CATEGORY 6. COMPOSITE REPORT : EX-INDUSTRIAL WORKERS IN EUROPE

THE IMPACT OF INDUSTRIAL TRANSFORMATION ON EUROPEAN OLDER WORKERS

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INTRODUCTION

The effects of socio-political changes on the labour market for industrial workers

The decade of the 1990s is characterised by the fashionable use of the concept of "globalization", indicating "the social processes in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding" (Waters 1998 p.3.). While the effects of new technologies with their associated forms of production and consumption are highly pervasive, at the individual level choices and experiences are affected by the constraints of locality i.e. the historical, cultural and personal context. This report examines the social reponses by individuals employed in manufacturing and industry in the seven Member States participating in the SOSTRIS research project to the changes in employment that have occurred over the past twenty years. Large scale technological innovation, capital mobility and international competition aided by political decision making e.g. Thatcherism and the triumph of neo-liberalism, have seen the restructuring of world industry and production from the early 1980s onwards and associated accelerated changes in labour markets. In the European Union structural unemployment, the shift to service employment, the disappearance of many skills and types of jobs, the move to less secure forms of work contract, labour flexibilisation, the demand for new skills and abilities, have had a social impact on all sections of the labour market. The industrial working class has felt the effects of these changes most strongly. (Employment in Europe 1996, p.94) The growth of employment in the service sector as well as the devolopment of new industries such as telecommunications has not easily absorbed many of these ex-industrial workers; the reasons for this are the subject, in part, of this report. Individuals faced by restructuring and change acted in line with their own expectations as well as the opportunities provided for reorientation and development. The socio-economic structural context and the degree to which workers were associated with core or peripheral industries[1] (Cooke 1983) explains much of the subsequent life trajectories of those faced by redundancy. The situation of older industrial workers varies with their geographical and occupation locations; some had the opportunity to retrain and/or relocate[2], while others were faced by long term unemployment or, at best, obtained early retirement (the subject of an earlier SOSTRIS report). For workers in

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[1] These are associated with physical locations and local labour markets despite growing possibilities of flexibility in the location of certain types of modern industry and services.
[2] The role of the GDR in providing training and education for the indutrial working class was impressive

some countries unemployment is the first step towards early retirement, while for others it represents being exposed to serious risks - both in terms of current poverty and insecurity, but also long term poverty into old age. It cannot be forgotten that for significant sections of the European population old age is marked by poverty and social exclusion.

The distinctive contexts of the European working class

Though there are significant differences between the industrial structures and histories of Northern and Southern European countries participating in the SOSTRIS research project, the effects of the economic changes mentioned on the social and personal lives of many industrial workers have been similar. This is evident in the national reports and biographies presented subsequently.While in Northern Europe industrial workers were "typically" employed in factories and large production units, in the Southern European countries employment in small craft workshops has been more common. Although the term working class is used for the purposes of this report, in the Southern countries this category covers individuals who were employed in small family businesses or were self-employed, making them distinctive in terms of their class consciousness and political ideology. Although the structures of employment and of class and work identity and consciousness differ between North and South Europe, divisions within the category of the working class can also to be found between Northern European countries as a result of socio-historical and political alliances. However what enables us to use the term the "working class" in this cross cultural context is the fact that they performed similar types of work which has made them vulnerable to the technical and political changes introduced in the past few decades. Their difficulties in adapting to the resulting changes in the labour market had consequences in their re-integration into jobs, and this situation has been a problematic issue for all the European Member States. [3]

The historical development of the industrial working class in Northern Europe occurred over an extended period of 200 years, a factor contributing in many countries to the development of a working class identity built predominantly on the male skilled worker and organised in industrial trades unions. This, together with core values, often derived from a Protestant ethic, contributed to the centrality of work in social life and the construction of individual identity, particularly male identity around this core value; as Beck (1992) says "wage labour and an occupation have become the axis of living in the industrial age". In the areas of Southern Europe examined in this research (Barcelona, Athens, Naples) neither working class history nor ideological values had the same effect on the construction of working class identity. There was strong trades union activity and participation historically in the Communist Party in all of these areas but this does not appear to have been primarily based on the experience of and reactions to modern industrial capitalism since so many workers were self employed or in small family firms. Participation in modern forms of industrial employment i.e. larger firms, has occurred mainly since the Second World War and thus is a phenomenon affecting just one or two

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[3] The issue of older workers was taken up by EU Ministers at their meeting in Essen in December 1994 and the debate on policies to help older workers is still the forefront.

generations. One consequence of this may be a lower level of identification with the world of industrial work and the working class per se, making them potentially more flexible about their work and identity and less bound up with the notion of a standardized working life course. It could be hypothesised that the loss of employment in the Southern countries is problematic more in relation to income than in relation to identity.

The impact of welfare structures and public policy on workers

The issue of income and unemployment is a critical one and while most Member States provide unemployment benefit or social security, the levels of this and the social meanings attached to acceptance of such payments may still make those receiving social security subsidies feel demeaned. In Italy and Greece, even social subsidies are time limited. The welfare context structures the biographies of individuals who grow up within sets of social and personal expectations about objective vulnerability and concomitant personal and social strategies that develop accordingly. The GDR is fascinating in the provision it made for the working class to have opportunities (in education and work) to overcome limitations rooted in their personal and social histories. The availability in people's lives of educational, training and retraining opportunities vary ; those who have access to these do find alternative routes out of social exclusion i.e. into other employment, into expression of other aspects of self.

Countries can limit the phenomenon of unemployment amongst ex-industrial older workers by providing access to early pensions and early retirement from the labour force. This confounds comparisons between the category of early retired and ex-industrial workers. Those who are older and faced by unemployment for several years before being able to get retirement pensions are clearly at far greater risk of social exclusion than those forced into early retirement. Governments during the 1980s used early retirement policies or in some cases extended the rights to disability pensions to older unemployed workers, as a way of dealing with redundancy ; but this option has been under scrutiny since 1994 with the realisation that the systematic decline in the labour market participation of older workers[4], particularly men, of all levels, was causing long term problems in the social insurance funding. An increasingly ageing work force contributed to this realisation. As a result more active labour market measures such as retraining and reinsertion are now strongly on the political agenda; however the actual creation of new jobs has not kept up with the demand for employment and during a period where there is no great demand for labour older workers are perceived as less desirable employees. Negative stereotypes, higher costs, lack of training and retraining investment, makes the feasibility of implementing the political rhetoric open to question. The political decision in most of the developed countries to decrease further expansion in employment in the state sector and the move to privatisation limits the extent to which the public sector can absorb older redundant workers in long term job creation schemes.

Labour market vulnerability

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[4] In the age group of men aged 55-65 only just over a half were still economically active in the European Union in 1997.

For the individual the status of being an unemployed older ex-industrial worker is totally different from that of a person who has been granted an early pension and is thus relieved from the necessity from looking for work, having secured a minimum income as of right. Even though some of the social mechanisms that are developed to deal with the status of early retirement confronts some of the same biographical issues e.g. the loss of meaning, social context; at the same time industrial workers who do not have the option of early retirement have to develop other strategies that will either help them remain active in the labour market or will provide alternative life projects. Temporary work contracts, illegal and non insured work, subsistence on social welfare payments of different kinds, confront them with insecurity and even those who have succesfully retrained and been absorbed into a new job in the work force, are aware of the fragility and vulnerability of their work.

The reports presented consist of detailed biographies and other cases from France, the UK and Greece. Following this is a sociological interpretation of the results from the life histories from all seven countries based on the work of the research teams. In the Appendix are presented the detailed profiles of the ex-industrial workers from Sweden, Italy, Spain and Germany.

The Sostris Case Studies

. Despite national socio-economic differences in patterns of modernization, the biographies of ex-industrial workers drawn from the seven different countries in the SOSTRIS project, illustrate common aspects in their lives as a result of changes and instability in employment. Within the life courses of people in this category of mature ex-industrial workers, are presented a variety of strategies for dealing with the crisis represented by the loss of traditional employment. Individual strategies take place within different social contexts, from those where there is support for adjustment e.g. retraining opportunities, to those where they are systematically excluded from employment.

Industrial transformation and modernization processes have been occurring unevenly both within and between the various countries; France and UK industrialised prior to Spain and Greece; urban Sweden prior to rural Sweden, Northern before Southern Italy. The ex-industrial workers come out of different industrial traditions and structures e.g. type and size of industry, their historical role in the modernisation process. In the various countries e.g. Italy, France, Greece, Spain, Sweden, several cases illustrate similar processes of transformation from peasant to industrial worker, and subsequently to other new situations, unemployment at an older age, self-employment, new service employment. The social reproduction of working class situations and lives, is particularly evident in biographies from countries with a long industrial tradition such as Germany, the UK and France..

I. Paths to working class employment

Amongst all the countries participating in the research, this generation of industrial workers come not only from working class backgrounds, but also from peasant and rural origins. Thus for many workers, urban industrial employment is not established in their family biographies as a historic form of employment. Examples include people like Anton in Sweden and Eleni from Greece from small fishing communities; Jens, also from Sweden, from a rural farm; Jean from France who was raised on a farm; Niki from Greece from a remote village; Pasquale and Giovanni from Italy from rural origins. For these people both absolute and relative poverty and opportunities in the industrial sector, led to their change of location and occupation and inclusion into the industrial working class.

" We couldn't dream about getting an education. It was very difficult to attend school. We didn't have books, everyone was poor then" Eleni, Greece.

Within the current situation it can be argued that these rural origins still represent a resource either in terms of a safe haven, a traditional community to which they can feel an identification, or as a conceptual resource in the sense that they have experienced alternative work roles and another way of life. Some still have physical resources such as land. Thus older forms of production and ownership coexist with industrial work.

The biographies of those interviewed reflect the hard physical and emotional conditions under which many grew up in all the European countries and which may account for their working class status and employment. Many were forced to leave school early (Kostas, Vassilis, Eleni, Toula from Greece; Pasquale, Giovanni from Italy; Loucas from Spain; Berthel, Jens, Ragnhild from Sweden; Bernard, Jaques, Mary, Jean from France; Barry and Derek from the UK) and had no effective choices about work, or they could not rely on either psychological or material support from their family. Disrupted family lives and the social consequences this had on their life courses occurred for different reasons:

*	the early deaths of parents, e.g. Pasquale in Italy, Oscar in Spain, Kudera in Sweden, Bernard in France, Harold in the UK or

*	abandonment by parents e.g. Lucas in Spain, Jacques in France.

*	the migration of one or more parent to take up work away from their family which marked the lives of Marta in Spain and Jean in France.

*	alcoholism in the family had a serious effect on the biographies of Ylva in Sweden, Bernard and Jean in France, Harold in the UK,

*	family psychiatric problems marked the biography of Raghild in Sweden and

*	violence that of Bernard's early life in France.

Traumatic histories do not necessarily dictate people's subsequent biographies, since there are social mechanisms by which they can get over these; but nonetheless they were so significant in the lived lives of those interviewed that they were still reflecting on and reporting these experiences years later..

Health problems, either in the family of birth or in the form of childhood illnesses, also often influenced early life choices with respect to education and family relationships e.g. in Greece Niki's handicapped brother was a factor in her difficult relationship with her mother and early entrance into the labour market; Kudera in Germany who has to struggle with his own early childhood illnesses seeks to overcome and master this through physical education and sports.

II. Labour market exclusion and individual strategies

i. The loss of work identity and its consequences

From the biographies it is apparent that the exact time period at which individuals confront radical changes in their employment, i.e. whether these occur late/early in their working life, late/early in the transformation of the industry, late/early in their national and local political and welfare contexts, affects their perspective on the new development in the labour market. The cases represented here reflect some of these variations and the individual strategies adopted. Their life courses are dynamic - we catch their responses at a historical and personal moment in their lives; this comes out in many of the interviews where it is understood that the interview provides an opportunity to reflect, summarize, express distress and anger; some individuals are able to "move on" while others are paralysed or adopt self destructive behaviour. Within the framework of SOSTRIS and with the emphasis placed on strategies to avoid social exclusion, the need for personal reflexivity as a way of confronting change has been a key issue not only for individuals but for agencies and policy makers in supporting effective action in this direction. In examining the biographies one of the aims is to identify personal and social strategies that contribute to the avoidance of social exclusion. As is evident in the cases presented strategies were as likely to be destructive as effective or constructive.

The anger, fear, humiliation and fragility found in the stories of the ex-industrial workers in trying to confront changes over which they have no control, seems to be a strong element in this category. The values of work, especially for some national and male groups/cultures, has been so central that the elimination of their job threatens the individuals with entire loss of meaning. The cost to

people's health of insecure work and the stress that results is well known. It is not only unemployment that brings about deterioration in health but precariousness itself. ([5]Wilkinson 1996, p.178.)

For some of the male respondents especially those from countries with long established industrial traditions, the loss of working class identity and solidarism, of male social work groups, has been a traumatic and saddening experience. It has devalued the old lives and not all have been able to reestablish new meanings. Donald, in the UK, still mourns his loss of workmates and the devaluation of his skills in the mining industry :

> *'I just miss, I miss my mates. I miss being chased because I was - I used to be a bit wicked- you know in work and er , er, I miss being called you little b…… get out of the way or get off the phone and, go and do this or, pull your finger out, you miss going to bed, tired, physically tired though I mean.'*

The role of health in creating crises in employment is obvious in several life histories. Health problems for the individual, often the result of accidents, or their immediate family, mark turning points in biographies i.e. redundancy, change of type of work. Thus Enzo in Italy after a car accident changes his work and life course to a more unstable projectory; Julian from Spain, who catches hepatitis after a car accident that hospitalises him, changes his life radically, leaving his job, wife and town; Reder in Germany develops back problems which force him to retrain; Harold in the UK after a serious accident underground as a miner, starts work on the surface, which provides him with new opportunities and perspectives. Barry from the UK who loses his job after an accident is forced into dependent self-employment, Donald also had a work accident which stops him being able to work underground.

One consequence of losing their employment that occurs in the biographies of men who were married, is a crisis in their marital relationship leading to its breakup. Such cases as illustrated by Oscar and Julian in Spain.

ii. Self Destructive Strategies

If reflexivity and the adoption of behaviour that will provide more life choices is considered an effective strategy for dealing with social change, then at the other extreme are forms of behaviour that do not allow individuals to constructively confront their situation.

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[5] Wilkinson R.(1996) *Unhealthy Societies: The Afflictions of Inequality*. Routledge, London.

- **Paralysis and fatalism** constitute forms of response to changes, though in some cases these may have been present in the whole life course. Such attitudes and behaviour generate or are, it could be argued, the most extreme form of the manifestation of social exclusion since there is a suspension of active response, of agency, a marginalisation of the self, of the sense of control and being the main actor in one's own life. On the other hand such reactions also do not confer blame or guilt; the individuals wait for others to give meaning to their lives or be active on their behalf.

  *"When I was born my face was covered with a caul and they said that I would be lucky….. As a girl I would make a good marriage and that I would have all the good things in life. And that's how it happened. I made a good marriage, my husband is very good. My children are peaceful. I always remember my mother in law saying that I was a special girl that I could only do good things and to bring luck to others." (*Toula in Greece)

Ylva in Sweden who "meets several new men most of whom turn out to be dipsomaniacs if not always violent. She begins to think that either she attracts that kind or she is marked by fate"

"I never thought I would be one of the affected, I always expected to get my old age retirement in the hospital, but, unemployment maybe means for me the possibility to do things I would otherwise never done. It's matter of destiny" Marta, Spain.

- Another common set of responses in subject's biographies is in the form of **depression, psychosomatic illness and physical illness.** These would appear to be forms of self destructive response to events and the individual's situation, but as they have a public manifestation i.e. illness, they can eventually be confronted, acknowledged publicly. The sick role being a socially acceptable form of behaviour it can be used psychologically as a strategy justifying their current employment situation . It may also remain a long term strategy e.g. disability entitling the individual to a specific social status and entitlements, or be an adjustment strategy e.g. allowing a period of depression.

Eleni in Greece, apparently deeply depressed at the time of the interview, asked about the future says :

"… it is uncertain because of all these illnesses and accidents we hear about. Although I'm a very optimistic person I went through difficult moments in my life and now I'm disappointed. I'm disappointed about everything and everyone. I know it's not good to tell you this but what can I do? "

Anton in Sweden who "after his sick leave felt utterly useless and spent most of his time doing odd jobs helping his relatives on the island. A kind of depression began to take hold of him."

Flora in Spain presents herself as disabled because of mental illness.

"Its been years that I've been looiking for a job, but it's more and more difficult as time goes by ..and given my situation in my head still more"

- *Alcoholism and substance abuse,* common in the family histories of subjects, represents a dangerous form of self destruction which several subjects recognised in their told lives and were trying to avoid. Julian in Spain when he became unemployed experienced problems at home and had a crisis with alcohol.

- *Anger,* another form of response in the biographies, is more ambivalent response since the object of the anger is remote. When it begins to take a constructive social response it also has the capacity to become a reconstructive strategy. This is the case of Oscar in Spain who decided to claim for a job in the Regional Government, by doing a hunger stike lasting three weeks at the front door of the Government building.

  " I am using all my weapons. On the one hand, I'm carrying out a personal and public fight by claiming for a political commitment to the unemployed by the municipality (socialist) and the Regional government. On the other hand, I'm pressing them in order to get a proper job."

  It can be argued that Bernard's anger in France " against employers and the system are the outcome and the expression of an anger against a more private violence".

- *Relationships:* in these men's biographies one ambivalent strategy might be the avoidance of marriage allowing them not to take on the responsibilities of male breadwinner and head of household . e.g. Vasilis in Greece, Bernard in France, Anton in Sweden, Sawarki in Germany. Staying single reduces the threat posed by change and allows greater flexibility e.g. in location, in work taken on. On the other hand it threatens them in the longer term since they have limited their familial resources e.g. working wives and children, kin networks. However this strategy may have developed prior to the threat of loss of work, as in the case of Antony in the UK whose work as a sailor does not allow him easily to marry and start a family

iii. Reconstructive Strategies

- *Self-employment,* turning workers into their own bosses, is an area where many experience a "failure" in their biographies. Lack of skills, objective difficulties in competing in the market, worsening labour conditions, individualise their problems

" *… the money was not good (in the previous job) and I left. Then I opened a workshop of my own but it didn't do very well .."* Kostas in Greece.

Lucas in Spain at the age of 21 set up his own business as electrician . In 1992 the business started to suffer from the impact of the economic crisis and he had to close down. He moved to Italy temporarily and accepted a new job.

Flora in Spain at the age of 28 set up a kindergarden on her own. This initiative failed and some months later she returned to her parents home.

Berthel in Sweden who had a small entrepreneurial shop strongly affected by the 1990 economic crisis. Services and skills of the kind he offered were no longer needed. This happened when he was 50 and started doing odd jobs in the black economy.

- *Interpretive Strategies* Political interpretations constitute an intellectual and constructive form of response, allowing people to interpret events meaningfully and in solidarity with others. However some specific political interpretations and actions have become devalued in the wider social context.

Julian in Spain who had participated intensively in the university communist political activities against the Franco Regime and retained the ideology of this period. Similar reactions were found in Oscar's biography in Spain with his political identity being the structuring principle in his life.:

"*My entrance in the big factory was my starting point as an actual worker, a political and trade union activist".*

He presents himself as a critical but faithful socialist fighter :

"*No matter what happens I'm an UGT (name of the socialist trade union). I have never wanted to break away from them."*

Niki in Greece comes from a family where the father was a Communist and this influenced her active trade unionist stance and indeed she even marries another trades unionist. .

Bernard in France who belongs to the CGT, a union ideologically close to the communist party though not belonging to it, is an active unionist leader. Similarly

Pasquale from Italy has an active role in the trades union and supports its values.

- *Educational and Retraining strategies;* the need for new skills in the changing labour market may have been anticipated either at the individual and / or at the collective, social level. Thus biographies present reflexivity as a strategy to adapt to the new employment situation, whether at an individual or social level. Clearly actions by employers and governments to encourage retraining and continuing education provoke individual's own reflexivity and mobility. This is particularly obvious

in the French and German cases where workers appear to have had opportunities within their existing employment to adapt to changes.

Marta, from Spain, loses her job due to hospital staff restructuring and during the subsequent two years of unempoyment she takes various occupational courses.

Ylva from Sweden, initially a waitress, who also undertakes various unskilled occupations while living on her island, moves to a large industrial city and begins evening courses, ending up as a secretary in a medical office. When she becomes redundant in 1992, she tries several courses again to "keep up hope but most of all to meet like-minded women"

In Germany Kundera is trained as insurance agent.when the plant where he was working closed down.

Also in Germany Render subsequent to his back problems, gets the offer of retraining from the enterprise as a merchant in industrial material, previously he worked as a locksmith. Over the last 8 years he had changed work four times and received a professional training for 15 months paid for by the employment office.

Sawarko from Germany, previously working as coummunication technician in a big plant of the chemical branch, took compter retraining when he the plant closed down and after he was dismissed from the job..

Bernard from France retrained, eventually becoming officially qualified as an adjuster.

Francois from France, after the closing of the manufacturering unit where he worked, chose to train in mechanics and computing, and obtained a degree in computing.

Jacques from France moved from a manual skilled trade to becoming a qualified maintenance technician.

- *Flexibility.* One strategy in dealing with the loss of industrial employment appears to involve for some people an adjustment in their perspective on what they are willing to do as work. When reentry into the occupation in which they had experience and skills was no longer feasible, perhaps after an extended period of reflection and unemployment, they began to detach themselves from that particular work identity and skill level. They become prepared to see themselves as flexible labour, as individuals who are willing to do any job. Desperation at their economic situation may be the major factor, but others recognise that their skills are no longer in demand and that they have to adjust to a less stable labour market.

    "I have worked in various jobs without insurance because it's very difficult to find work today. I might work now in a camping site for the summer, I don't know yet. When I heard about this

> *interview on the phone I thought it would be about a job and I came. I have worked as a painter, in construction work…. anything…"* Kostas in Greece

Niki in Greece , does any kind of job. She works as a house cleaner, as well as growing crops on their land for sale. She also periodically gathers herbs and wood for sale, has attended paid seminars and she has tried to find money through a EU program to start her own small business, using land given to her by her father as collateral

Julian in Spain, after becoming unemployed and getting a divorce, begins to work in temporary jobs, both in the formal and informal labour market. He has also lived in different cities where he has found a job.

> *"I'd accept any job which would be offered to me. No matter under which conditions".* Marta, Spain.

Lucas in Spain, has been working in very precarious situations and most of the industries he works in have gone bankrupt.

> *"I'm sure that my story will be similar to the other interviewed, all of us are alone because politicians don't know what to do with us, and with the end of work. Our last resource is luck and personal networks to get temporary jobs."*

Bernard in France, from 1975-1995 only had casual jobs but never stayed unemployed. He had been a painter, adjuster, trimmer, turner, miller, crimper, warehouse man, maintenance agent; he'd worked on the assembly line and done industrial cleaning.

Antony from UK, worked as a radio officer on a ship but when technology made radio officers obsolete he started doing odd jobs. He never bothered about further training.

- The availability and/ or rediscovery of the ***private sphere*** i.e. family, community, neighbourhood, hobbies, sports, friendships, learning, offer the individual a viable alternative in terms of social and personal relations that can confront effectively existential insecurity and employment exclusion. Those unable or unwilling to look to these or who have very limited links, are under threat of social exclusion.

Community affairs and issues, including the organisation of community sports take up the time and interest of Niki in her village in Greece, Jens in Sweden and Harold in the UK. Jean in France and Mr. Beeskow in Germany retreat to the private sphere of family, home and gardening while Ranhild in Sweden helps the family business with the accounts. Kudera in Germany develops his own private interests in various hobbies and sport and Marisa in Italy extends and maintains her social networks by attending museums and film debates in her town.

- Closely linked is ***voluntary work and participation*** in religious, community and political associations since this appears to provide a viable alternative sense of values and self worth and bases for new life trajectories in the biographies of many ex-industrial workers. Oscar in Spain is active in organising a movement for the unemployed and developing public campaigns for their rights. Both Martha and Lucas in Spain are active with the local community associations including the parent teachers association. Flora in Spain is active in an NGO as a volunteer for the support of migrants. Barry in the UK has become active in his local church, regularly visiting old people and also provides advice to other unemployed people

- Another strategy is the discovery and cultivation of ***private creativity*** which has the potential to offer some individuals a new "non worker" identity based on these new skills and abilities. Thus Vasilis in Greece attends a school for photography; Ylva in Sweden writes poetry and paints. This strategy was also found amongst people belonging to categories at risk, examined in earlier SOSTRIS work e.g. ethnic minorities and migrants. Involvement in creative and artistic activities was found to be an important strategy in dealing with spoiled identities and avoiding the sense of marginalisation and social exclusion.

- ***Internalised world views and ideologies*** e.g. Protestant ideology, being a trickster, a beater of "the system" , a political activist, appear also to be effective in people's biographies in providing them with meaning. Where these values revolve around the world of work and their identity as an industrial worker then the disappearance of their job generates a crisis. This can be confronted and reinterpreted with time and the core value system and ideology is readjusted to make sense of their experience. Thus Bernard in France sees himself as a rebel who defeats the system; Alber in Germany has managed to retain a Protestant world view throughout all the years of the GDR and since the fall of the Wall and the devaluing of his work. Derek and Barry in the UK have both turned to religious values to provide meaning and structure in their lives:

" At the age of 18…a sense of wanting to make the world better.. a sense of injustice at school..and its still today wanting the best for people. The only difference now is that I realize that in many respects its politicians and policies and schemes and things don't actually change things, the only thing that will change them is Jesus…" Derek.

" *God said to me he said I got work for you, you are too old in Man's eyes but you are not too old in mine to do any work..*" Barry.

III. Societal level

The social context of labour market exclusion affects the strategies available to individuals. As already discussed under personal strategies, the availability from the state or employers of retraining opportunities and a philosophy that encourages this, act on the individual's own choices. The societal level affects fundamentally the biographies of people - this is nowhere more obvious than in the changes in ex-industrial worker's lives in the ex-GDR.

- **Prejudice.** For a number of ex-industrial workers redundancy makes them have to confront the problem of a form of social exclusion based on age prejudice where employers may be unwilling to hire them even if they have the requisite knowledge and skills. Age as a social categorisation emerges in the biographical narratives; the individuals in the different countries meet age prejudice against older workers by employers and their agents.

⇒ *" I know it's over, who wants a 45 year old woman when so many young people are competing with us?"* Marta, Spain.

⇒ *"she went oh sorry but you're too old for the job and she said in the next breath that I can go in and do it voluntary, you know, and I thought to myself if I'm too old I said if I'm too old for the job,I'm too old to do it voluntary"* Barry, U.K

However this does not appear as an evident structuring principle in their own biographical self presentations, they often refuse or are surprised by this form of categorisation. Unlike those given early pensions who may have to confront the issue of their new status involving an "early" old age, this category have not yet withdrawn from working life. Their sense of devaluation occurs in relation to employment.

- *Gender***:** Tentatively there is some evidence from biographies that societies or social contexts where people's central interest and value system is oriented more to the private sphere than to work sphere, losing work represents far more the problem of losing income, rather that an absolute loss of status or meaning. Gender differences in biographies suggest that women's plural and alternative roles particularly in the family, their sense of themselves as beings other than just workers, is potentially a resource under situations of labour market exclusion.

IV. Risk of Social Exclusion

In reviewing the biographies of ex-industrial workers from all countries, a striking observation, whether in or out of employment, is the sense of vulnerability in their present and future lives. The lack of stability is a risk they have confronted all their lives and appears to threaten them for the remainder

of their lives in all aspects of their life e.g. work, home, relationships, location, health. One factor is the lack of personal and social resources many had from the start as well as their misfortune of living and working during a period of radical transformation. The avoidance of poverty, unemployment and social exclusion depends strongly on present and future social and welfare policies and thus the states in which they reside. Even the most constructive and reflexive of individual strategies to avoid social exclusion cannot protect this vulnerable group if the state itself is not reflexive or bonds of social solidarity are not well developed. To a great extent it appears that the cost of modernisation and transformation in European economies is being paid for by some of the most vulnerable.

As Julian and Lucas from Spain comment :

$\Rightarrow$ *"Time and space are unforeseeable"*

$\Rightarrow$ *" The first thing I must say is that I'm absolutely excluded from the working world".*

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