

IT specialists in outsourcing centers for business services in Poland. Sociological study of experience of work

The contemporary world of work is in a state of constant social, economic and cultural change, taking into account aspects related to the organization, management and culture of work, or the global and local division of work, its structures and institutions, but also considering the latter in the context of the ongoing digital transformation processes, such as robotization and automation in the sphere of work and beyond. This situation is especially pertinent to industries related to the broadly understood IT sector – one of the most important parts of the Polish and global economy – in which the number of employed people is constantly growing, there are more and more investments financed by domestic and foreign capital, and the earnings are among the highest in the entire Polish national economy. In this project, I will examine the experience of work of IT specialists working in Polish and multinational centers providing business services in Poland.

The central research question of the project concerns the types of meanings of work attributed by IT specialists in business service centers in Poland, taking into account the specific conditions of the digital transformation of the Polish economy, changes in work organization and management methods, as well as biographical experiences and career patterns of IT specialists. Furthermore, I ask what are the ways of pertaining meanings to IT specialists' work in these contexts? For example, are high earnings the most important for IT specialists, or maybe stable employment and the possibility of promotion in the company? Perhaps new technologies or a good atmosphere in the company are more significant for them? These and other issues will be analyzed on several levels of social reality: (1) based on an analysis of the relationship between attributing meanings to the sphere of IT specialists' work and other spheres of life related to their biographical experiences, social identities, career paths and life strategies; (2) linked to the analysis of organization and management of work at the level of centers, and the analysis of the elements of managerial ideologies and the impact of the latter on the behavior of IT specialists at work and outside, as well as based on the analysis of the impact of digitization of work on the meanings of the latter; (3) in relation to legal regulations that create – along with social norms – the institutional context for the development of business services in Poland, and based on the analysis of ideology of work in the context of the Polish variant of 'cultures of capitalism'; (4) linked to the global transfers of capital, knowledge, technology and labor in the structures of the world economy, and based on the relationship between the organizational culture of (global/local) companies and the processes of globalization of the world of work; and in connection with the business processes outsourcing from economically developed countries to those less advanced.

As part of the project, it will be crucial to focus on the ideology of work in the context of the digitization of the Polish economy, understood in this project as dependent market economy. This type of research has not been carried out in Poland so far and it is crucial for understanding the processes of legitimizing changes in the sphere of work in our country.

In order to reconstruct the experience of work in business services centres in Poland, I will conduct my own empirical research. I will also make use of secondary sources and data during desk research analysis. In order to reconstruct the experience of IT specialists work and learn about the meanings attributed to work by the former in business service centers in Poland, I will carry out 30 biographical narrative interviews in three cities: Cracow, Lodz and Warsaw. Additionally, I will conduct 15 expert interviews with employees of HR departments in the researched companies, with employees of Voivodeship Labor Offices in the three mentioned regions, and with representatives of trade unions in Poland in order to analyze issues related to the organization, management and digitization of work in business service centers in Poland. I will also carry out a critical analysis of the discourse on the image of IT specialists created by employers in the business services industry; such analysis will be aimed at reconstructing elements of the ideology of work in the researched industry. The last element of the research will be the case studies of 6 selected companies (3 with Polish and 3 with foreign capital) in order to reconstruct the category of experience of work in business service centers in 'natural' social setting.

Firstly, the proposed research has a chance to become a pioneering contribution to the discussion on subjective experiences of work in the conditions of the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution', a digital economy whose nature varies depending on the position of national economies in the global division of labor. Secondly, this project will potentially allow to capture a combination of systemic, organizational and biographical factors in shaping the experience of work in one of the key industries for the contemporary Polish economy, dominated by multinational corporations. Thirdly, this research will provide with an important contribution to the theoretical framework to critical anthropology of management – it can expand theoretical categories used by sociologists and anthropologists of work, including, for example, work on IT engineers in the Silicon Valley. Fourthly, this research focusing i. a. on specific ('lean') management methods (and its introduction in IT sector-related industries) will enable transferring the analysis of experience of work in the IT industry to some of the observations regarding the consequences of the implementation of 'lean' production in other industries (e.g. automotive, but also public administration), e.g. for the quality of work or employees' health.