	1,230	593	No data	No data
Spain	1,310	746	1,503	789	1,568	706
Finland	2,162	895	2,439	1,079	2,600	1,228
France	1,827	970	1,849	1,067	2,034	1,135
Hungary	523	374	638	458	676	480
Ireland	2,582	853	2,448	1,226	2,745	**1,643**
Iceland	2,874	843	1,906	698	2,419	998
Italy	1,586	873	1,694	920	1,896	966
Lithuania	457	170	571	201	634	251
Luxembourg	2,362	1,287	2,577	1,403	2,952	**1,480**
Latvia	457	209	657	283	790	408
Malta	1,129	349	1,355	439	1,497	512
Netherlands	1,818	586	2,148	733	2,305	783
Norway	3,218	984	3,789	1,172	**4,050**	1,282
Poland	525	262	664	328	777	383
Portugal	780	548	876	439	846	429
Romania	263	152	388	151	442	181
Sweden	2,305	1,013	2,557	1,077	2,963	1,274
Slovenia	933	415	1,136	560	1,211	525
Slovakia	477	245	694	383	789	429
United Kingdom	2,554	800	2,175	659	2,455	752

Source: Eurostat database

Table 5 shows the great disparities between European countries in relation to monthly earnings of youth. The other general conclusion is that youth working part-time earn on average less than half of, and sometimes three times less than that earned by those working fulltime (e.g. Norway, Germany, Denmark, Malta, UK). The third conclusion is that in most of the countries monthly earning rates have increased in 2006–2014. Exceptions are the UK, Cyprus and Iceland.

The lowest youth earnings are in the post-Soviet countries, e.g. Bulgaria, Lithuania and Romania. In other countries of that region monthly earnings of youth are also very low. Poland is among this group of countries.

While Poland in some aspects (e.g. temporary employment) is similar to South-European countries, in other aspects it is closer to post-Soviet countries (e.g. part-time employment and monthly earnings). What is more, in some aspects (related to precarious employment) the tendencies observed in Poland are the opposite of those of other European countries (e.g. in the longitudinal aspect of the part-time employment rate).

Thus we might conclude that Poland represents an "eclectic" model in terms of the situation of its youth on the labour market. Their situation is incomparable with that of their peers in other European countries.

But even on the basis of the above data and analysis, it is still difficult to determine whether youth in Poland are actually more at risk of falling into the precarity trap than their peers from other European countries. What is more, a reference to the theory of a dual labour market – in the Polish case – does not explain the observed irregularities.

Conclusions

My comparative analysis of the literature, the data and the national context factors show that precarious employment needs to be understood as a multi-dimensional phenomenon. The factors determining the level of precarious employment vary from country to country, and the meaning of precarious employment varies significantly across the different labour-market and institutional contexts (Duell 2004).

The main aim of this paper was to answer the question about the characteristics of the situation of young people on the Polish labour market in the context of the risk of precarity, in comparison to other European countries.

The analysis reveals that the problems of young people on the labour market do not apply to all countries. No doubt in Greece and Spain the situation of 20-29 year-olds on the labour market is very difficult as a consequence (among other causes) of the economic crisis. Indeed, among the investigated countries, the worst situation of youth on the labour market is noted in South-European, mostly Mediterranean, countries. Difficulty in finding fulltime jobs (whence the high rates of unemployment) makes the decision to work part-time, in most cases, "involuntary". The disadvantaged standing of young people is further confirmed by the share of temporary employment. One can therefore conclude that the youth of Southern Europe – in particular in Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy – are the most vulnerable to falling into the precarity trap.

While part-time work is nothing reprehensible – and is useful to various people including students or those just starting their careers (frequent in Denmark and the Netherlands) – it becomes a problem in regard to precarity when the main reason for working part-time is the inability to find fulltime work.

On the other hand, there are studies (e.g. Eckelt, Schmidt 2015) showing that even Germany – a country generally known to cope very well with the entry of young people into the labour market by virtue of i.a. its dual vocational education system, also has its problems with precarious work among youth.

Analyses from outside of Europe also show that young people face difficulties in the transition from education to the labour market. Inui et al. (2014) researching youth labour in Japan note that three persons out of ten remain in a precarious condition of non-regular employment or joblessness after graduation and into their mid-20s. Only few of those who start their job careers with some instability eventually attain a stable economic condition. The precarious group also reports more often lower self-esteem and life satisfaction.

Similar difficulties also affect migrants. Studies of various groups of migrants (e.g. Potter, Hamilton 2014) show that they are at greater risk of falling into the trap of precarious employment than are non-migrants.

The difficulty with assessing the extent of precarious employment in an international comparison lies in, among other things, the different forms of employment relationships which might be considered precarious -- or not precarious -- only in the national context, which is strongly influenced by national labour-market policies and regulations, and social values.

In relation to the research question, Poland is similar to the Southern European countries only in temporary employment. Other comparative data show that Poland is more similar to other post-Soviet countries. No doubt young career-starters on the Polish labour market can feel more optimistic about their situation than their peers in Southern Europe about theirs. That is probably why the dual labour-market theory alone is insufficient to explain their greater risk of the precarity trap.

As for future studies, the above findings of my comparative research on the incidence and structure of the different dimensions of precarious employment (or the functional equivalents of precarious employment) should be supplemented by an analysis of the welfare regimes and family-support models of the analysed countries.

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