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Bifurcation of working time and its fate in Poland today

The article aims at explaining the idea of the bifurcation of working time, i.e. the division of working hours by shortening them for the low- and middle-skilled workers and lengthening for the high-skilled, as well as assessing the possibility of its application to an emerging market country such as Poland. I locate the bifurcation of working time in the wider context of the post-Fordist shift in capitalism and argue that the driving force behind it is the capital for labour substitution and interrelated capital concentration. I will then explain the structural conditions for the emergence of this bifurcation, consider the existence of those conditions in regards to Poland and, finally, return to a discussion of the empirical data. The aim of the article is to situate working time developments in Poland within a broader perspective, taking into account both general tendencies in capitalism, in addition to the position of Poland in the global economy.

In the article, I will define capital in a narrow sense, i.e. as fixed, financial and natural capital, therefore including real property, machines, factories, patents, etc., but excluding the so-called “human capital”.

From Fordist to post-Fordist understanding of the economy and work

The concept of the bifurcation of working time arose in the USA by observing employees' time spent working in different sectors of the modern economy. In general, it states that low- and middle-skilled workers are working shorter hours, whereas high-skilled — longer (Jacobs and Gerson 2004). Bifurcation is deeply linked with the post-Fordist shift in the economy. The Fordist economy was related to a high level of structural “organisation” (Kocka 1974). The core of the Fordist economy were large industrial complexes, which were concentrated in a few centrally significant nation-states and were orientated towards standardised mass production. They were characterised by bureaucratised control of labour

and complex managerial hierarchies, with an importance placed on the role of collective agencies such as trade unions and employers' organisations.

The Fordist understanding of employment was influenced by the nature of output-oriented mass production. Work was therefore time-oriented — performed in specific time units with efficiency measured in time spans. The growth of productivity depended upon successful re-inventing of the production process in order to find an optimum method (vide — Bedaux system or Taylorism). Particular tasks, which were performed in assembly line production, were relatively simple so that bureaucratised control could be effectively exerted. The idea of control was concentrated around the correctness of task completion and adherence to time requirements for work. Managerial hierarchies within Fordism resembled a pyramid. Fordism was founded upon the conflict between the employees and the employers resolved through collective bargaining. In terms of consumption, Fordism assumed that the worker received a “living wage” and could afford to buy the fruits of his labour, and that the workers' standard of living would be constantly ameliorated (Jessop 1992). In terms of family structure, it was based on a single male breadwinner model, with the wife working in the house — a “Fordist family” assumed a strict labour divide between male “production” within the social system and female “reproduction” of the social system (Williams 1994, 61).

The Keynesian phase of Fordism (*trente glorieuses*) assumed full employment as an ideal of political-economical order. It served, on the one hand, as a peace-keeper of the conflict between the working class and the employers (Judt 2005; Kalecki 1943), on the other hand, as a way to make full use of the productivity of labour (Keynes). Due to the growing productivity of labour, practically non-existent unemployment, and increasing productivity of the time units in which work was performed, the time spent at work was to be systematically reduced without affecting productivity. In 1930, Keynes predicted that the work week would drop to 15 hours in the twenty-first century with no harm to the dynamics of the growth of production and consumption standards.

Indeed, after 1945 the working week was systematically reduced until 1970, but the reduction by no means reached the pace predicted by Keynes. In the 1970s, the working week stopped shortening in Western Europe, and even started to lengthen in the USA and partially in the UK.

In 1970, Western economies underwent a process of disorganisation of capitalism (Lash and Urry 1987) characterised by a fall of large Fordist complexes, abolishment of managerial hierarchies in companies and the rise of network management, de-bureaucratisation of control, exteriorisation of transition cost through outsourcing and offshoring, weakening of trade unions, as well as the decline of the Fordist family model — the consumption aspirations of families, women's desires of liberation from the rigid division of labour and employers' interest in expanding their labour base.

Simultaneously, the disorganisation is intertwined with the servitisation of the economy and the increasing importance of knowledge, innovation, design, and creativity in the production process — “cognitivisation” (Marazzi 2008; Florida 2002; Lash and Urry 1994). At the cultural level, the disorganisation (or — post-Fordisation) of capitalism is related to postmodernism (Jameson 1991) and radical “acceleration” of the general pace of living (Virilio 2011; Bauman 2005).

Since the 1970s, in relation to the above, time spent at work has been subsequently disorganised — the standard employment model is in decline, different models of a more flexible employment are being developed (part-time, temporary, self-employment) and are spreading onto the labour markets. The most crucial factor is the transition from the time-oriented to the task-oriented model of labour that forces workers to be more adjusted to the requirements set down by the market, as well as influx of new employees. Productivity is being increasingly determined by the level of adjustment to the tasks, contrary to the rationalisation of the production process forced by Fordism. A task-oriented production process excludes working in strictly determined time regimes and creates a need for more task-oriented models of employment (part-time, temporary etc.). This is increasingly exacerbated by market globalisation (e.g. requirements of international clients), as well as by consumer demands with regard to availability (24/7 economy). At the same time, labour is being increasingly treated as a simple commodity, with a price that should be determined solely by the market mechanisms — workers should therefore not earn a “living wage”, but rather “what the market gives”. In post-Fordism, working time is treated as a tool of competition, and not as something that should be systematically reduced. Simultaneously, full employment as an ideal of political-economical order was replaced by new explanations emphasising that some level of unemployment is unavoidable and even healthy for the economy (NAIRU — non-accelerating inflation rate of unemployment).

I would like to approach the topic of financialisation as a principal idea explaining the most recent developments in the modern capitalism. Financialisation has been most commonly defined as a rising significance of the financial markets and the financial sector in the economy since the mid-1970s. Sociological discussions on the implications of financialisation are focused mainly on empirical data showing increasing inequalities and the fact that the rising significance of finance allows the “rentier class” to re-emerge (e.g. Piketty 2014; Lin and Tomaskovic-Devey 2013; Bakija et al. 2012). The social implications can be clearly problematised, especially within the Marxist framework, because of the Marxist understanding of production and profit. Marxist economists highlight that the financial sector does not in fact produce anything, because circulation of capital does not create added value, but only redistributes it (obviously — in an unequal way; Lapavistas 2011, 2014; Varoufakis 2013).

Putting aside the relative validity of these claims, financialisation as a concept tries to deal with the changes in modern capitalism by emphasising the growing capital intensity of modern capitalism and the implications arising therefrom, including the declining wage share in GDP and the decreasing importance of labour in general (see: Dünhaupt 2013).

Given that I do not share Marxist assumptions stressing the difference between abstract and concrete labour and given that this difference is impossible to grasp empirically, I classify the professional work related to the financial sector as labour, and, therefore include the time spent on it as being an element of the “working time” in this paper. “Profiting without producing”, as Lapavistas puts it, does not in my opinion mean that the work itself is vanishing in the financialised sector of the capitalist economy. The financial sector requires a lot of cognitive labour for financial decisions to be made, framework to be set, etc. Financialisation reflects, therefore, increasing capital intensity understood both as capital-labour ratio input in the process of production, as well as an increase in the amount of professional, cognitive labour that needs to be performed to manage the financial resources that are fuelling the economy. What results, in the end, is a decreased significance of the low- and middle-skilled labour in the economy.

While noteworthy, it does not mean that the profits arising from the capital for labour substitution are directed towards the professionals, which is clearly related to the separation of the ownership and control (a phenomenon occurring for a very long time). The question of the ownership of capital, as well as the distribution of the generated profits, is another, only partially related, issue. Given the extent of the unequal distribution of wealth, it is, therefore, perfectly possible to generate profit with only a limited amount of work, something that Lapavistas (2014) conceptualised and Piketty (2014) evaluated empirically. The most important thing is that the growing concentration of capital and interrelated capital for labour substitution leads to a significant segmentation of the working force via their relation to the capital and the compliance of their skills with technological development, which causes bifurcation of working time to occur.

Bifurcation and its different effects

The assumption behind the bifurcation of working time thesis is similar to the skilled-biased technical change (SBTC) that describes changes in demand for workers of different skill levels (Violante 2008). With technological progress, the demand for high-skilled professionals using advanced technologies in their work increases, whereas the demand for the low-skilled positions effectively replaced by technology decreases (e.g. European Commission 2010–2014; Acemoglu and Autor 2010). At the same time, traditional blue-collar sectors, in accordance with task-based technological change hypothesis (TBTC), are in decline due

to replacement by machines, computers or cheaper labour overseas. Information and communication technologies are, therefore, replacing the low- and middle-skilled labour and, at the same time, boosting employment in the high-skilled sector (IMF 2007; Autor et al. 2003). Empirical data in developed countries shows an increasing possibility of exchanging large amounts of low-skilled labour with capital-intensive technologies operated by a limited amount of high-skilled labour ("elasticity of substitution of labour by capital", i.e. the degree to which capital can substitute for labour in the process of production; Acemoglu and Autor 2010; Alvarez-Cuadrado et al. 2015). Decline in the role and relative significance of labour is caused by increasing capital intensity, that is — an increase in the capital stock per labour unit spent on the process of production (Arpaia et al. 2009). This is correlated with the declining wage share that is noted all around the world (Stockhammer 2012). In other words, the thesis assumes that cognitivisation and servitisation of the economy leads to the division of the labour market into two groups of workers — those in prestigious sectors of a knowledge-based economy, who perform abstract and intellectual jobs complementary to technological progress (the "creative class" — Florida 2002; "salaried"/"professionals" — Standing 2011), and others trapped in the precarised low-status, pink-collar sectors. The process of the disorganisation of the Fordist model of employment is influencing the working time of those groups differently.

Since high-skilled workers of the creative sectors related to knowledge did not traditionally have institutional guarantees of restricted working time (Zerubavel 1985), they are working longer hours due to global pressures of competitiveness; downsizing that has either increased the amount of work, reduced the employment or both; new technologies that enable more flexibility of work; increasing competition for fewer promotions; rising expectations with regard to the performances of companies (Hochschild 1997).

One should also notice a change in the concept of work itself as it increasingly starts to resemble "entrepreneurship". The paradigmatic ideal of post-Fordism is not an employee on a full-time standard employment contract, but rather a free cooperation with an employer or "micro-entrepreneur" (contractualisation of employment). This can be clearly seen in Poland, where an ideology of entrepreneurship resulted in a rise of almost three million sole proprietorships (for a population of 38 million). Some of them are actually cooperating with only one company, and are, in fact, employees, but are deprived of social guarantees specific to the standard employment contract (e.g. limited working time). Zerubavel (1985) notes that the concept of entrepreneurship generally requires the entrepreneur to be fully dedicated to the job. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) showed how the *soixant-huitarde* artistic critique of Fordism resulted in the ideology of "creativity" which contributed to the re-definition of the concept of management, and demanded more flexibility from employees confined to the framework of sole proprietorship. This forced a greater devotion to the job from the

employees, while not offering them any social advantages in return, and often giving them a false sense of self-fulfilment. For example, in Poland, almost 50 per cent of sole proprietorships are established because its founders had no other option for work, or were forced by their employers to do so (Amorós and Bosma 2014). It disproportionately affects freelancers associated with the knowledge-based economy.

In addition, while cognitive capitalism becomes more reflexive, it produces tools allowing significant increases in productivity, but also results in the blurring of the boundaries between working time and leisure. Mobile phones (in Poland called “smycze”, i.e. “leashes”) make the flight from work practically impossible. Staff members, especially in the creative industries, often working for global customers, are being pressured to be highly responsive and to complete some tasks despite being formally outside of work (e.g. respond to e-mails). Company laptops and cloud computing can make any space with access to the Internet a workspace. Task-orientation of the economy and new technologies result in blurring the idea of both “working time” and “workplace” — more and more people are working outside the strict workplace and outside regular working hours.

Hence, a cognitive shift in capitalism ends with the potential invasion of work into all areas of an employee's life, which makes them unable to control their working time. As a result, task-orientation of the economy and ideology of flexibility and full commitment to a job increases not only the amount of actual working time (in form of paid or unpaid overtime), but also results in work time spilling over into all areas of life that were previously free therefrom — commuting (due to mobile technologies), leisure and even holidays. Donnelly (2006) has shown that flexible arrangements can prevent well-educated and well-paid individuals from being able to have at least a little control over their life, being restricted by their professional commitments to clients, employers, their own ambitions, and the dull requirements of “professionalism”.

As a result, in highly cognitive economies the trend is that the professionals are working more hours than they have in the past (Coleman and Pencavel 1993a, 1993b; Jacobs and Gerson 1998; Fraser 2001; Maume and Bellas 2001).

At the same time, an increase in the productivity of the economy and the capital for labour substitution reduce the working time of traditional blue-collar workers, as well as “shorten” (often in the form of forced part-timing or in the form of technological unemployment) working time of low-skilled, pink-collar workers. Automatisations of simple tasks, performed by both blue-collar and low-skilled, pink-collar workers leads to their marginalisation in the labour market, and to their replacement by advanced technologies (Violante 2008; Eurofound 2013), a process that was called “the end of work” by intellectuals such as Rifkin (1995), Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2011). What they mean in fact is the end of a low-skilled work. Empirical data shows a decline in actual labour demand in economically developed countries, and that the labour market tends to divide

itself more deeply into high-skilled professionals and low-skilled precariat, which is increasingly pushed out of the labour market (Eurofound 2013; Cedefop 2011; Sanders 2005).

In this model, increases in productivity will decrease labour demand in low- and middle-skilled sectors, and increase concentration in cognitive-sectors that are managing the same capital that substitutes labour. In this perspective, globalisation is driven by the Matthew effect with regard to the time spent at work. Fewer and fewer constantly better-educated people are increasingly concentrating different types of capital and are getting increasingly more productive work done. Among the enterprises, this can be seen in the increasing concentration of productive enterprises of the creative industry (market concentration increases; e.g. the “big eight” consulting firms in the 1990s have now turned into the “big four”; oligopolisation of banking and media industry etc.), or in culture and sports, which can be seen in the formation of a narrow elite of celebrities and sportsmen. The field of science is also undergoing the same process. A growing trend to shift to task-orientation can be observed, which enhances the mechanism of “the rich getting richer”, as seen, for example, in the grant system in science, where getting a grant increases the chances of getting another, and as a result exacerbates the fact that more and more resources are directed into the hands of a more and more limited scientific elite.

The case of Poland

One should note that the adequateness of the bifurcation thesis has been verified with regard to highly cognitive economies such as the USA and the UK. It is especially important since those countries have been pursuing a service model of the economy, with strategic hi-tech, professional and financial sectors accompanied by lower service sector jobs such as personal care, restaurant and retail workers, cleaners etc. (Autor and Dorn 2013). But does this phenomenon occur in semi-peripheral economic countries, such as Poland? One should make a few remarks in order to set the framework for the boundaries of this reflection. The important features of the Polish labour market are: a very low, but slowly increasing employment rate (60 per cent; Eurostat 2014); relatively (as for European standards) low labour costs (6th lowest in the EU; Eurostat 2014); and Poland witnesses a record percentage of so-called junk contracts (fixed-term contracts; 27 per cent of Poland’s total number of employees have these contracts, the highest rate in Europe and double the EU average). The structure of the Polish labour market still seems distant from those of the highly developed market economies, with 12.5 per cent of the labour force working in agriculture, 26 per cent in industry and 61.5 per cent in services. Despite the legend of the Solidarity union movement, the level of unionisation in Poland is among the lowest in the European

Union (12 per cent against the EU's average of 24 per cent; CBOS 2014), which adds to the weak leverage that employees have against employers.

Poles are one of the nations with the longest working hours among developed countries (1,923 average annual hours actually worked per worker, second highest in the EU and 150 hours longer than the OECD average; OECD 2015a). Poland is among the most profitable countries for employers in the world — the wage share is very low and decreasing (around 46%), whereas the level of the return on investment from human capital (wages) is extremely high, and, in fact, brings Poland closer to Asian levels and is unparalleled among developed countries (PwC 2012).

The Polish labour law is relatively flexible for a European country, and, in fact, became even more flexible as a means of preventing the negative consequences of a financial crisis. Above all, working hour regulations have been made flexible, enabling the introduction of longer settlement periods (periods applicable to calculating working hours) and flexible working hour schedules.

Concurrently, the Polish economy is relatively unproductive in terms of GDP per hour worked (fifth lowest among the OECD countries; 60 per cent of the OECD average; OECD 2015b); the general innovation indicators are also low (3rd lowest place in Europe; Cornell University, INSEAD, and WIPO 2014). Poland tends to spend little on research and development (only 0.9 per cent of GDP, more than twice less than the EU's average of 2.1 per cent). Poland is known for its minimal investment in the development of human capital, and Polish employees rarely participate in any additional public funded training (which is barely existent), while Polish employers are reluctant to organise training for their workers — only 22 per cent of companies are providing training, which means that Poland holds the last place in Europe and it is three times less than the EU's average of 66 per cent (Cedefop 2010).

All of that leads to the conclusion that the Polish economy is a classical example of an uninnovative subcontractor economy, which can be clearly judged, based on the level of vertical specialisation that has occurred in Poland that is characteristic for the "assembly line countries" (Milberg et al. 2014, 156). The most dynamic sectors of the Polish economy are low-value added manufacturing (consumer electronics assembly lines) and business process outsourcing (BPO). The dynamics of the BPO market's growth is unparalleled — Poland is Europe's biggest and the world's third largest BPO market, only after India and China (ABSL 2015).

When these factors are taken into account, one should not expect the bifurcation of working time to occur, given that it is a characteristic of super-innovative economies which place a crucial importance on creative and R&D activities enabling strong capital for labour substitution.

This is fully consistent with the findings of the analyses conducted within the varieties of capitalism approach, classifying Poland as a dependent market economy (DME). According to this approach, DMEs do not need to invest in R&D

or public education because innovations are being “imported” via transnational companies from more innovation-oriented coordinated- and liberal-market economies. The comparative advantage of DMEs is a relatively well educated and cheap labour force that makes DMEs a good environment for assembly line production and outsourcing (e.g. Nölke and Vliegenthart 2009).

Conclusions: Bifurcation in Poland — does it apply?

The period of 2003–2013 was chosen due to two factors: the availability of reliable data and the fact that Poland has joined the EU in 2004, which increased globalisation of the Polish economy. Eurostat’s data (years covered: 2003–2013; Figure 1) shows that occupations covered by the bifurcation thesis, including: managers, technicians, blue collar workers, plant and machine operators, and elementary occupations, have experienced reduced working time between 2003 and 2013 in Poland, with professionals as the sole exception. What is noteworthy is that the incidence of excessive hours (people working longer than 50 hours) has increased in the preceding period from 16.5 per cent in 1995 to 19.3 per cent in 2005 (Lee et al. 2007, 50).

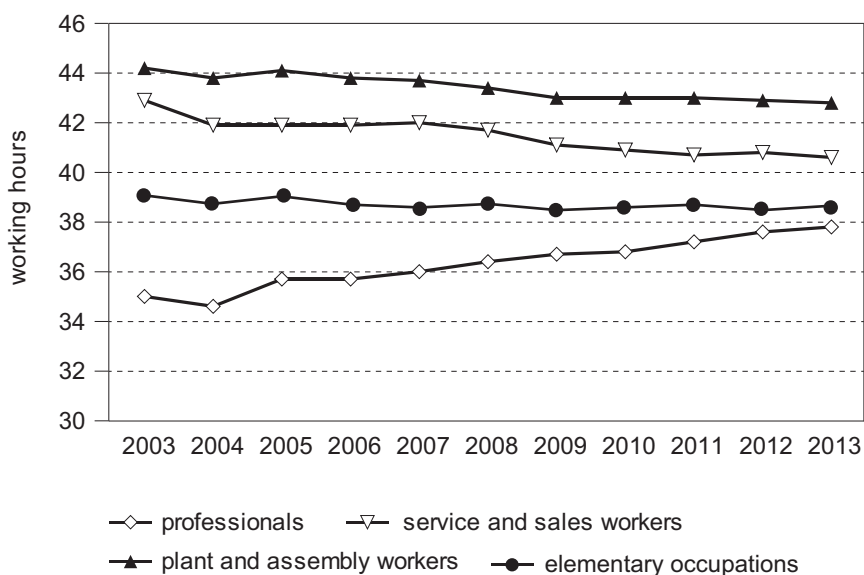


Figure 1. Working time in selected sectors

Source: Eurostat (2014).

The decline was most substantial in two sectors that can be identified as the most prone to the reduction according to the bifurcation thesis — service and sales workers (reduction of work week from 42.9 hours in 2003 to 40.6 hours in 2013)

and plant and machine operators and assemblers (44.2 in 2003 to 42.8 in 2013). The reduction of working time among service and sales workers is probably caused by the rising level of part-time work. Part-timers are most widespread in this sector, whereas 66 per cent of them work part-time involuntarily (OECD 2015a). During the aforementioned period, the average work week of professionals has increased from 35 hours to almost 38. Professionals (both employed and self-employed) are also the only group among part-timers that has increased its workload between 2003 and 2013 (employed from 17.2 to 20.1 and self-employed from 18.3 to 21.1 hours). However, working hours of professionals still remain visibly shorter than those of blue and pink collar workers. This disparity might be underestimated due to the elusiveness of cognitive labour, but data substantiating this claim is lacking. What is also lacking is the precise data on the working hours distribution within particular employment sectors.

We must therefore conclude that although the trends are similar, the bifurcation, understood as working hours being excessively lengthened for professionals from creative sectors and painfully shortened for pink and blue collar workers itself, has not occurred in Poland. If present trends are continued, the bifurcation might occur, but this type of prognosis requires long-term extrapolation. It cannot be excluded that the contemporary tendency to extend professionals' working hours will eventually stop, although if one treats more developed countries as an indication, this is not likely to happen.

The main explanation that may be given is that the level of capital intensity in Poland is low and, therefore, the Polish economy continues to develop on a basis of labour-intensive sectors, i.e. sectors in which a relatively huge proportion of labour is used in comparison with capital. If the substitution of labour for capital does not occur or occurs slowly, there are no structural reasons for the working hours of professionals to be significantly longer than those of blue and pink collar workers. This can also explain why the decline of working time among elementary occupations was so weak (from 39 to 38.6 hours). The second possibility is that the conservative pace of working time developments is caused by the dynamics of employment rate increases that cause the formal labour as such to be distributed more evenly across the population.

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Bifurcation of working time and its fate in Poland today

Abstract

The article aims at depicting the idea of the bifurcation of working time and at verifying the possibility of its application to an emerging economy country such as Poland. The paper puts the bifurcation idea, the applicability of which was verified with regards to highly cognitive countries, in a wider context of the post-Fordist shift in capitalism. Empirical data confirms that the bifurcation has not occurred in Poland, but the analysis of the working time in different sectors gives some indication that the trends may be similar.

Bifurkacja czasu pracy i jej los w dzisiejszej Polsce

Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu przedstawić ideę bifurkacji czasu pracy oraz zweryfikować możliwość jej zastosowania w kraju o wschodzącej gospodarce, takim jak Polska. Praca sytuuje ideę bifurkacji, której przydatność została zweryfikowana w odniesieniu do krajów o wysokorozwiniętych gospodarkach kognitywnych, w szerszym kontekście postfordowskiej zmiany w kapitalizmie. Dane empiryczne potwierdzają, że bifurkacja nie nastąpiła w Polsce, ale analiza czasu pracy w różnych sektorach może wskazywać, iż trendy mogą być podobne.