

**Re-placing Work: Economic Transformations and the Shape of a Community in
Post-Socialist Poland**

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Abstract

This paper reports on an ongoing research project which explores the remaking of life and work in Nowa Huta, a steel town built as Poland's first socialist city. It focuses on the changing relationship between work and community in Nowa Huta using both qualitative research material and secondary data sources. It locates the study in the context of both recent debates over the 'end of work' and previous accounts of work-community relationships in old industrial regions, but argues that the specific experiences of socialism shaped a particular relationship between work and community. In such contexts, moreover, the 'end of work' is coupled with the 'end of socialism' to figure a double ending for some communities. The paper documents the changing place of work in Nowa Huta, recognising the impacts of the loss and restructuring of employment but also drawing attention to the continuing importance of work and workplace relations in shaping lives in Nowa Huta. It concludes by highlighting the importance of more open accounts of economic and employment change, particularly in the post-socialist world.

Keywords: Poland / post-socialism / socialism / work

Introduction

In recent years there has been considerable debate over the 'end of work' as a variety of commentators document the decline of industry, the loss of 'jobs for life' and the decentring of work. This paper connects to these debates by exploring the processes of economic and employment restructuring in an industrial community in post-socialist Poland. It uses this example to support a growing body of research which counters the 'end of work' debates by pointing to the continued importance of older forms of work through both their material legacies, in the shape of networks, institutions and relationships built at work, and the community memories of work. Through these conceptualisations of work and its wider social relations, connection is made to a set of post-structural political economies which call for the recognition that other social forms, which might provide the resources for future stability, persist and exist within dominant capitalist social and economic forms.

This paper aims not only to contribute to debates around the meaning and place of work but also to the conceptualisation of post-socialism. Discourses of ‘transition’ in east central Europe in some ways echo the ‘end of work’ debates; the focus is on endings, the erasure of past practices and the ridiculing of nostalgia. Thus, in exploring the continuing centrality of work in Nowa Huta, Poland, my case study community, I hope also to underline the importance of exploring post-socialism as a hybrid concept, in which historically and geographically diverse processes come together to produce not simply a transitional form, but one which contains the potential for plural and open accounts of economic and social change.

I begin by discussing ‘transition’ and its discursive construction to obscure all alternatives, and explore how this echoes critiques of wider discourses of capitalism and globalisation by post-structural political economists. I then shift the focus to literatures on work and community, noting the claims of some of the ‘end of work’ protagonists before identifying some of the alternative ways of seeing the place of work. Following a section which introduces both the research methodology and the case study community, the body of the paper presents the empirical material and a discussion which leads into a broad set of conclusions.

Transition, post-socialism and capitalism triumphant

The early 1990s, immediately after the fall of communism in east central Europe and the Soviet Union, were marked by a Fukuyaman triumphalism which claimed that capitalism and the West had won and the East was thus ripe for transformation. In wildly optimistic assessments, post-socialist states announced their intention, aided by the IMF, the World Bank and the EBRD, to make the transition from socialism to

capitalism in a year or even 100 days. The focus of both domestic and international policy was on erasing and ignoring the institutions, practices and geographies of socialism, which were deemed to have failed, and building a new social, economic and political system ‘from scratch’. Such approaches rested on viewing east central Europe and the former Soviet Union as a *tabula rasa*, primed for a ‘capitalism by design’ (Stark, 1992; see also Hausner *et al.*, 1995). Within this context, ‘transition culture’ (Kennedy, 2002) left little space for debate, for alternatives or for the recognition of continuity within change. For most, the focus was on the new, on what should be created in order that these states might become like the ‘advanced economies’. While some recourse was made to pre-socialist practices and institutions, to the infant capitalisms of the region’s inter-war years, the socialist past has largely been ‘snipped out’ of interpretations and prognoses (see, Light, 2000). Yet increasingly we can see that post-socialism is marked by pervasive and forceful legacies of socialism and that in, for example, the nature and form of work and economic activity (Burawoy *et al.*, 2000; Clarke, 1999; Smith, 2000; Smith, 2002), of solidarity, community and social networks (Ashwin, 1999; Clark and Soulsby, 1998; Ferge, 1997; Stenning, 2003), and of property relations (Hann, 2000; Verdery, 2002), there are both negative and positive echoes of socialism. Moreover, as Burawoy and Verdery (1999a, p.2) suggest, in contrast to the notion of a fixed ‘transition’, “the destructuring effects of the end of state socialism” could be seen to throw up not only conflicts but alternatives, in the spaces opened up by the uncertainties and promises of post-socialism.

The extension of capitalism into east central Europe can be seen as another moment in the ‘real, global and invasive’ geographies of capitalism (Castree, 1999), marked, in part, by the radical, complex and often painful remaking of lives and communities,

shaped so strongly and so extensively by actually-existing socialism (see, for example, Kideckel, 2002; Świątkiewicz and Wódz, 1997; van Hoven, 2001; Wódz, 1997). In recognising the uneven and combined development (to employ a historic turn of phrase) of capitalism in east central Europe, we can envision alternative (economic) spaces (Castree, 1999; Gibson, 1999; Gibson-Graham, 1996). This paper attempts to achieve a balance between both political economic and more post-structural accounts of transformation, arguing that it is important – both theoretically and politically – to highlight the destructive influences of both material and discursive (geographies of) capitalism on communities in order to negate the ‘fairytale world’ of the Right (Castree, 1999, p.143) but that we must also engage with the challenges of feminism, post-modernism, post-structuralism and the opportunities that such theorizing offers for more open accounts of economic change.

Work, community and the ‘end of work’

As part of the debate about contemporary capitalism, much has been written in recent years on the changing nature of work, and the consequences of these changes for other spheres of life (see, amongst many others, Sennett, 1998; Beck, 2000; Bauman, 1998; for a review, see Strangleman, forthcoming). A number of tendencies have been identified which point to both a loss of linearity and clarity of (occupational and social) progression and a loss of security. Beck, Sennett and Bauman, amongst others, draw attention to the rising short-termism both within and beyond work, which demands flexibility and mobility. The short-term and non-technical nature of many new jobs means that many workers have only a superficial understanding of their work, their identity as a worker is ‘light’ (Sennett, 1998, p.74). Flexible and part-time work does not provide the markers and handles (both nominal and material) of ‘jobs for life’;

instead it suggests a demand for flexible, partial and ever-changing identities which are not “too tough and stiff to be revoked if need be” (Bauman, 1998, p.28).

For communities and societies the consequences of these transformation are manifold. Beck, who sees work at the centre “holding things together” (2000, p.7) argues that “a society without work, so it seems, is a society without a centre, a society lacking in basic coordinates in matters both large and small, in everyday life as in politics, economics, the law and so on” (ibid.: 10). Beck, Sennett (1998) and Bauman (1998) all see the physical expression of the ‘new worlds of work’ in a diminishment of community and a withdrawal from civic life. The spatiality of these shifts is eloquently described by Richard Hyman who contrasts the, perhaps stereotypical, representation of older forms of industrial community with the present:

“Today the typical employee may live a considerable distance from fellow-workers, possess a largely ‘privatized’ domestic life or a circle of friends unconnected with work, and pursue cultural or recreational interests quite different from those of other employees in the same workplace. This disjuncture between work and community (or indeed the destruction of community in much of its traditional meaning) entails the loss of many ... localized networks...”

(Hyman, 1999, p.3)

Yet the place of work in shaping and supporting wider community networks can be read in different ways. Through research which recognises and explores the connection between work and wider community lives, we can identify considerable potential for continuity beyond the ‘end of work’. Whilst employers often financed and managed a whole range of local infrastructures and services, which might disappear with the employer, not all work-community connections were constructed by capital.

Communities were also created through ‘shared meanings’ and practices built both on the everyday experiences of working, learning and living in a community and on more exceptional episodes of industrial and political action (see, for example, Hudson and Sadler, 1986; Rees, 1985; Williamson, 1982; Strangleman, 2001). Through the ‘routinization’ of daily life (Beynon and Hudson, 1993; Hudson, 1994), production, consumption and reproduction within communities were connected and the relationship between work and community is both reflected in and shaped by wider social formations, such as gender contracts and family relationships. Everyday relationships and identities feed into both formal and informal social networks which provide the community with resources, support and continuity, particularly at times of radical socio-economic restructuring. Such meanings and practices, though often constructed through institutions of work and class, can be seen to be at least partly autonomous. Thus, despite the loss or decline of industry, the destruction of community and loss of networks might not be inevitable.

In a different, but related, context Ian Roberts has argued that accounts of working class people and communities which focus almost entirely on the public presence of working men, that is on working class men in workplaces, coincide with discussions of the ‘end of work’ to emasculate working class communities (Roberts, 2001). Their ‘whole significance’ disappears as work disappears; the absence of work is translated into absence *per se*. Seeing work as constitutive of relatively autonomous social networks beyond the workplace opens up possibilities for envisioning much more continuity beyond the ‘end of work’; even if the job no longer exists the wider social and economic relations constructed around work persist. In the context of post-industrial

Youngstown, Ohio, Sherry Linkon and John Russo emphasise the importance of a community of memory, focused not only the past but on “vision and hope for the future” (2002, p.3). By exploring the complex and conflictual histories of communities, they argue “we may view ourselves as agents – a community that has the resources and will to action – and create significant positive change ... Youngstown was not always a victim or a place of loss but also home to robust social organization and community life” (Linkon and Russo, 2002, pp.245-246). In the south Wales mining valleys, Parry stresses not the end of work, but its changed meaning and highlights “its continued consequence in the formulation of solidarities and social attachments” (2003, p.228). In both material and discursive fields, work and its legacies continue to be of critical importance in shaping communities and their futures. This is not to deny the very real impact of job loss and economic decline in old industrial communities but to argue that as economies change, so too do communities, and this process of change is not only about loss, but also about the accumulation of resources for the future.

In many places at the sharp end of economic restructuring, discourses of loss and decline dominate, creating an overriding sense of community failure, itself a poor basis for recovery. Byrne (2002, p.280) argues that it is important “to challenge the negative conception of the nature and potential of industrial cultures” through an emphasis on ‘plural futures’ founded on alternative stories of economic change which validate the multitude of community practices and institutions in place which ease the process of economic and political restructuring (Gibson *et al.*, 1999). Thus, elsewhere, Gibson (1999) asks that, rather than simply the result of exogenous economic change, community be seen as the initiation of a conversation, a “call to becoming”, as a progressive and potentially radical space.

Work, community and socialism

The importance of understanding the place of work within communities is even more convincing in the post-socialist world. Whilst there were important analogies between the practices of paternalism in east and west (Domański, 1997), key features of the state socialist system shaped a particular centrality of work in the lives of people and their communities. Offe (1996) argues that the extreme level of integration between production and social policy under the socialist regimes of east central Europe meant that, in contrast to western forms of paternalism, there was almost nothing outside the enterprise. There were rarely alternative providers of welfare, recreational or consumer services and “collective survival and individual status” (op. cit., p.235) were founded almost entirely on the relationship to production. That work was established within socialist regimes as not only a right but a duty meant that there was, to all intents and purposes, no choice in accepting the place of work in structuring most other spheres of life (see also, Rainnie *et al.*, 2002). The populations of the regions could be seen as worker-citizens, whose rights and value were founded on their “work contribution in the creation of a new social reality” (Domański, 1997, p.176). This productivist ideology was reinforced not only through the material relations of workplaces, communities and states but was also inculcated into new generations of workers through the education system, the media and slogans on buildings and banners. In these ways, workers under socialism were encouraged to believe not only in the centrality of work, but also in their centrality within these regimes.¹

At the scale of people’s lives, the industrial employer was very visible on the urban landscape, involved not only in production, but also in daily activities outside work

such as the publication of newspapers and the support of cultural and sporting events. Many offered collective holiday resorts, health services and retail outlets, whilst some went as far as attempting to replace domestic spheres with the communal preparation and consumption of meals (Domański, 1997; see also Ciechocińska, 1993; Clark and Soulsby, 1998). The role of industrial employers both within and beyond the socialist factory attests to a considerable influence of work and workplaces on the daily lives and identities of residents. Work was the ‘basic unit’ (Ashwin, 1999) around which wider lives were centred and routinized; Domański describes how “you had to meet your mill comrades and overseers queuing at the shop, waiting at the doctor’s, and going on vacation” (1997, p.185). This internal construction of identity was reinforced by these towns’ privileged location within the wider socialist project. These were *the* sites of socialism. Industrialisation, urbanisation and socialism were seen as parts of an inseparable whole such that “[s]ymbols of industrialisation such as Nowa Huta, Płock, Puławy and other towns endowed with new factories were principal symbols of socialism as well” (Domański, 1997, p.175).

In these spaces, the ‘end of work’ coincides with the ‘end of socialism’ to suggest a double ending, and closure, in communities constructed not only for particular forms of work but also for socialism. Notwithstanding the experiences which echo through both east and west, the demand for alternative accounts of the ‘end of work’ in the post-socialist world is even more convincing.

Researching work and (post-)socialism

The empirical focus of this paper is Nowa Huta, a district of the southern Polish city of Kraków where the ‘end of work’ and the ‘end of socialism’ are writ large on economic

and social landscapes. Nowa Huta was founded in 1949 as the largest project in Poland's first six-year plan and as a symbol of Poland's industrial and socialist future. Named after the 'new steelworks', the town was centred on the then Lenin Steelworks and grew to house approximately 250,000 people, around 40,000 of whom were employed in the steelworks. Since 1989 the steelworks, renamed Huta Sendzimir, have, through a combination of redundancies, early retirement packages and the transferral of workplaces to firms spun-off from the steelworks in the process of modernisation, reduced employment to around 8,000. The research on which this paper is based is part of an ongoing project exploring the changing shape of Nowa Huta, placing particular emphasis temporally on the post-1989 transformations and thematically on the relationship between life, work and community. The interviewees quoted represent a range of subject positions within the community, chosen not so much for their representativeness but for the variety of experiences they could talk about. In all, I carried out 32 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with residents of Nowa Huta (together with a number of 'key informants' and 'gatekeepers' within and beyond the community), whose ages ranged from 18 to 87. Many were connected directly with the steelworks, others only possessed the most tenuous links to work there. Interviews lasted between forty five minutes and three hours and were transcribed in Polish immediately afterwards. The transcripts were read and analysed in their original Polish form and the material collated for writing purposes. All names have been changed and followed, in their first appearance, by a brief description of the interviewee.

This interview material is set within a wider review of statistical data, gathered from Polish governmental, European and other sources to construct an account of the transformation of work in Poland post-1989. Together, this material is constructed to

flow through three scales of analysis, from socialism as a system, through macro shifts in Poland's labour markets to the specific experiences of Kraków and Nowa Huta. In this way, the paper aims to move away from abstract interpretations of post-socialist transformation and instead explores the experiences of those living with the economic and political shifts ongoing in Poland. In this respect, this paper seeks to contribute to a growing body of geographical and anthropological work (see, for example, Hann, 2002; Burawoy and Verdery, 1999b; van Hoven, 2004) which presents ethnographies of post-socialist change.

Work and transformation in Poland

This world of work began to be transformed under socialism as the economic and political contexts shifted and were reformed, yet the collapse of socialism in 1989 marked a much more dramatic remaking of labour markets and work itself. Economic transformation in east central Europe (ECE) and the former Soviet Union (FSU) has, by definition, involved shifts in the nature and locations of work but also, from a situation of (artificial) full employment, involves the loss of work and the movement of significant populations out of the workforce altogether. It is estimated that more than six million jobs were lost in ECE during the first decade of transition (Akkoyunlu, 2001), largely accounted for by job destruction in the state sector and a slower process of job creation in the new private sector.

[tables 1 and 2 near here]

Table 1 shows how unemployment in Poland rose through the early 1990s, reaching a turning point in the middle of the decade. However, the turn of the century has seen

unemployment rise again, reaching 18.0% (December 2003, according to national statistics [GUS, 2004])² or 19.1% according to OECD standardised rates, the highest amongst OECD states (OECD, 2003). There are clear regional variations around this national mean; many of the north-western counties, in particular, record unemployment levels of over 35%, whilst the larger cities have levels of just 6-8% (*Rzeczpospolita*, 12.8.02). Within these headline figures, there is a high level of unemployment stagnation - in 2002 51.2% of the registered unemployed had been out of work for more than twelve months (GUS, 2003) and the growth of the long-term unemployed leads to a decline in those eligible for benefits, just 14.6% of the registered unemployed at the end of 2003 (compared to 79% in 1990 [GUS 2002; MGPIPS, 2003a]). Another disturbing sign is the high levels of youth unemployment, rising to 41.5% of the 15-24 age group (see Table 2), with some regions recording youth unemployment rates well over 50% (Behrens, 2002: 3).

Unemployment however is not the only growing form of inactivity. In all, the employment rate stands at just 53.8%, reaching an especially low rate for women and the over 55s (Table 2). Three main factors account for growing absence from the workforce - illness and disability, education and professional training and family obligations. The size of the workforce itself is reduced by a growing trend to early retirement, often encouraged by generous financial packages offered by restructuring firms, hiding unemployment amongst older age cohorts and marking the “professional deactivation of the older generation” (Tokarska-Biernacik, 2002).³

For those in work, one of the most notable transformations has been the shift to the private sector, with employment in private enterprises rising from 47.9% in 1990 to

73.4% in 2002 (GUS 2003). Employment in services has grown as employment in industry and agriculture have fallen (Sztanderska and Piotrowski, 1999, pp.11-12). Particular dynamic sectors over this growth period were property and company services, hotels and restaurants, construction and trade and repairs, many of which tend to be characterised by casual (or risky) forms of employment. These shifts are also linked to an increase in employment in small firms and family-run enterprises; over 80% of new jobs have been created in enterprises with less than 100 employees (Kwiatowski *et al.*, 2001). There has also been a slight increase in levels of part-time working, though levels are still lower than EU15 (Table 3). Such figures, however, give no indication of an apparent increase in the phenomenon of having more than one job and the importance of second, part-time jobs to maintain a living wage. This data also inevitably excludes those working outside the formal economy (estimated at around 800,000 [ibid.]), many of whom will be working on a part-time basis. Data on working times are mixed. There has been little change in the average number of hours worked per week, but working hours appear to be more polarised, with more people working both considerably more and considerably less than the average (GUS, 2002).

These shifts in the nature of both employment and employers have caused a number of less tangible transformations in the experiences of work. The post-1989 processes of privatisation have seen the divestiture of many of these facilities as firms concentrate on their core productive activities. New private firms rarely provide any kind of social wage to supplement salaries. The influence of foreign investors and wider discourses of enterprise have also had a significant impact on personnel management practices - employees have experienced demands for new skills and attitudes to work, flexible working patterns, new forms of work organisation and restructured industrial relations,

all tendencies reinforced by the amended Labour Code which focuses on increasing the flexibility of the employment contract, making it easier to both create and destroy jobs (Czarzasty, 2002; see also, Kancelaria, 2002).

Kraków and Nowa Huta

At the local scale, we can recognise many of these general trends. Kraków is seen as one of Poland's 'winner' regions - compared to the national averages, it records high levels of economic growth and foreign investment, and low levels of unemployment, yet it has experienced many of the same transformations and within this city-level analysis, Nowa Huta stands out as a labour market subject to particularly dramatic transformations. As has already been noted, Nowa Huta's labour market is dominated by the former Lenin Steelworks (now Huta Sendzimira) which has, in recent years, been undergoing a major process of restructuring, in preparation for privatisation.⁴

Unemployment in Kraków at the end of 2003 stood at just 8.4%, less than half the national rate. In structure, however, the Kraków labour market very much mirrors the national picture (Grodzki Urząd Pracy, 2003b). Women account for over 50% of the unemployed; young people under 34 almost 49%; and those with basic and incomplete vocational education 55.3%. A growing percentage of the registered unemployed, particularly women, have been out of work for more than 2 years. There has been a significant increase through 2001 and 2002 of those who have taken early retirement. Workers with a background in industry, construction and trade and repairs make up the largest shares of the unemployed, but these are also the sectors where most new job offers are concentrated. One apparent area of growth has been "seasonal working in the

so-called ‘grey zone’” (Grodzki Urząd Pracy, 2003b, p.6), indicative of a shift out of the formal labour market, towards more diverse sources of income.

The situation in Nowa Huta very much reflects the larger urban picture (Grodzki Urząd Pracy, 2003a) with the share of unemployment in Nowa Huta only slightly exceeding its share of Kraków’s population (34.6% as against 29.5%). Whilst fewer of the unemployed have been seeking work for more than 24 months (11.3%), a significantly larger percentage have been out of work for between 12 and 24 months (30.9% compared to 20% in Kraków as a whole). This reflects the timing of mass redundancies at Huta Sendzimir and points to a potential problem of long term unemployment for this cohort. Nowa Huta represents a disproportionately small number of the new job offers within the Kraków labour market (just 15.7%) suggesting that many of those finding new work are finding it elsewhere in Kraków.

A more positive indicator suggests that more of the Nowa Huta unemployed are engaged in retraining programmes and other public works projects, though in part this reflects higher levels of national and international funding for such programmes in the light of steel restructuring (MGPiPS, 2003b). The process of restructuring at the steelworks is also reflected in particularly high levels of workers in receipt of early retirement benefits, over 45% of the Kraków total (as against a population share of 29.5%). A final marked contrast with Kraków is in the make up of unemployed school leavers – whilst in Kraków as a whole the largest share is made up of higher education graduates, in Nowa Huta, the predominant group possesses post-secondary technical or vocational education, a difference which reflects Nowa Huta’s sectoral and skills profile and suggests more structural unemployment. Although the City Labour Office notes

that the steelworks implemented redundancies relatively smoothly, taking time and money, from national and international sources, to ease their impact (interview with City Labour Office, July 2001), the statistics point to some concerning trends, played out in the lives of my interviewees.

Nowa Huta and work

As Domański suggests, there were key sites which epitomised the work-community relationship under socialism and Nowa Huta was one of these. As such, in its early history, notwithstanding the accounts of appalling working and living conditions in the 1950s (Janus, 1999; Lebow, 2001), work was connected to a set of positive transformations in the lives of people and their community (see, for example, Goban-Klas, 1971; Stojak, 1967; Siemieńska, 1969). Most of the town's early residents were attracted to Nowa Huta in search of stability and work, and in Nowa Huta work was central, socially and financially. The rhythm of life in the town was shaped by shifts at the steelworks – at the scales of both family and community – whilst Justyna (mid 40s, environmental management) remembers the impact of her father's shift patterns on the pace of life at home, others drew attention to the rhythmic flow of workers travelling by tram through the town.

Within the community, familial, social and institutional networks shaped the search for and choice of work. Bartek (late 20s, former steelworker/optician) and Michał (mid 50s, retired steelworker/museum curator) both found work in the same department as their fathers and uncles, and Agata (60s, retired bookkeeper) helped her brothers, arriving in Nowa Huta from the countryside after her, find employment in workplaces connected with hers. Bartek reached employment through a series of structured steps

from school, to technical college to an apprenticeship in his father's department, each institution supported by the steelworks to shape the path of occupational progression.

The ubiquity of work (both within and beyond the community) was linked to the communist era duty to work. After discussing the particular role of Huta Lenina in the regional labour market, Andrzej (mid 40s, manager at steelworks) explains "so that's what socialist, communist employment was. In principle, everyone had to have work."

Dorota (early 70s, pensioner) expands on, this contrasting the past situation with that of today:

"then, anyone who wanted to work did work. They even made young people, who hadn't graduated from primary school, and who weren't working, they made them [work]. It was compulsory, they made them do something, it was called OHP,⁵ they brought young people into workplaces and they worked there ... then they forced you to work and now there is no work."

Once at work in Nowa Huta, the connections to other spheres of life became clear; work in Nowa Huta gave Agata "the possibility of a start in life" and gave others a home, access to a network of social and cultural facilities and wages high enough to provide for a family. Whilst Edward (late 80s, retired steelworker) drew attention to the larger impact of Huta Lenina:

"What role did it [Huta Lenina] play? Well, above all, I'd say work and the stabilisation of life, that's one thing, and another, it was a source of support for many thousands of people ... one working family member could support four members of his family"

Jacek (mid 30s, school teacher) highlighted some of the more personal implications:

"what my father said, he simply explained that thanks to the factory we had a place to work, we had somewhere to live ... thanks to the fact that my father worked there, I could go once or even twice a year to camp..."

For Edward, and others, work in Nowa Huta was not simply a source of income and housing; he reminisced at length about the 'pioneering times' when the hard work

involved in the town's construction was also a source of pride and reward (see also Prawelska-Skrzypek, 1990), and the industrial skills involved an asset to the nation.

Work, community and transformation

The events of the 1980s, in which the steelworkers of Nowa Huta played a critical role, heralded the collapse of the communist regime in Poland and a concomitant reshaping of economic, political and cultural priorities. The subsequent labour market shifts have begun to radically transform the nature of work and community in Nowa Huta, reshaping incomes, experiences of work, the relationship between home and work and the wider community.

Incomes and livelihoods

It is perhaps the steelworkers themselves, who benefited from the particular generosity of the socialist regime, who have perhaps been hardest hit by the shifting priorities which challenged the centrality of heavy industry in the Polish economy. Józef (early 50s, maintenance worker at steelworks) begins to describe how things have changed:

“No, well, economic conditions then were, well, how shall I explain ... in comparison with the average national wage my earnings, say in 1980, were about twice the national average. And now, at the moment, at the current time, I have 0.7, or 0.6. So, well, a lot has changed.”

Yet the declining position of steel is coupled with a developing ‘new economy’ where wages barely allow for supporting a family. Józef goes on to talk about his daughter:

“But, now, even though her husband earns reasonably well, it's difficult for them to provide for their family. Without the help of the two sets of parents, it would be lousy for them ... Well, they barely have the chance to survive, they almost have no chance”

Jan (late 50s, retired steelworker) contrasts the current experiences of achieving an apartment, one of the key markers of the transition to adulthood, with his position over thirty years ago

“I mean, before you had to wait, now you have to work for an apartment, and that’s the difference, because on these wages you can earn enough for a few centimetres squared of apartment, right? Because apartments are expensive. So, well, then, if you had work then you had an apartment, and that was already almost everything, and everything that you earned on top of that, then you could live. And that’s the truth, that was the truth.”

Jan’s statement portrays an assumed certainty and centrality of work. As he finishes and reflects, he realises that this is no longer the truth.⁶ Piotr (40s, steelworks electrician), talking about a friend, a former steelworker who had retrained to gather mushrooms and berries, complained “well, it makes no sense. That’s seasonal work, who earning that can support a family, eh?”, while Józef reflected:

“I see here by the block young people who don’t have work ... maybe a bloke drives a car, or something like that, but that’s not work. There’s no future.”

Employment insecurity signifies a wider economic and social insecurity which touches not only individuals, but their families and communities. Marta (mid 40s, school secretary) expresses this most clearly:

“I remember earlier times, when there was no talk of unemployment, there wasn’t such an idea as unemployment. Everyone had work, and if you didn’t have work then you got a pension ... I’m not returning to those times with nice thoughts, I’m just talking about the fact that no one had this fear, that we might find ourselves on the street, that we might have nothing to give the children to eat. Now that fear is terrible.”

These statements testify to a clear decline in the quality of work, not so much in the context of the daily experience of labour (though perhaps in this as well), but in the context of managing the work-life balance and in supporting wider social relationships. The difficulties involved in managing a family financially on the basis of work today complicate still further the relationship between work, home and community. In contrast to memories of work under socialism, contemporary work is rarely seen to support life outside work, and, as I discuss in more detail below, is often experienced as a detraction from life at home and in the community.

Work, home and social life

A family wage, large and secure enough to support two adults and children, was just one of the ways in which work shaped the wider community. Whilst this in itself is threatened by the loss of work and the declining quality of employment opportunities, these shifts are having a still greater impact on the nature and quality of social and family lives.

In a community like Nowa Huta, the connections between social lives and work lives have always been tight. Lena (late 20s, works in airline sales) explores this, looking at the lives of her neighbours in one of Nowa Huta's oldest neighbourhoods:

“I mean, it seems that it's important for people, that here the majority of the residents work there at the steelworks, and maybe that's important, because, for example, because even today I was in a shop and one, this old man shouted to another ‘Greetings, colleague from the blast furnace’, so, in some way it's clear, people who work in one place, kind of, identify with that place, it's difficult to explain, because I've never been directly connected with it, but for this community, there is, they all live together, work together, there's this mutuality of goals in this community.”

Jan talked about this from his personal experience:

“it was once like, like that the plant took care of the integration of the workers, because we went, for example, on these excursions which were organized. So people got to know each other and grew friendly, and that lasted some years, right?”

This kind of community was built up through day trips, excursions to the theatre or concert hall, or simply everyday outings after work, as Jan continues to describe:

“So, for example, with us it used to be that work finished at 2 and there was a coach and in the afternoon, like at this time of the year [summer], a whole coach full of people went to somewhere on the water, returned at 9, 10. Yeah, and really there, anyone who wanted to drink beer, then they sat down, and others played football. And people got to know each other, right?”

But as Jan concludes, it's “now home, work and nothing apart from that. That's how it is.” Many of my interviewees, especially those from older generations, explicitly

discussed how interpersonal relations had changed as a result of the ongoing restructuring. Piotr noted:

“You know, people’s attitudes to, for example, work have changed, previously it was relaxed, calm. Now you have to look from person to person because it’s not clear who amongst your colleagues is a friend and who an enemy. Because it’s clear that there’s going to be maybe 2000 lay-offs, and everyone’s looking at each other thinking, god, maybe I’ll be laid off, or maybe he will...”

For Leszek, the stress of the threat of redundancies feeds an “envy between people” but it’s not only envy which erodes personal relationships; later in the conversation he came to the issue of time, complaining, “I work so long that I don’t have time to go anywhere ... I just have home and work.” Jan was even more convinced:

“Previously people were more open, now everyone closes themselves off like a snail in a shell and sits.

Why do you think this is?

Time. I blame time for this. Once, maybe it’s not this, but one you could live calmly. People were sure of tomorrow ... And now, well, it’s not like that. People fear the loss of work and that’s it.”

Younger people also identified a shift related not only to the specific conditions of a particular workplace, but more generally to the changing nature, and demands, of work.

Beata noticed this amongst her parents’ generation:

“for example, a friend’s father who lost his job at the steelworks just can’t get on with his friends, because they had work, they still worked at the steelworks, somewhere else, but he... The steelworks were his whole life, he spent how many years of his life there, and in the end he couldn’t cope with being with them...”

but also saw the impact on her own life, in terms of contact both with family and friends. Echoing Leszek, she explained:

“Yes, in everyday life it’s difficult to maintain those contacts, even to meet with my family. Kind of, no one has any time, everyone works different hours, but however we do have contact... You know, when I was younger, I think, that, yes, I remember that we often played together with our cousins, I don’t know, maybe our parents had more time for that, and at the moment no one has any, because everyone has to work, in order to try and keep their family.”

As Beata describes, the pressures of work haven't simply worn away wider social lives, but have also worked to the detriment of family relations, and this goes beyond regular contact with extended families. Michał explained how he no longer seemed to be taking family holidays:

“And everyone's afraid, that if they go away for 2 or 3 weeks, then maybe already someone more capable will come along, and throw you out into the labour market, right? That might happen, right? Yes, I think that even those people who plan some free time, then it's near home, so that they can have contact with work all the time, in case something needs to be done”

There are a number of related issues here. We can see the growing pressure of time and the perceived necessity to commit, quantitatively, more and more of your life to work, in order to keep hold of your job and fight off the competition. The time and effort committed to work reduces the time available to maintain lives outside work, in the home and with friends (see Schor, 1993). But in addition to this quantitative domination of life by work, we can see that growing insecurity is impacting negatively on the quality of social relationships. Trust is being broken down as people become more protective of their jobs and, in the face of redundancy, workers feel they have to compete for the remaining jobs. At the same time, we can point to the diminishment of community institutions, including the workplace, but also cultural centres, bars, trips out of town, through the withdrawal of funding and the incursion of the market, at precisely the time when the community needs integration. These frailties extend beyond the workplace, into friendships built up at work, and also into other relationships. Józef, for example, argues that people were more sociable before, and that it's rising poverty which leads people to live more isolated lives. This is a point

which Michał echoes when he explains why he doesn't see his friends and family so often anymore:

“Well, because people don't have any money. We feel embarrassed in front of one another, of our poverty. And yes, that's how it is.”

For Sennett and others, this withdrawal from community life is an important feature of the new world of work. Whether induced by poverty, shame or a more complex mix of emotions, the return to the home when not at work results in the loss of more public leisure facilities; in Nowa Huta, reduced audiences at the town's cinemas has already led to the closure of screens (Radłowska, 2002). In a broader sense, the withdrawal from the public sphere makes the challenge of reviving the community more difficult (Bauman, 2001).

The community consequences of job loss

The consequences of job loss for the community relate to an accumulation of individual experiences and a set of wider spatial outcomes. In the most general sense, my interviewees identified a listlessness and lack of direction amongst those worst hit by restructuring. The impacts are not solely psychological and others point to the material impacts of job loss. Robert (18, student) notes that the continuing threat of redundancies at HTS will lead to an impoverishment of the community as those laid off, especially older workers, find it difficult to obtain new work or retrain. For those lucky enough to still qualify, livelihoods have been supported by benefits; for many others, the only opportunities exist in the shadow economy, often making use of skills and contacts developed at work.

The growing absence of labour is a clear feature of Nowa Huta's landscape today – the streets are no longer empty, of men particularly, during the working day. Clusters of retired and redundant workers gather on street corners and in cultural centres, testimony to the communities built on the common experience of work, and its loss, maintained by the continuing functioning of workplace and trade union organisations in the lives of former workers (Stenning, 2003). On pay day, the shops become busier and there is more socialising amongst workmates and neighbours. Life in Nowa Huta is still “linked to the rhythm of work at the plant” (Niward, 1997, p.78).

Today, however, the common experiences are more likely to be of job loss and insecurity than labour and achievement, and they are less likely to be experienced collectively. The withdrawal to the home and the erosion of the bonds and spaces of community life has meant that the problems of the present tend to be lived alone. What is more, the achievements of the new system – consumption, enterprise – are more likely to be experienced individually too. The wider political implications of this fragmentation of experience means that it is more difficult to contest the ongoing transformations; organising becomes increasingly problematic when ‘common cause’ is hidden (Stenning, 2003). A marker of the new worlds of work in Nowa Huta is that, after the steelworks, the largest workplace is an open-air market, Tomex, supporting, often informally or illegally, around 7,000 people, from former steelworkers to doctors of philosophy (*Rzeczpospolita*, 11.6.99). The insecurity of this work and the lack of additional benefits contrasts markedly with work in the steelworks during the socialist era.

This insecurity is coupled with a devaluing of work that allows labour resources and skills to be wasted and disparaged, in contrast to socialist-era Nowa Huta where work was not only a source of pride and propaganda but also the basis of citizenship, social mobility and achievement. This undervaluing of industrial labour and its achievements goes further, perhaps, in post-socialist states than elsewhere, since it reflects not only the general trend but also a specific movement to revalue the socialist experiment. As Jałowiecki notes, this kind of assessment writes off the efforts of a lifetime as a “gigantic mistake”, notwithstanding the fact that “a substantial part of the ‘builders’ of People’s Poland acted in good faith” (1991, p.5; for more on the devaluing of the working class post-1989, see Kideckel, 2002). The disparagement of industrial labour devalues, however, not only personal and community identities, but also the skills and resources built on this history which might provide opportunities for growth and regeneration after deindustrialisation.

Conclusions: The place of work in post-socialism

Under socialism, lives and life chances were shaped almost entirely by a person’s, or community’s, employment status. Praweńska-Skrzypek (1990, p.152) argues that “people were treated as part of production forces only”, reduced to ‘workers’ within a productivist system, their needs met only to support their reproduction as workers. Since 1989, the economic and social decentring of work results in its devaluing, and in many cases, lacks a replacement. Yet, despite the fact that work now no longer offers the security, benefits and community once experienced in Nowa Huta and contrary to ubiquitous discourses of the end of work, work still seems to dominate lives, albeit in different ways. Many of my interviewees testified to the persistent centrality in their lives of work, the search for work or the absence of work. People were spending more

and more time, and energy, working to the detriment of their lives outside work; the absence, or low value, of work was shaping, particularly, young people's lives as they had no access to the other tenets of stability – an apartment and the income to support a family; and the loss of work was ruining relationships built around it.

However, the continuing place of work was not only a negative phenomenon. Whilst highlighting the threats to their community, my interviewees also indicated the positive role that work had played in shaping a dense network of social relationships, in establishing family lives and in integrating communities. Thus, whilst social lives had been eroded, the contacts that my interviewees maintained continued to be focused on relationships built at work – witness Lena's account of comrades in the neighbourhood shop – and these contacts continue to serve as a taken-for-granted source of advice, support and mutual labour, amongst other things. These loose networks are supplemented by formal institutions, developed out of the workplace which help to mitigate the pains of restructuring, and by undocumented friendships and relationships which have survived the pressures of poverty and insecurity. In short, these wider social and economic relations have persisted beyond the 'end of work' and indeed the 'end of socialism'. There is no *tabula rasa* in Nowa Huta; post-socialism and its new worlds of work and community are shaped as much by the legacies of older social and economic forms as they are by in the invasive geographies of capitalism.

A broader view of work allows us to see that, contra Beck, a society 'after' work can survive. Work (and particularly single, central workplaces) may be increasingly unable (and unwilling) to structure community institutions, to form the centre of a community, but life, certainly in Nowa Huta, hasn't 'all fallen apart' (Beynon *et al.*, 1989); the

centre may be disappearing but the edges appear to be holding together, for now. The strong ties created in the workplace, in neighbourhoods populated by colleagues from work, in the communality of experience in Nowa Huta, *if they are not lost*, provide the community with a very strong base for an alternative framework of collectivism, for the construction of a community-led strategy for the future. Nowa Huta is a community which has adapted before, numerous times; it is a community of migrants with a proud history of construction (Siemieńska, 1969).

The danger, then, of current discourse and practice is that they erode the resources (both tangible and intangible) which contain the potential for meaningful renewal and the strength for support in difficult times. The double end – of work and of socialism – in Nowa Huta exacerbates the challenge faced by the community in reconstructing itself. It is not enough to argue that the structures which built such places and created such work are history, inevitably so; the ends of work and socialism clearly have consequences and the ways in which these endings are narrated and understood shapes the opportunities and alternatives for the future; by ignoring or undervaluing these historical resources and ascribing to the contemporary forces of capitalism an unchallenged role, the spaces in which community futures might positively be created are themselves destroyed.

This paper began with a call to document the threats to communities (in this case, in east central Europe) posed by the ‘end of work’ and the invasive geographies of capitalism, whilst also recognising the presence and value of other social and economic forms. After exploring the connection between work and community and sketching out the transformations of Poland’s labour market, this paper has explored the shifting

experiences of work in Nowa Huta, drawing out some of the consequences for security, familial and social relationships and the shape of the community. In doing so, I (or more properly my interviewees) have highlighted not only the broader connections of work and its persistent centrality but also what is in danger of being lost, posing challenges for community development in post-socialism. Such an alternative account sees the community as a space of continuities and beginnings (as well as endings), and scripts post-socialism as open, with the potential for more progressive experiences of change.

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Table 1: Unemployment

	Dec. 1990	Dec. 1993	Dec. 1995	Dec. 1996	Dec. 1997	Dec. 1998	Dec. 1999	Dec. 2000	Dec. 2001	June 2002	Dec. 2002	June 2003	Dec. 2003
Poland GUS	6.5	16.4	14.9	13.2	10.3	10.4	13.1	15.1	17.5	17.4	18.1	17.7	18.0
OECD									18.5		19.8	19.2	19.1
Małopolska								12.7	14.1	13.4	13.9	13.6	13.9
Kraków								6.3	8.1	8.2	8.4	8.5	8.4

Source: GUS (2004), Urząd Statystyczny w Krakowie (2004), Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Krakowie (2004), OECD (2004).

Table 2: Poland's Labour Market 2001

	Unemployment		Long term as % (>12m)		Youth unemp. 15-24	Employment Rate				Part-time work		Time limited contract	
	all	F	all	F		15-64		55-64		all	F	all	F
					all	F	all	F					
EU15	7.3	8.5	44.0	44.8	14.0	63.9	54.8	38.2	28.6	18	33.8	13.4	14.5
CC11	13.0	13.4	52.4	54.4	28.8	57.8	52.5	34.6	26.6	9.8	12.0	8.0	7.7
Poland	18.4	20.0	50.1	53.9	41.5	53.8	43.4	30.5	23.8	10.2	12.6	11.9	11.4

Source: Franco and Blondall 2002

CC11 is the eleven post-socialist states of the thirteen candidate countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovak Republic); Malta and Turkey are not included.

¹ The importance of workers to the regime was, at least partly, fictitious such that most of the working class was routinely marginalised from the exercise of power (Hamilton and Hirszowicz 1987).

² In early 2004, GUS reassessed its recent unemployment data in light of the 2002 Census, estimating an unemployment rate of 20% or 3.175 million in December 2003 (*poland.pl*, 30.01.04).

³ In late 2002, Solidarity launched a campaign, focused on this cohort, entitled “Too old for work, too young for death” aimed at reinstating the benefit rights withdrawn by the current government and supported by a series of protests by unemployed workers in the spring of 2003.

⁴ Huta Sendzimira is currently one part of Polskie Huty Stali (PHS, Polish Steelworks), a state-owned company which brings together four of Poland’s largest steelworks. PHS has recently been purchased by the LNM Group, now the world’s largest steel producer.

⁵ OHP, or *Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy* (Volunteer Labour Corps) was a scheme established in 1958 to engage young people in the construction of post-war Poland, providing them with education and vocational training in the process.

⁶ In Polish, and many other Slavic languages, ‘prawda’ means both the truth and a right. Interpreting ‘prawda’ in this case as ‘a right’ rather than ‘the truth’ serves to reinforce the perceived importance of work.