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Work transformation within post-soviet transit: sociological peculiarities of Ukraine's case¹

Abstract

Ukraine as a specific example of the post-soviet transition country with practically non-structured economy (that means only partial changes made against the background of prolonged use of previously formed economic resources) has displayed a strong interdependence between market, labour, state and democratic processes. The two historic projects of state building and market building, carried out simultaneously since the early 1990s, have distinctly revealed the "soviet birthmarks", which both politicians and the society find difficult to remove. After the USSR's policy of full employment had been broken, ordinary working people faced the experience of being unemployed, which they had never known before. However, Ukrainian policy makers turned out to be unable to offer a proper employment policy. Therefore, processes occurring in labour sphere of the post-soviet Ukraine represent both casual employment and new tendencies of free market aspirations with development of a private owner's consciousness.

The paper's research question is to understand and explain routes and reasons for market trends in labour sphere and their crucial influence on Ukraine's social transformation.

Keywords: *full employment, transition/redistributive/mixed economy, self-employment, informal employment*

In the beginning, it would be useful to mention a very important and still valuable remark made by Neil Fligstein: "There are two great institution-building

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projects going on in post-socialist societies: state building and market building. These projects cannot be divorced from one another because much of state building is about market building, both in terms of setting rules for markets and the state's role in markets and also deciding how societies will respond to markets in fields like social policy. This period in the former socialist societies is like the 1880–1920 era for the advanced OECD countries in that the basic outlines of institutions are being laid down” [Fligstein, 1996: p. 1080–1081].

Socio-economic differences between countries of Central and Eastern Europe, displayed for the last twenty years, represent the impact of different economic regimes, including employment policy options, against the background of a previous political-economic regime and social experience (that is the so-called “path dependence”, or “inheritance”). “Although differences in trajectories of transitions across reforming state socialist and post-communist societies have become more pronounced over time, *path dependence* is likely to result in structural similarities across transition societies” [Nee, Matthews, 1996]. The problem is that some countries of this region have properly implemented economic reforms through economic restructuring while the others have only made partial changes or taken just a very few re-organisation measures, which, in fact, are nothing but prolonging the use of previously formed economic resources. Ukraine is a country that has been undergoing post-soviet transition having practically non-structured economy and continuing to exploit the Soviet Union's huge heavy industrial facilities — a typical example of the mid-20th century's economy, primitively shrunk in the last twenty years. As the economy has neither been restructured nor modernised in keeping with technological challenges and today's needs, the only major change happened to be market-like is privatisation of industrial facilities by selected representatives of the *nomenklatura*¹ and “red directors”, who have got used to being recognised as real winners of the post-soviet transition due to legitimization of the state-owned property. On the other side, working people as an ideological “embodiment” of soviet regime were urged to tap experience of job seeking, which was unknown to them, after the ideological rule “one life, one job”, adopted for the majority of people, had been broken. During the whole post-soviet period, Ukrainian politicians turned out to be unable to offer any kind of employment policy following vitally needed but practically absent economic restructuring. Besides, it needs to be mentioned that leading cadres of the Communist Party could only perform a command-administrative managerial activity, so they were absolutely unprepared for market realities. The word “market” was firstly pronounced by the last Chairman of the Council of Ministers Nikolai Ryzhkov in 1990. At the same time, in June 1990 the majority in the Ukrainian parliament, which consisted of communists and “red directors”, formed the influential “Group of 239” whose slogan was “For the sovereign soviet Ukraine!” (which, in its turn, was a real reason for the counter-revolution after 1991, as some Ukrainian and European politicians called it). Therefore, Ukraini-

¹ The word “nomenklatura” is derived from the term “nomenclature” (which, in turn, means a system for giving names to things within a particular profession or field) and used to designate a population stratum in the states of former socialist camp, which occupied various key administrative positions in Communist Party, central and local authorities, as well as in the spheres of industry, agriculture, education and health care.

ans since the early 1990s have been experiencing new life and working challenges that are the exact opposite of lifetime full employment policy and soviet ideology based on abolition of the institution of private property as a main idea for building communism, according to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' "Manifesto of the Communist Party". There is a need to clarify the meaning of *full employment* in Soviet Union since it differs from that used in the West where everybody who *seeks* job must be employed. In soviet realities, everyone who *ages able-bodied must be employed*, otherwise he would be sent to prison. It would be advisable to mention Article 12 of the 1936 Soviet Constitution (about the so-called *sponging*), which proclaimed work being a duty for every able-bodied citizen, in accordance with the principle "He who does not work, neither shall he eat". Later, in 1961, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR adopted the Law (based on the above-mentioned Article 12) "On strengthening the struggle with persons who avoid socially useful work and conduct a parasitical mode of life" deriving "unearned" incomes from exploitation of land allotments, cars, renting out apartments, etc. Socially useful work in soviet terms means only work under state control and approval. A point should be made that in the 1980s struggle against unearned incomes was accompanied by "perestroika" changes, when the Law "On Individual Labour Activity" (1986) and the Law "On Cooperatives" (1988) were enacted. Finally, in 1991, struggle against sponging ceased as the "Law of Employment" was adopted, which abolished criminal responsibility for sponging and acknowledged for the first time a phenomenon of unemployment.

Thus, soviet system of prohibitive measures formed quite a specific attitude to work and pay; besides, heavily contributed to unification, or rather, equalisation of living standards among soviet people. That was the main reason why in the early 1990s new opportunities offered by market economy were absolutely unexpected for the majority of population, why the economic initiative was nipped in the bud, only highlighting the severe problem of searching for the sources of living. After the Soviet Union's full employment policy, which provided low but secure wages and lasted over several generations, had been broken, millions of people were dismissed from industrial enterprises and research institutes¹, which had to be closed down. So, they suddenly lost their state-guaranteed jobs and experienced unemployment for the first time in their lives.

Therefore, all the processes in socio-economic sphere illustrated by both statistical and sociological data represent initially spontaneous changes in the employment structure, attitudes to work, work motivation, as well as new trends in career aspirations together with the development of market consciousness. However, the so-called soviet tracks (typical soviet system of low wages together with post-soviet complicated tax system and high fiscal burden) are barely visible, which results in increasing shadow economy and informal employment.

Conceptual framework. Obviously, all the above arguments refer to the well-known concept of path dependence, which generalises all other concepts appropriate for understanding and explaining post-soviet social realities. Post-socialist studies used to be carried out in terms of transitology that later was replaced with a more adequate research logics for analysis — "from where to where".

¹ Those enterprises and research institutions belonged to various industrial branches, but most of them related to defense industry.

The overall quality of a socio-economic system before undergoing certain changes turned out to be more important to its future development; therefore, in the 2000s the concept of path dependence acquired primary importance to post-soviet studies. This concept, previously used mainly by economists, later was developed within interdisciplinary research embracing economics, sociology, cultural studies and history [David, 1985; North, 1991; Arthur, 1994; Pierson, 2000; Biggart, 2001; Crouch and Farrel, 2004 and others]. In general, path dependence means that current and future states, actions or decisions depend on the path of previous states, actions and decisions with regard to a temporal aspect, finally forming the model of institutional “sticking” [Scott E. Page, 2006]. Thus, the process of formation and development of a new state is essentially determined by its existence at the stage of a proto-state; furthermore, the most decisive factors are institutional, eventual and behavioural. This concept can be presented as an institutional manifestation of established patterns of social norms and practices, which have been reproduced under new conditions, determining the state of a society, politico-economic development and social processes. It has been found that the strongest influence is exerted by institutional factors related to mentality and values. Michael Burawoy, a real master in the area of ethnography of transitional societies, aptly noted that post-soviet countries had gone through a transition without transformation, in particular Russia, which had experienced an *involutionary* degradation instead of the anticipated neoliberal *revolutionary* break with the past or the neo-institutional aspiration to *evolutionary* ascent to a future capitalism [Burawoy, 2000: p. 2]. Consequently, in most post-soviet countries, political choice of the model of social state was determined not by certain nation-specific factors or by the society’s democratisation, but basically by paternalistic principles of the soviet social policy provided at all levels of social and political hierarchy: the same figures within the party’s nomenklatura were appointed to key positions, according to election results¹. Therefore, even after Ukraine had gained independence Ukrainians kept giving their votes to well-known representatives of the old soviet cadres, who had authoritarian habits and preferred a command-administrative style of management. Thus, the soviet model of social policy together with soviet type of social organisation and culture kept being reproduced during the whole period of transition from socialism to capitalism, which has become a real obstacle to market changes and their reproduction. The following factors are impeding market transformation in post-soviet states: 1) low living standards and low aspirations of the most population groups during the soviet period; 2) patience as a national trait together with a low protest potential and undeveloped civil society; 3) public views on social justice in terms of socialist ideology with dominance of orientation towards work over market orientation when entrepreneurial labour is measured not by number of working days but definitely by other, e.g., innovation economic criteria [Shabanova, 2005: p. 35].

Nevertheless, one of the core conceptual approaches in post-socialist studies could be a theory of market transition from socialist system. The theory was first introduced by Victor Nee in 1989 and later proved its validity for analysis of so-

¹ It is well known that the elections in the USSR had only one candidate on the list, giving no real choice to the voter.

cialist economies undergoing market reforms, finally generalising theoretical material and empirical findings in the monograph written by Victor Nee and Sonja Opper “*Capitalism from Below*” (2012). Nee originally puts emphasis on the transition from redistribution to market in state socialism, which shifts sources of power and privilege to favour direct producers relative to redistributors. In contrast to modern market economies, where redistribution is provided by welfare state institutions, in state socialist societies redistribution “constitutes the integrative principle of economy” and is provided by institutions of central planning [Nee, 1989: p. 663]. The administrative model for distribution of rewards, which existed during state socialism, was prolonged afterwards in some cases of utility of political power for entrepreneurs, but hierarchical forms of economic coordination remain dominant. The three interrelated theses constitute Nee’s market transition theory: 1) *the market power thesis*, according to which less power – control over resources – is located in the redistributive economy and more in market-like exchanges; 2) *the market incentive thesis* – redistributive economy depresses incentive because administratively set prices for labour (without performance-related pay, just loyalty to the system was rewarded) are lower than market-determined ones; 3) *the market opportunity thesis* about changes in opportunity structures concentrated on the marketplace, rather than within the redistributive sector [Nee, 1989: p. 667]. Following Karl Polanyi’s concept of redistribution and non-market trade, Nee referred also to János Kornai’s specification of negative consequences of the partial economic reform, bringing out the worst aspects of central planning with market features. It would be good to note that Kornai did not regard the Soviet Union as an egalitarian state; social inequalities existed in soviet society, though they were somewhat restricted by distributing wealth according to the labour contributed by a person whose significance, moreover, had to be established by ruling party.

In the address delivered at the conference “Visions and Perspectives after 20 Years of Transition”, Kornai mentioned “the principle of meritocratic distribution, where scaling merit – in the practice of existing socialism – is, however, in the party-state. This scale would allow much more income to the hero of socialist labour than to an average worker, more to a district party secretary than to a university professor... Yes, there was some inequality, but looking at the total income and wealth distribution of whole population, what really characterised society was more some kind of grey equalisation, a drastic suppression of income inequality” [Kornai, 2009: p. 384–385].

The ideas of these two outstanding authorities provide, according to Nee, the following new directions in socialist studies: examining the distributive consequences of partial reform when “redistributors double benefit from distributive and market opportunities”, “modelling entrepreneurship and labour market that transfer surplus labour into the second economy” and finally, analysing the role of the state in establishing the institutional framework of a *mixed economy* [Nee, 1989: p. 679].

The “second economy” sector, which existed in socialist countries, particularly in the USSR, comprised all income-generating activities outside the redistributive (in other words, state-controlled) economy: private construction and repairs, handicrafts, private tutoring, privately provided medical services, etc. In the Soviet Union, being engaged in these activities was quite risky as the

right to extra work and earnings was strongly restricted due to redistribution policy based on the ideology of social equalisation. The concept of “second economy”, proposed in 1977 by an American economist Gregory Grossman, refers to productive and exchange activities, which satisfy at least one of the two conditions: being directly for personal gain or contradicting the existing legislation. Some sovietologists (F. Schneider, H. Gramatski and others) asserted that the shadow economy, being penetrated into all spheres of production and consumption, had formed the phenomenon of second economy outside state control. The second economy, in its turn, performed a number of functions such as a source of information, supply, stability, and even innovation. As early as the mid-1980s, several soviet economists described the function of informal activity in the context of individual labour activity, which actually served as a precursor to private entrepreneurship [Khavina and Superfin, 1986].

Hence, at the very beginning of market transition in post-soviet Ukraine those who were engaged in the second economy legalised their quasi-market activities and became the first entrepreneurs, thus forming the image of market-like changes. However, habits and practices related to “parallel economy”, which were inherited from soviet times and used in order to avoid state control and, later, tax burden, still exist, although being transformed into contemporary ones.

Therefore, the next research approach links to the concept of *informal economy*, particularly to informal employment. It should be accepted that the informal sector differs in size in different countries and there are different methods for its measuring. Economic informality still needs close attention of a researcher, especially in post-socialist countries. The concept of informal employment based on ILO definition as the most appropriate takes into consideration informal small-scale producers or distributors of goods and services in response to market demand (on condition of regularity). But the biggest share of informal sector is considered to belong to the shadow economy.

A method for measuring the shadow economy, used by a renowned Austrian economist Friedrich Schneider, gives a general idea of economic informalisation all over the world, but it is insufficient for research into the nature of informal economic activity. That is why American researchers Michael Alexeev and William Pyle, having thoroughly analysed all of the existing methods for measuring informal economy, which had been used to estimate the size of this sector in post-soviet states, concluded that such type of economy is a historical phenomenon rather than institutionally determined [Alexeev and Pyle, 2001]. Moreover, the phenomenon of informal employment (both voluntary and involuntary) helps point out the processes occurring in labour sphere in the post-soviet economic space, thus providing solid ground for understanding the overall process of **labour market formation**. In addition, IZA's¹ longitudinal project on labour markets in emerging and transition economies (including Ukraine) underlines the role of previous basis, that is to say socialist economy, in the nature of specifically post-soviet informal employment [Lehmann and others, 2012]. The authors mention the three major conceptual approaches towards informal employment.

¹ The Institute for the Study of Labour. Established in 1998 in Bonn, Germany, IZA is a private independent economic research institute focused on the analysis of global labour markets.

The first is a traditional interpretation of informal employment as an involuntary engagement of workers in segmented labour market: there is a primary — formal — market with “good” jobs and secondary — informal — with “bad” jobs. The second is a “revisionist” approach [Maloney, 1999, 2004], according to which workers choose informal employment voluntarily because of higher utility of an informal job as compared to a formal one; besides, the labour market is regarded as a continuum of options that workers have either at a point in time or over the working life. The third conceptual approach provides a more complex vision of labour market segmentation with “upper tier jobs” and “free entry jobs” in the secondary, informal sector; access to the first group (as they are good jobs) is restricted while the second group is open for anyone (as most jobs in the informal sector, which people take up only involuntarily). Surely, we have to differentiate economic activity within the informal sector from informal activity within the formal sector, as well as salaried formal/informal workers from the self-employed within these categories [Lehmann and Pignatti, 2007]. According to IZA's data on Ukrainian labour market, salaried formal workers clearly dominate in the overall employment structure not only qualitatively but also with regard to their attitudes towards unemployment and informal jobs, using them as “waiting stages” to enter a formal employment relationship. So, the pattern of working life, inherited from soviet times, continues to be widespread in post-socialist Ukraine.

Self-employment, as a relatively new model of employment relationship in Ukrainian labour market, when the same person is both an employer and an employee, is not considered an easy alternative to formal employment (at least, for most post-soviet people). Only those who have an ability and willingness to take risk turn to self-employment as formal entrepreneurs, while the majority of self-employed workers were forced to take up this option. They are engaged in the informal sector and work just to survive [Ivashchenko, 2002–2012].

There are several approaches to the phenomenon of informal economic activity. Two of them, structuralist (developed by Keith Hart in the 1970s) and legalist (reflected in a notable Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto's book “The Other Path” published in 1989), can definitely be regarded as explaining post-soviet realities, where the main reason for informal economic activity was a search for the sources of living. Undoubtedly, De Soto's conclusion about informal economic activity is worth a lot of attention: in his opinion, informal economy is a natural or “normal” form of capitalist entrepreneurship within bureaucratic institutional structures and over-regulated market economy, where the sphere of legal big business is tightly connected with state power — like a reservation where the small business, having no room to operate, is compelled to go to a shadow sector. However, the author makes an optimistic assumption that the rise of the informal sector is a sign of widening of the cohort of agile entrepreneurs whose only need is economic deregulation [De Soto, 1989].

Sociological evidence (*Sociological Monitoring 1994–2015, undertaken by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine*). Work, employment guarantees and employment itself have always occupied the highest positions in Ukrainian citizens' value hierarchy. As mentioned earlier, the epoch of full employment, when everyone was institutionally tied to a certain workplace, ended as soon as the USSR collapsed, which suddenly confronted millions of people both with open and hidden unemployment. Therefore, mass search for

work or just for the sources of living along with different adaptation challenges has led to historic changes in the labour sphere. For example, in 1994 **80.4%** of respondents said that they had never changed their job while in 2001 that group reduced to **43%**. The employment situation underwent changes in parallel to the growth of private sector: since 1994 public sector employment has been decreased more than twofold – from 51.2% to 19.6% (in 2014) while the figures for private sector have grown almost sixfold over the same period – from 6.1% (1994) to 35.8% (2014). Employment rate, after steep fall in the early 1990s, began to rise again, reaching 56.5% in 2000 and 59.3% (the historically highest point) in 2008; however, fear of being unemployed remains high: 54.4% in 2008, then sharply jumped to 80% in 2010, thus becoming almost the same as it was in the 1990s (84%), and fell to 60% in 2014. Besides, employment in each economic sector changed together with the overall structure of Ukraine's economy: from 30.6%¹ (1990) to 15.8% (2009) in industry, from 17.1% (1990) to 4.4% (2009) in agriculture, while the highest figure was recorded in service sector – 62.5% in 2010. In general, over a 20-year period total employment decreased by 21%, the number of employees in industry halved, in agrarian sector reduced fourfold while service and retail sector grew almost twofold, employment in financial sector doubled and in insurance sector increased one and a half times.

For lack of proper economic reforms, in particular in the area of employment policy, the share of persons who define themselves as unemployed keeps rising: 48.1% in 2010 and 42% in 2014 as compared to 39.3% in 1994; mainly due to the increasing share of those who do not have a permanent job – by 10% from 2010 to 2014. Moreover, the problem of mismatch between a person's educational background and his/her current job is quite remarkable: 51.6% of employed said that their current position corresponded to their education while 30% pointed out that there was a mismatch between their current job and education, 12% hesitated to answer. Getting a job corresponding to a person's professional qualification is even harder: only 28.2% of respondents said that their current job matched their professional level while 32.3% gave a negative answer and 30% found it difficult to answer the question.

There is another point that should be made: in Ukraine, as well as in other CIS countries there has emerged a segment of the working poor due to the system of low wages inherited from the USSR. Therefore, teachers, medical workers, researchers and university lecturers need to earn additionally. Usually 10–12% of respondents said that they had to earn “on the side”, but in 2010 the share of those who had some extra work amounted to 28.9%, forming together with those who did not have a permanent job a significant segment of Ukraine's informal economy, which equalled 56% of official GDP (F. Schneider). The State Statistics Service of Ukraine began to calculate the employment rate in the informal sector as early as 2000, but the first data were open to public in 2004. At that time, there were 3,939,500 persons, or 19.4% of all employed, who were engaged in the informal sector. In 2009, their number increased to 4,469,900, or 22.1% of all employed. In 2013, 23.6% of all employed persons worked in the informal sector. The following branches of economy constitute the informal sector: agriculture (65%),

¹ % of total employment.

construction (12%) and services (12.5%) including retail trade, repairs, hotel and restaurant business.

Since the mid-1990s Ukrainians have been encountering the problem of unemployment. At present, almost 80% of them claim that it is very hard to get a job that is sufficiently well-paid and corresponds to their professional level, 60-70% want their job to match their profession.

Another important problem of Ukraine's economy is labour migration. Ukrainian migrants have already been known all over the world. Experts estimate that there are 3–5 million Ukrainians working abroad and they send about 6–7 billion USD back home every year. In 2001 (the year when the total sum of money transferred from abroad was first calculated and recorded), 5.5 billion USD were sent back to Ukraine, which equalled nearly half the state budget.

Despite the fact that for more than 20 years of transition to a market economy Ukrainians have gained new work experience and there are lots of opportunities opened to them (although completely the opposite of what they would expect), their involvement into entrepreneurship is still quite low (approximately the same as it was in pre-reform Central Europe). The growth of private sector has changed the overall structure of economy but there are no noticeable qualitative changes in the sphere of private individual initiatives so far: the total number of entrepreneurs in Ukraine is about 2 millions¹ against the background of 18 millions employed (2014). Only the self-employed are retaining their positions: according to official statistics, 17% of employed Ukrainians in 2009 and 14% in 2014 identified themselves as self-employed (including agricultural sector). There are different reasons for Ukrainians' orientation towards self-employment: repeated economic crises, low wages, initiative to search for the sources of living, low but consistent "proliferation" of market consciousness, etc.

Anyway, getting a job that is sufficiently well-paid and corresponds to a person's qualification is the acutest problem for the majority of Ukrainians: 73% of respondents complain about it. 55% say that finding any job, regardless of pay or required skills, is rather problematic. Against the background of these upsetting data only one indicator may inspire optimism. This is *Ukrainians' willingness to start their own business, which tends to grow: in 2004, 20% of respondents strongly agreed with this statement while in 2010, 2012 and 2014 their share amounted to 30%, 26% and 31% respectively, reaching together with those who agreed 41% (2004), 49% (2010), 45% (2012) and 51% (2014)*. These figures certainly point to positive outlook for Ukraine's economy, being a good proof of the ongoing development of entrepreneurial culture and growing market consciousness.

Conclusions. In general, the post-soviet employment practices, by means of different survival strategies like informal employment, labour migration, involvement in multiple labour markets, etc., have intensified the predominance of a core value model based on subservient soviet mentality and transformed it, due to new market opportunities, into the model combining a boss and an employee in the same person. This is what De Soto called people's capitalism.

Structural conditions and consequences of market reform in Ukraine have activated Ukrainians' adaptation capability needed to survive in a new reality

¹ Including all kinds of businesses.

and raised public orientations towards profit, shadow economy and labour migration. The latter are regarded as spheres, which provide an opportunity to generate and accumulate real incomes without paying taxes as a way to counterbalance an increase in expenses. On the contrary, the government's social policy has always been directed towards increasing social benefits and thus lowering a share of earnings in Ukrainians' income structure; as a result, there is no sufficient potential to raise labour productivity in Ukraine so far. The overwhelming majority of Ukrainians are dissatisfied with the size of their salaries, considering them as a manifestation of injustice. They share the same attitude towards salaries of other professional groups and even ministers, who earn only three times more than average workers while they should earn 20 times more (ISSP 2009)¹. Informal employment is seen by Ukrainians as an additional source of income, allowing them to somewhat improve their living standards.

All of the above-mentioned socio-economic circumstances have led to the emergence of a specific model of labour market: (1) segmented labour market and (2) multiple labour markets, which, in their turn, include formal labour market related to a person's main job, labour market for additional jobs, informal (shadow) labour market, labour market providing opportunities for self-employment, entrepreneurial initiative, foreign labour market(s), small and medium-scale businesses, etc. Both qualitative and quantitative aspects of the labour markets should be described in statistics and sociology by indicating the major actors of these markets, continuity of their involvement in the markets, their circulation in and outside these labour markets, possibilities of entering, re-entering and abandoning these labour markets, etc., which are helpful to understand the process of formation of the post-soviet labour market and its nature.

The labour markets in Ukraine do not emerge from the state hierarchy. Their emergence and growth are directly linked to the rise of manufacturing markets, but, at the same time, they play a fundamental role in societal changes occurring in the reforming state socialism. Research into the process of labour market formation by using different types of evidence (political, economic, socio-economic and social), which refer to redistributive/mixed/hybrid/informal/market economy, and different employment cases is helpful to find out the employment transformation tracks within market transition from the Soviet Union's state socialism to post-soviet "capitalism". Moreover, socio-economic situation at the "point of departure" should definitely be taken into account to understand the process of transition in general and try to predict where and when will be seen the "point of arrival".

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