



# JOBS FIRST? IN SEARCH OF QUALITY

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## Abstract

Is it not the most important thing about work to have it? Is the best quality of a job not its quantity? Does the slogan of “good jobs” not serve those who, fearing flexibility, want to return to obsolete forms of security? Aren’t actually “bad jobs” our future? But who is to decide about the goodness of jobs? In looking for answers to questions such as these, our research group first reviewed the relevant literature. This paper is based on national state-of-the-art reports presenting the dominant discourses of job quality in Hungary, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom during the past decade. In focusing on the concept of “good jobs”, we examined how stakeholders and scholars interpret job quality in these countries. Equally important is for us the understanding of popular attitudes to work as well as their cultural aspects, which will be observed by a dozen of case studies in the next phase of the project.



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## Summary

This comparative report is based on four national state-of-the-art (SoA) reports. They discuss the changing perceptions and discourses surrounding job quality in two old and two new member states of the European Union during the past decade. In focusing on the concept of the 'good job', our research group examines how stakeholders and scholars interpret job quality. Equally important to this research is the understanding of popular attitudes to work. After having compared a great many employment discourses in the four countries we came to the following conclusions, which will be tested by a dozen case studies in the next phase of the project:

- In thinking of 'good jobs', the main labour market actors organise their employment narratives along the flexibility/security axis to form two 'discursive alliances'. They refer to various concepts of flexicurity, but take the liberty to pick and choose from their constituents and often remix these concepts at will.
- Frequently, the emerging policy blends are of dubious quality, and their scientific foundations seem to be rather fragile (with the exception of the UK). Even in the case of the principal notions of flexibility and security, their possible combinations are not identified and the distinction between their different shades of meaning is not made with sufficient rigour. In many cases, secure jobs are regarded as 'good jobs' while flexible jobs are seen as 'bad jobs' and vice versa: both discursive alliances are hampered by tunnel vision.
- The flexibility and security discourses are intertwined but lean toward the former. Flexibility can be interpreted as inclusion, and, as such, as a contribution to a new version of security that replaces the outmoded narrative of stability with that of employability. The 'security camp' (old or new) could, in principle, show a greater interest in the attributes of 'good jobs' that go beyond those related to wages and contractual rights, but it does not seem to 'escape ahead' (making virtue of necessity) in three of the four countries. But even in the fourth one, the UK, where a coherent narrative has crystallised around the concept of 'good work', concern about the quantity of jobs offsets quality considerations.
- The catchphrases of EU employment programmes are borrowed without critical reflection, in particular in Hungary and Slovakia. Much of the borrowing is simulated. Moreover, in these countries, unlike in Spain and the UK, sometimes even elementary social science information on quality variables is missing; information that would help the main labour market actors to determine how job quality might be conceived. The distance between the European and the national discourses is due, to a certain extent, to inconsistent messages coming from Brussels, more exactly, to diverging interpretations of job quality in both EU policies and international research.
- Many of the interpretation problems originate in a concentration of research programmes on the flexibility-security nexus, in the competing/overlapping taxonomies of job quality features as well as in *sui generis* difficulties of comparability (e.g., subjective versus objective indicators, satisfaction levels versus preferences, etc.), measurement and aggregation. There seems to be a desire to construe synthetic indicators of job quality. As a rule, the emerging indices ignore 'green variables'. Job quality is not observed through discourses and cultures; and

where it is, then it is by means of impersonal/shallow large surveys. Despite these shortcomings, such surveys may assist anthropological/sociological research, thereby contributing to an alliance of the two approaches.

- Employees' attitudes towards 'decent work' do not often match the dominant discourses of the stakeholders. In all four countries, the popular attitudes are less inclined towards flexibility than their representations by the collective actors. Again, the UK is an exception to a certain degree, for here even employees see more clearly some of the inherent opportunities in flexibility as an enrichment to their lives.
- As regards the various components of job quality, those of a 'post-materialist' nature, including features related to socio-ecological transition (SET), are the clear losers. Hence, a 're-traditionalist' of the concept of job quality seems to be a valid assumption, especially in Spain and to a lesser degree in the UK, while in the two Eastern European countries, the same phenomenon could be interpreted as being stuck in a traditional interpretation of job quality, focusing on full-time work with permanent contracts and appropriate wages. In the rare cases in which 'green jobs' are promoted by employment programmes, they are without doubt presumed to be 'good jobs'.
- Instead of the expected East-West divide in reflections about job quality, a North-South divide emerges, in which Hungary and Slovakia join Spain on the southern side. This division is demonstrated in these three countries by less sophisticated employment discourses, a stronger antagonism between the two discursive camps, a quantitative rather than a qualitative approach to jobs taken by employment programmes, and a relatively low value attributed to the post-materialist components of job quality, such as SET awareness.

The report concludes with a number of hypotheses concerning the cultural components of 'good job' discourses. These components are arranged in two clusters: the first is related to the collective actors of the labour market, the second to the individual ones. In the former we witnessed considerable variation within the same alliance between the respective countries. In the latter, there was much evidence of national diversity of cultural features, such as attitudes to informality, tolerance of 'bad jobs', mobility and sustainability. The two clusters do not overlap fully, suggesting a friction between individual preferences and macro-discourses – a friction to be examined more closely in the next phase of the project.

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Is it not the most important thing about work to have it?<sup>1</sup> Is the best quality of a job not its quantity? Does the term ‘good jobs’ not serve those who, fearing flexibility, want to return to obsolete forms of security? Aren’t actually ‘bad jobs’ our future? Do we not cherish a utopia if we continue to long for jobs that go beyond the ideal of stable and decently paid work? Is it not a utopia of a utopia to expect, besides autonomy, participation, fair treatment, etc., also ‘green values’ among the attributes of job quality? But who is to decide on the ‘goodness’ of jobs?

In what follows, I will approach these questions from the perspective of a seemingly simple one: who are those who *think and speak* about ‘good jobs’ and in what terms exactly?

## 1. Introduction: research goals and working hypotheses

The main task of our research programme is to study cultural prerequisites to changing discourses/perceptions of job quality in two old and two new member states of the European Union during the past decade. In focusing on job quality (‘decent work’, ‘good work’)<sup>2</sup>, we do not aim to define what is to be meant by ‘good jobs’ in a ‘good economy’. Instead of overloading the project with normative propositions, our research team concentrates on how relevant economic and political actors/stakeholders and scholars think and speak about job quality, and what kind of employment programmes<sup>3</sup> they envisage to attain it.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Stephen Overell, *The Meaning of Work*, The Work Foundation, London 2009, p. 3 (<http://www.goodworkcommission.co.uk/Assets/Docs/ReportsWithCovers/03.MeaningOfWork.pdf>)

<sup>2</sup> Although ‘job’ and ‘work’ are not identical terms, they will be used interchangeably in this report to follow the widely accepted logic of treating the concepts of ‘good job’ (EU), ‘decent work’ (ILO), ‘good work’ (UK) as synonyms. For more detailed definitions, see section 6.

<sup>3</sup> These programmes are embodied in all kinds of normative macro-level documents (labour codes, employment laws, government plans, decrees, guidelines, chapters of party programmes, trade union strategies and NGO agendas, academic works, journal articles, etc).

Equally important in this study is the understanding of popular attitudes towards work (one might call them ‘individual employment programmes’), as well as the frictions between them and the larger employment programmes. In other words, in the first phase of our research project we compare not only economic, political, and scientific but also popular discourses<sup>4</sup> as they appear in these programmes. Although reflections on what might be considered to be a ‘good economy’ are not within the scope of this study, the reader will undoubtedly draw a number of conclusions from our results with regard to devising a ‘brave new world’ in the European economy.

Our research group is interested in job quality but does not attempt to measure it or use refined synthetic models based on subjective and objective indicators of whether quality is improving or deteriorating. Nevertheless, we will ask why certain indicators are regarded as principal terms of the employment narratives on ‘decent work’ (see section 6).

The comparison of ‘good job’ discourses will not stop at ideas but, in the second phase of the project, will stretch to actual practices. In the course of 2012/13, a total of twelve case studies will be prepared in the four countries to ascertain the ‘local value’ of employment programmes in terms of job quality. The two phases demand different research techniques. While in the first we approach cultures through ideas as they appear in a variety of discourses, in the second the same cultures will be explored by means of sociological/anthropological research on the spot. Hence, throughout the research period, a large number of actors in the labour market will be studied, ranging from government agencies, political parties, social partners, NGOs and scholars, all the way down to flesh-and-blood company managers, employees and workers.<sup>5</sup>

This report focuses on dominant discourses on job quality, and distils the state of the art from the scholarly and political literature. So as not to overlook any significant type of employment programmes, we defined them rather broadly, including, as mentioned above, even popular attitudes to various attributes of job quality. (Articulating an attitude is regarded here as a speech act, i.e., part of a discourse that can be observed at the kitchen table, in a trade union meeting, or in the answer boxes of a sociological questionnaire.) At this point, we deal with popular attitudes as they manifest themselves in industry- or economy-wide sociological surveys. Later, the case studies will provide more precise micro-level information.

Our project applies a wide-ranging notion of culture (including values, norms, habits, symbols, knowledge, language, etc) to avoid confining the concept of ‘good jobs’ to one or two self-explanatory features, and thereby disregarding cultural choices that may lurk in the background.<sup>6</sup> Besides the conventional aspects of job quality (such as wages,

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<sup>4</sup> In order to simplify the analysis, I make no clear distinction between the terms ‘discourse’ and ‘narrative’.

<sup>5</sup> Below I use the employer/employee division, in which ‘employee’ will also stand for workers and low-ranking managers/professionals.

<sup>6</sup> For a major intellectual source on the concept of culture in our project, see Peter L. Berger (ed), *Limits of Social Cohesion* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998); Peter L. Berger and Samuel Huntington (eds), *Many Globalizations* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002); Lawrence E. Harrison and Peter L. Berger (eds), *Developing Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2006); Peter L. Berger and Gordon Redding (eds), *The Hidden Form of Capital* (London: Anthem Press, 2010).

work contracts, health and safety, skills, career development, work-life balance, equal opportunities, participation, etc), also the ones popularised by the most recent jargon prevailing in the literature (such as flexicurity, employability, life-cycle approach to work, inclusive labour markets, matching skills and jobs, etc) will be studied. In exploring the cultural attributes of the employment programmes we pay attention to cultural variables such as risk and security, short- and long-termism, materialist and post-materialist values, paternalism and self-reliance, hierarchy and competition, institutional and personal orientation, rule abiding and rule bending, choice between formal and informal procedures, individualism and collectivism, traditionalism and modernism/post-modernism, etc. Here, loyal to the guiding principles of the NEUJOBS project, socio-ecological values serve as a distinguished set of variables.

As regards the main working hypotheses, our group would not have embarked on a comparative research programme like this if we had not expected to see substantial differences between the various discourses, cases and countries, and between discourses on central and local levels, not to mention a considerable divergence along the former East-West divide. Similarly, it was assumed that conflicts/frictions between and also within the employment discourses (e.g., between their economic and social, or social and ecological aspects) would differ case by case and/or country by country. Specifically, we wanted to check whether in the European labour markets, as many analysts contend,<sup>7</sup> the demand for job quantity overrides quality considerations (a 'good job' is the existing job'), whether there is a broad preference for job security (a 'good job' is the job that will continue to exist tomorrow'), and whether post-materialist values count less and less in defining the concept of a 'good job' (a 'good job' is the well-paid and stable job'), which may eventually lead to the retraditionalisation of employment programmes.

Even more specifically, we also ask questions such as these to examine that outcome: "are 'green jobs' regarded as 'good jobs'?", "do ecological and social considerations complement each other in the employment discourses?", etc. It may sound pessimistic but our research group predicted to encounter indifference or reservation (even resistance) by a variety of actors to the idea of socio-ecological transition (SET), and any kind of 'good economy' that embodies SET awareness as its guiding principle. Rhetorical adherence to environmentalism aside, the acceptance of SET is presumed to be overshadowed by its rejection, especially in Eastern Europe. Resistance would occur in the real cases rather than the literature, and part of it would have strong cultural roots.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Notes 22 and 46.

<sup>8</sup> Again, in this first phase of research, our work package is not able to control such hypotheses profoundly. In identifying the state of the art, we cannot do much more than reconstruct the opinions of the main actors (and their observers) about job quality. In the second phase, we move a bit closer to the subject of these opinions. The case studies to be conducted in the four countries will certainly provide more reliable information about *real* cultural choices in conceiving of 'good jobs' than what we learn exclusively from actors' discourses. Nevertheless, even a hundred case studies would not result in firm, representative conclusions unless supported by comprehensive surveys.



As both the state-of-the-art reports and the case studies require a good deal of local knowledge, it was reasonable to rely on the well-established research networks of some of the key members of the NEUJOBS project when selecting the four countries under scrutiny. However, one could also safely presume that in countries with a longer and shorter history of capitalism (Spain and the UK vs. Slovakia and Hungary) as well as with more and less liberal labour market regimes (the UK vs. Spain, Slovakia and Hungary) and with more and less advanced economies (the UK vs. Spain and the UK and Spain versus Hungary and Slovakia), the employment programmes would rest on different interpretations of job quality.

Similarly, it is exciting to compare two new EU member states that chose opposite trajectories during the 2000s: Slovakia introduced and maintained radical liberal reforms whereas Hungary let its previous reforms decline and took a populist-authoritarian turn. It would have been helpful to include in the sample Sweden or Finland as well as Greece or Bulgaria in order to examine the North-South divide more profoundly (in both the East and the West) but that would have required much greater resources. The same applies to the inclusion of Germany or France as prototypes of advanced, non-Anglo-Saxon-type capitalism in large countries. In any event, according to an auxiliary hypothesis of ours, it may well be that in the end the differences between the cases (companies) will prove to be more relevant than those between the countries.

Finally, the time period covered by our project starts at the turn of the millennium because we assume that since then employment discourses in the individual countries have been exposed to EU-level employment programmes (strategies) more than ever – an influence to be studied in detail by NEUJOBS as a whole. No matter if that influence happens to be strong or weak, affects rhetoric or substance, our research group decided to examine it by taking a bottom-up approach. Instead of following a top-down method by asking whether or not the narratives of the Lisbon Agenda or the European Employment Strategy trickled down to the member states fast enough, for example, we first wanted to approach the country-specific employment discourses before asking whether, or to what extent, they are shaped by recent EU programmes. In this way, we hoped to comprehend better the reasons for the reluctant (simulated) acceptance of certain chapters of these programmes in some of the member states – another auxiliary hypothesis, to be sure.

Because the timeframe of our research project (roughly the past decade) includes the years of the global financial crisis, the national SoA reports reflect on how it disturbed the patterns of thinking and speaking about job quality in our countries. However, today it would be too early, we believe, to draw conclusions with regard to the consequences of that disturbance.

## 2. Writing and comparing SoA reports. Methodological considerations

*Sources.* As a first step we decided to consult academic works (above all labour sociology/anthropology/psychology and labour economics), including larger surveys on job quality. Realising that in this field academic research normally does not pay much attention to the intricacies of political, business and civic discourses, not to speak of their cultural components (see section 3.2. below), our literature review



encompassed, as a next step, a great many original sources. As the European Union is a major generator of employment programmes, our analysis also had to go beyond the discursive world of the four countries. A move in the opposite direction was not necessary: as mentioned above, in this phase of the project we focus on macro-level documents, and the lower-level literature is only discussed if it is cited by them as examples.

*Depth of analysis.* The members of our research group are economists and sociologists by profession - labour market experts who are well-trained in empirical studies and prefer qualitative to quantitative observation of discourses. In order not to straitjacket ourselves in writing the SoA reports, we did not indulge in refined hermeneutic investigations reconstructing the meaning(s) of the available texts, or offering a detached interpretation of them. We opted instead for a loose sort of qualitative inquiry<sup>9</sup> that concentrates on the main concepts, arguments, structures, etc., of the employment programmes, and does not suppress the researcher's judgements entirely. The vocabulary of key terms was provided by the standard features<sup>10</sup> of job quality as well as the cultural variables listed above. In selecting the relevant documents and their core components, we were assisted by preliminary interviews carried out with leading labour market specialists in the individual countries.

*Comparison.* Do we expect to construe one overarching typology for all observable employment discourses including their cultural attributes? As will be mentioned below, for the time being, we do not know whether we should search for types on the level of nations or beneath that. In the following pages, the reader will find modest attempts at both. My partial synthesis of the four national SoA reports strives to retain their essential conclusions without sacrificing the *couleur locale* they convey. Although I quote the authors extensively, this paper does not hold water without the conscientious and creative work invested in the national reports.<sup>11</sup> I cannot even say that the comparison is exclusively my own value added to the project because in several cases I just continue on a comparative line of thought put forward by an author in his/her report or in our numerous conversations during the past couple of months. Thus, I suggest that the reader consult the national reports in parallel to this one.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Fairclough, Norman (1995). *Critical discourse analysis*. Harlow: Longman; Teun van Dijk, *Discourse and Context. A sociocognitive approach*. Cambridge UP, 2008; J.P. Gee (2005). *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*. London: Routledge; Blommaert, J. (2005). *Discourse*. Cambridge UP; Wetherell, M., Taylor, S., & Yates, S. J. (Eds.). (2001). *Discourse Theory and Practice*. London: Sage; Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. (Eds.). (2009). *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage.

<sup>10</sup> For the difficulties in identifying these features, see section 6 below.

<sup>11</sup> The relationship between the national reports and the comparative one is reflected by the references in this report. Most of the country specific sources will not be repeated here but quoted through the national reports.

### 3. The research landscape

#### 3.1 General patterns of employment discourses

A state-of-the-art report is at the mercy of primary ‘discourse producers’ and of those who observe them day by day in the respective countries. It capitalises on their output. With the employment discourses, we had to face the problem of over-politicisation and fragmentation (or conspicuous lack) of certain narratives. For example, in Hungary and Slovakia the research communities are relatively small and – with the exception of part of the economists – lean toward the left. The social partners and the parties are not supported by powerful think tanks, and many of the less powerful lack expertise in employment policy. Large, repeated surveys and literature reviews, dissertations, books on job quality are rare or non-existent. The same applies to policy proposals and reports. What is perhaps more critical for us here, in these two countries even labour sociology tends to neglect cultural analysis. There is much more talk about interests and power than values while attitudes are, as a rule, described without explaining the cultural choices behind them. A reason for this lacuna may be that the voice of the social partners and civil society is weak, therefore the political narratives are not counter-balanced adequately in public discourse, and the cultural features do not come to the fore. Quite often, we had to extract/decipher them from ‘silent’ narratives, or from employment practices and job satisfaction levels described, *faute de mieux*, by the national SoA reports.

In these respects, Spain seems to assume a middle-of-the-road position between the Eastern European countries and the United Kingdom. Labour research is relatively advanced with rich experience in flexicurity studies, yet, quality of jobs has remained a rather neglected field until today. In conceiving of ‘good jobs’, it is primarily the UK experts who, during the past 10 to 15 years, have been working hard on the concept of ‘good work’, as they call it, and suggesting authentic theoretical approaches and policy solutions (not infrequently, shaping employment programmes on the EU level). In the other three countries (above all in Hungary and Slovakia) selective importation of terms and research techniques prevail, and neither the academic experts nor the policy-makers have refined their narratives sufficiently to apply basic notions such as flexibility, employability, security, stability, etc. in accordance with taxonomies widely accepted in Europe.

Turning to the real labour markets, their main actors all have academic, political etc. differences; nevertheless, they have something important in common: they are not devoid of conceptual ambiguities as far as categories of ‘goodness’ and ‘decency’ are concerned. In a sense, the ambiguities stem by necessity from the normative character of these terms. Evidently, the employer, the employee and the society at large tend to think differently (often in opposite ways) about them. The meaning of ‘goodness’ may change along the lines of social status, occupational, ethnic, gender, etc differences. Of course, history also matters: factors such as the recent evolution of a country’s labour market regimes, the level of economic development, the length of a capitalist past as well as country-specific economic cultures may strongly affect the way in which the individuals and institutions interpret what pleases/repels them when supplying or demanding a job.

Conceptual differences are reflected even in the respective languages. For example, the ILO-propagated term ‘decent work’, referring to dignity as only one element of the notion, was translated into both Hungarian and Slovak as ‘dignified work’ (*‘méltó’* or *‘tisztés’* in the former, *‘dôstojný’* in the latter, just like *‘menschenwürdig’* in German). These terms go far beyond ‘appropriateness’ to mean, in an almost solemn fashion invoking pride, an ‘honourable’ or ‘respectable’ occupation, as contrasted to humiliation, discrimination and exclusion.

Such semantic discrepancies must not mislead the observer: the division of labour among the discourse producers exhibits a fair degree of similarity between the countries. By and large, the employment narratives put forward by the employers, the liberal and conservative parties and part of the labour economists face those suggested by the trade unions, the social-democratic parties, the labour sociologists and most of the NGOs. Both ‘discursive alliances’ are reinforced by numerous organisational and personal ties. As rough as this typology may be, it seems true that the former prefers flexibility to security while the latter’s priorities are exactly the other way round.<sup>12</sup>

If this were an ideal dichotomy, then those who advocate flexibility would not claim that security is contingent on it. Security would be downplayed or ignored, and no one would promise that the pain of ‘flexibilisation’ would be a fair price for enjoying the pleasure of secure employment. And conversely, the security narrative would show stubborn resistance to any major sacrifice in wages, work contracts or working conditions. Yet, the employment discourses in the four countries demonstrate a clear rapprochement between the two alliances. The ‘no gain without pain’ thesis propounded by the – I would call them – ‘flexibility camp’ opens a door toward a novel version of security that can be attained through new, variable skills, also by those whose employment was insecure in the past, and that is embodied in more ‘decent’ jobs. In the optimal case, for instance, flexible work schedules may improve work-life balance and reduce ethnic-, gender- or age-related discrimination. They may lead to a more inclusive workplace with deeper engagement and wider participation. These would serve as pain-killers to a certain extent. Similarly, the ‘security camp’ seems ready to accept some sacrifice if more flexible work organisation (and even hire and fire regulation) results in job creation, and these do not reduce wages and spoil

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<sup>12</sup> On cross-cutting these alliances by the concept of flexicurity, see R. Blanpain and M. Tiraboschi (eds), *Global Labor Market: From Globalization to Flexicurity*, Kluwer 2008; Boeri, T., J.I. Conde-Ruiz and V. Galasso (2006), *The Political Economy of Flexicurity*, FEDEA Working Paper No. 2006-15, Madrid; Eichhorst, W. and P. Marx (2011), “Reforming German Labour Market Policies: A Dual Path to Flexibility”, *Journal of European Social Policy*, Vol. 21, No. 1; Stephen Evans et al, *Anglo-Security*, [http://www.smf.co.uk/files/7913/2317/4737/SMF\\_Angloflexicurity.pdf](http://www.smf.co.uk/files/7913/2317/4737/SMF_Angloflexicurity.pdf); Leschke, J., Schmid, G., Griga, D. (2006): *On the Marriage of Flexibility and Security: Lessons from the Hartz-reforms in Germany*. WZB Berlin; Madsen, K. (2007), *Flexicurity - Towards a Set of Common Principles*, *The International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, Vol. 23, No. 4; Viebrock, E. and J. Clasen (2009), “Flexicurity and Welfare Reform: A Review”, *Socio-Economic Review*, Vol. 7, No. 2; Wilthagen, T and Tros, F. (2004): *The Concept of Flexicurity: A New Approach to Regulating Employment and Labour Markets*, *European Review of Labour and Research*, Vol. 10., No 2.

working conditions. Or if they do, jobs would become ‘better’ in other respects of job quality such as inclusion, skills development, or work-life balance.

In principle, the two camps could thus easily agree from the very outset on some common strategy of raising the level of ‘decency’ of work, which would balance their positions (applying, for example, the rhetoric of flexicurity, sanctioned by the EU, which contains clear references to training, participation, equal opportunities and the like). Beneath the surface of rapprochement, however, the employment discourses of the various actors of the labour market began to drift toward the concept of flexibility long ago. And the pendulum swings back rather slowly, if at all. As a consequence, besides security, many other attributes of a ‘good job’ as imagined earlier (ranging from safety at the workplace to equal opportunity) have faded away or vanished completely in the employment programmes, in particular, in Eastern Europe. At the same time, the SET-related values that might enrich the concept of ‘good jobs’ do not seem to emerge. Again, the UK serves as an exception in our sample.

As will be demonstrated, flexibility has increasingly been accepted even by employees (not to mention their trade unions) for the sake of some kind of job security. Although if asked about their attitudes to ‘decent work’, they continue to enumerate all the advantages they would ideally expect from a ‘satisfying job’, the weight attached to these diminishes while the objective of having a relatively stable (even though insecure, non-standard, atypical) job gains prominence. ‘Bad jobs’, and precarious employment are becoming more widely accepted. Stable employment is preferred even at the price of sizable wage/income concessions and a substantial deterioration in working conditions, while one can hardly capture those components of ‘decent work’ which are related to post-materialist needs such as participation, equal opportunities, fair business or sustainability when checking the preferences of the employees.

Of course, this is just a bird’s-eye view, and both flexibility/security and ‘bad jobs’ may mean different things in different contexts. What kind of contexts do we have in mind? It is debatable whether one is advised to search for the cultural (dis)similarities of employment discourses on the level of countries, or rather on that of regions, industries, firms, actors of the labour markets, generations, class, race, gender, etc. However, in the absence of proper international surveys covering the four countries, our SoA reports could not rely on timely and comparable knowledge about job quality in the selected countries on nearly any of these levels. Therefore, I would not suggest to waste the picture, however blurred it may seem at the first sight, which transpires from the national SoA reports and reflects remarkable differences between the countries even if the representatives of the dominant discourses find their place in two major camps crossing the national borders.

Lack of timely and comparable knowledge – is this not a high-sounding but empty criticism, knowing how many international surveys have been conducted during the past 15 years to map the various features of job quality in Europe?

### 3.2 Large surveys: pros and cons

Job quality has been a frequent subject of scientific research in various disciplines and under various headings since ‘bad jobs’ were created *en masse* in the wake of the first industrial revolution. For about one and a half centuries, it was not clear what would

be the end result of the rivalry between the simultaneous tendencies of quality improvement and deterioration. In the advanced industrial societies it was the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that broke this ambiguity for a while. A rapidly expanding research field in economics, sociology and psychology of labour as well as in management/organisation sciences, anthropology, economic history, etc. began to focus on the evolution of the quality features of work. A sizable methodological apparatus of quality studies was created to define, observe and measure these features. While the analysis became increasingly complex, most of the researchers presumed optimistically that in the long run 'good jobs' would gradually crowd out the 'bad' ones despite the fact that the definition of the latter would change incessantly, including jobs that were regarded as 'good' earlier. (The contrary case was not considered seriously.) According to a parallel assumption, what cannot be achieved at the workplace in terms of quality improvement would be provided by the welfare state from above.

The fact that concepts such as job satisfaction, decency of work and the like became part of everyday language in social sciences and politics in Europe during the past few decades is due to a partial failure of these assumptions. In many industries 'bad jobs' persist, work intensity grows, wages stagnate, work contracts become insecure, precarious jobs proliferate, in sum, the proverbial 'standard model' of employment (i.e., full-time work with a permanent contract) erodes. Prior to that, the main research question of the studies on the cultural aspects of employment (e.g., value surveys) was not growing 'decency' as such but its internal composition, above all the proportion between 'materialist' and 'post-materialist' elements of job quality.<sup>13</sup> The former seemed to be increasingly secure, and the share of the latter permanently expanding. Currently, however, both of these pillars of 'good jobs' are being shattered, and the trade-offs between them (and between their constituents) are turning into eminent problems of research. What is more, the declining welfare state of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is not likely to be able to fix the cracks of the pillars.

What does a typical research agenda look like in this field today? To put it simply, the agenda is dominated, often implicitly, by the problematic of flexicurity, thus, it focuses on the *quid pro quo* between job security and the flexibility of work contracts and/or working conditions.<sup>14</sup> The 'post-materialist' elements of job quality are given less attention: they usually appear as 'cushions' that moderate the shocks of decreasing

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Ronald Inglehart's concepts of 'culture shift', 'silent revolution' and 'modernization/postmodernization', which he uses to make distinctions between acquisitive and security/survival-oriented, instrumental-rational, etc. (materialist) values on the one hand, and autonomy/self-expression-oriented, gender- and environment-conscious etc. (post-materialist) values on the other. See Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution*, Princeton UP, 1977; *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*, Princeton UP, 1990; *Value Change in Global Perspective*, University of Michigan Press, 1995 (with Paul R. Abramson); *Modernization and Postmodernization*, Princeton UP, 1997; *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005 (with Christian Welzel). See also Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences*, Sage, 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Lucie Davoine and Christine Erhel, *Monitoring Employment Quality in Europe: European Employment Strategy Indicators and Beyond*, Centre D'Etudes de l'Emploi, 2006, in which they apply the concept of the Transitional Labour Market (TLM) to define comparative variables.



security and/or increasing flexibility of employment rather than as self-explanatory aims of ‘humanizing’ the workplace.<sup>15</sup>

As for research techniques, the studies begin by identifying a set of composite quality features (enumerating/mixing ‘materialist’ and ‘post-materialist’ ones)<sup>16</sup>, and continue by formulating a questionnaire in which these features are presented to the respondents for evaluation/selection/ranking in the framework of impersonal (or personal but rather shallow) surveys. In many cases, the interviewees have to choose from among answers like “safety at the workplace is unimportant/important/very important for me”.<sup>17</sup> Frequently, these surveys are carried out by leading international organizations with a primary interest in large-scale comparisons and generalizable results.<sup>18</sup> In most research projects, subjective variables of job quality do not appear at all<sup>19</sup>, or objective and subjective variables are observed simultaneously, and combined in the analysis, however misleading that may often be.<sup>20</sup> This equally applies to ‘truly’ objective data stemming from statistical sources and to data concerning the objective facets of jobs as well but provided by the respondents. The preferences are not grasped at all or with the same methodology in the individual countries, and it is hard to find reliable representative data (at least for some years) supporting the conclusions of the surveys.<sup>21</sup>

With time, the researchers involved in such projects do not put up with description and qualitative analysis but strive to measure (and aggregate) even the subjective

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<sup>15</sup> An important exception is Stephen Overell et al, *The Employment Relationship and the Quality of Work*, The Good Work Commission, London 2010.

<sup>16</sup> For diverging interpretations of job quality, see Section 6 below.

<sup>17</sup> For a recent combination of a long questionnaire with short interviews (44 minute-long on the average), see *Fifth European Working Conditions Survey*, Eurofound Luxembourg, 2012. Quality of work is just one chapter of the survey, targeting four dimensions (security, health, skills, work-life balance) with a mix of subjective and objective indicators. See also Clark, A. (2005). *What Makes a Good Job? Evidence from OECD countries*. In S. Bazen, C. Lucifora and W. Salverda (eds.): *Job Quality and Employer Behavior*, Palgrave Macmillan. Cf. Section 6 below.

<sup>18</sup> See Note 48.

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., Leschke J., Watt A., *Job Quality in Europe*, ETUI, Brussels 2008, in which the authors admit that with objective variables it is close to impossible to assess quality features like collective interest representation and voice. See also Richard Anker et al, *Measuring Decent Work with Statistical Indicators*, ILO, 2002.

<sup>20</sup> In the very beginning, the European Commission introduced the concept of ‘quality in work’ as one that includes both objective and subjective indicators (Indicators of Quality in Work, Report by the Employment to the Council, 14263/01, 23.11.2001). For a critique of this approach, see Francis Green, *Demanding Work: The Paradox of Job Quality in the Affluent Economy*, Princeton 2005. See also Clark A. (2005), *Your Money or Your Life: Changing Job Quality in OECD Countries*, *British Journal of Industrial Relations* Vol 43/3; *Fifth European Working Conditions Survey*, Eurofound Luxembourg, 2012; *Measuring Quality of Employment*, UNECE, 2010, [http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/publications/oes/STATS\\_MeasuringQualityEmployment.E.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/publications/oes/STATS_MeasuringQualityEmployment.E.pdf); Stephen Overell et al, *The Employment Relationship ...*;

<sup>21</sup> For the lack of comparable data, see *Measuring Quality of Employment*, UNECE ...



variables.<sup>22</sup> The individual quality features are composed of dozens of variables, and the integration of these requires a number of normative (arbitrary) decisions, leading to composite figures that cover women and men, old and young, skilled and unskilled as well as entire occupations, sectors, even countries or country clusters as a whole. Quite recently, not only the variables but also the features have been aggregated into a single job quality indicator in the framework of heroic but sometimes questionable methodological ventures.<sup>23</sup>

As regards the subjective variables, the respondents are normally asked about their satisfaction levels rather than about their aspirations/preferences. The researcher tries to derive the latter from the former.<sup>24</sup> In this way, one may produce snapshots of how 'decent' the respondents feel their existing work to be, but one cannot really learn what kind of ideals they cherish with regard to 'good jobs'. Moreover, in most surveys the respondents are not requested to explain the components of these snapshots. Typically, the researcher puts on the hat of the 'normal employee'; sees the existing (viable) selection of the quality features from his/her perspective; pretends to know the breadth of the choices and the potential reasons for certain preferences; and will not make great efforts to reveal the motives governing the decisions taken by the respondents, and confront these with their real practices. Even if the preferences are somehow revealed, their discursive environment and the underlying cultural motives remain in the dark. The respondents are inundated by a whole lot of questions (requiring short answers) even when data collection is not impersonal. Finally, the researcher has almost no opportunity to test the existence/strength/consistency of the

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<sup>22</sup> For an early attempt to calculate a 'job desirability index', see Jencks et al, (1988), What is a Good Job? A New Measure of Labor Market Success, *American Journal of Sociology* Vol 93. See also Richard Anker et al, *Measuring Decent Work ...*; Clark, A. (1998), "Measures of Job Satisfaction: What Makes a Good Job? Evidence from OECD Countries", *OECD*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/670570634774>; Sverinn-Age Dahl et al, *Quality of Work – Concept and Measurement*, RECWOWE, Edinburgh 2009; Lucie Davoine and Christine Erhel, *Monitoring Employment Quality in Europe ...*; Davoine, L., C. Erhel and M. Guergoat (2008), *A Taxonomy of European Labour Markets Using Quality Indicators*, [ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=2267](http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=2267); De Bustillo Llorente, R. et al (2011). *Measuring More than Money: The Social Economics of Job Quality*, Edward Elgar; *Fifth European Working Conditions Survey ...*; Leschke J., Watt A., *Job Quality in Europe ...*; Janine Leschke et al, *Putting a Number on Job Quality? Constructing a European Job Quality Index*, ETUI 2008; Leschke, J., Peña-Casas, R. & Watt, A. (2011), *Possibilities and Challenges for Building a European Indicator on Job Quality*. in K. Busch, M. F. a. H. S. (ed.) *Socially Unbalanced Europe: Socio-Political Proposals in Times of Crisis*. Merlin Press; Martel, J.P. and Dupuis, G. (2006). *Quality of Work Life: Theoretical and Methodological Problems, and Presentation of a New Model and Measuring Instrument*. *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 77.; *Measuring Quality of Employment*, UNECE, 2010; Sirgy, Joseph M. et al (2001), *A New Measure of Quality of Work Life*, *Social Indicators Research* 55.

<sup>23</sup> See Davoine et al, (2008), *A Taxonomy of European Labour Markets Using Quality Indicators ...*; Leschke et al, (2011), *Possibilities and Challenges ...*

<sup>24</sup> On the risks of using satisfaction indicators, see De Bustillo Llorente R. and Macias E., (2005), *Job Satisfaction as an Indicator of the Quality of Work*, *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 34.; Sirgy et al, *A New Measure ...*

preferences because the respondents are not observed in the context of a given case of employment.

Despite the above inconsistencies (which, fortunately, began to diminish recently), these surveys succeeded in defining the major components of job quality as well as presenting their probable combinations and shares. While capitalizing on these results, in particular, in identifying the salient features and variables of job quality, our project

- goes beyond the paradigm of flexicurity by mapping a great many other components of job quality ranging from wages, through health and safety, all the way down to gender equality, industrial democracy and ‘green values’;
- observes the materialist and post-materialist features of job quality as separately as possible;
- takes a more personal approach to the study of ‘good/bad jobs’ by conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews;
- asks the respondents to explain their preferences in defining the concept of ‘good/bad jobs’, and tries to ‘read out’ the cultural motives from these preferences;
- compares the discourse of the respondents with their own practices (and with the discourse of their colleagues) in their real working environment described by embedded case studies, thereby putting the ‘snapshots’ in a dynamic context.

Undoubtedly, many of these tasks cannot be expected to be fulfilled by large surveys. Impersonal questionnaires, for instance, cannot provide the researcher but with a limited access to ‘real life’, however large the samples may be and however precise and comparable the research results may seem. Hence, our anthropological (qualitative-sociological) approach<sup>25</sup> should be seen not as a rival but an ally of the survey methods described above (see section 6.2. below). What we promise is putting some flesh on the skeleton of survey-based studies of job quality, or, to use another metaphor, to zoom in at certain sites when making the snapshots. Although a state-of-the-art report is not the proper place for ‘reading out’ cultural motives from the texts, the observation of dominant employment discourses may bring in a good part of the reality into the rather sterile world of quality surveys and indices.

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<sup>25</sup> It does not really follow the line of most of the current job quality projects but rather goes back to the tradition of ‘industrial anthropology’ (industrial sociology), though avoiding their critical, often anti-capitalist strands. Of course, a lengthy cohabitation with the respondents or a ‘thick description’ of the cases would be an overambitious goal given the size of our project. Yet, an attempt at a relatively deep understanding of the cases (in the style of *verstehende Soziologie*) combined with some degree of participant observation, as well as a resolute self-restraint in terms of making normative statements, are necessary requirements of sound research in our project. See e.g., Michael Burawoy, *The Anthropology of Industrial Work*, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 8, October 1979; Baba, M. *Anthropology and Business*, *Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, Sage 2006; Herbert Applebaum (ed), *Work in Market and Industrial Societies*, SUNY Press 1984; Harrison Trice, *Occupational Subcultures in the Workplace*, Cornell UP 1993.

In the following, I will first give a short overview of the various employment discourses in the four countries following the main actors in the labour market, including its analysts, in order to check if they vary across country lines. Then, it will be asked whether the country-specific discourses match (a) the major EU narratives, (b) the leading scientific theses that have been developed on job quality over the past decade. Finally, I will compare our working hypotheses with a few tentative conclusions offered by the SoA reports, and briefly examine to what extent the emerging 'good jobs' narratives can be explained by cultural factors.

#### 4. Discourses and their producers

Four groups of actors (social partners, governments and parties, civil society organizations, research communities), and – separately – people at large (employees) will be examined from the perspective of the two 'discursive alliances' mentioned above. In focusing on their cleavage, I will not ignore those instances where the gap between the two major narratives has been bridged, and some kind of flexicurity thesis approved by both camps.

The actors' discourses do not float in the air, they are deeply rooted in the actual changes in the labour markets of the four countries. Although these changes cannot directly explain all facets of the employment discourses, especially those related to job quality, they provide a background for comprehending their evolution. What do the data tell us? Let me sum up the main messages of the tables in the statistical annex of this report (to be sure, these macro-data represent just a narrow selection of major employment indicators):

- During the past decade as a whole, economic growth was very fast in Slovakia, fast in Hungary, moderate in Spain while the UK underwent a slight economic decline. Hungary and the UK suffered from the global financial crisis the most deeply.
- The rate of employment did not change significantly in the four countries. It was higher in the middle of the decade but decreased afterwards. The rate was the highest in the UK during the entire period. The decline in male employment was basically counter-balanced by a rise in female employment, especially in Spain. The rate fell sharply among the youth (the least in the UK), stagnated among the middle-aged, and grew considerably among the older employees (in particular, in Slovakia).
- Part-time employment rose, especially in the case of women. The rise was the slowest in the UK but there the share of part-time work was high anyway.
- Temporary employment grew a little in Hungary and Slovakia, and diminished in Spain and the UK.
- The rate of unemployment rose everywhere, in Spain sharply (in particular, among men and the youth), with the exception of Slovakia. Long-term unemployment changed in a similar fashion.
- The overall activity rate did not change dramatically in any of the countries (yet, it grew in Spain, especially among women). It remained very low in Hungary during the whole decade.

- The unemployment trap did not grow in Spain and the UK; it decreased considerably in Slovakia, and increased in Hungary.
- Finally, as regards net incomes, between 2005 and 2010 they more than doubled in Slovakia, rose significantly in Hungary and moderately in Spain, while declining in the UK. Again, the crisis hit Hungary and the UK the most strongly. By and large, as far as incomes are concerned, neither female nor young employees fared worse than their male and older colleagues.

All things considered, by the end of our research period, the plight of employment was the most favourable in the UK while it was Slovakia where the employment trends showed the greatest improvement. Among the two ‘bad performers’, the employment trends were more critical in Spain than in Hungary in most respects. How do all these changes manifest themselves in the major political and scientific discourses in the respective countries?

#### 4.1 The ‘flexibility camp’

The government introduces “measures that will increase the motivation of individuals to find and keep their jobs, especially those individuals whose potential wage in the labour market is low. Special attention will be paid to long-term unemployed so that the provision of their basic needs will be linked to an adequate motivation to find jobs. (...) The government believes that a flexible labour market able to react to economic development is a prerequisite of unemployment reduction.” This is an excerpt from a 2002 declaration of the centre-right government in Slovakia (Veselkova 8). “We believe that an increase in the minimum wage is a measure that will lead to an increase in unemployment, rather than creation of new jobs. A poorly paid job is better than a defunct job”, said the president of the National Association of Employers in 2009 – in Slovakia again (Veselkova 22). “Is it better if low-qualified individuals, people without professional experience, recent graduates, people in starvation valleys and living from social benefits are at home or is it better if they work for, let’s say 260 euro per month?”, asked the minister of labour in the subsequent centre-right government of Slovakia in the same year (Veselkova 23). Such citations could equally well have been taken not only from Hungary but also from the two Western European countries in our sample<sup>26</sup> during the past decade or so despite the fact that the latter two are not emerging markets/democracies with extremely weak trade unions, immature labour market institutions, deep poverty and a high rate of inactivity.

The maxim of flexible job creation is nuanced by the representatives of this camp in many ways. According to the Hungarian report, although the employers (in both public and private, foreign and domestic, large and small companies) are eager to apply all the familiar instruments to make employment as flexible as possible, in the large transnational companies increased flexibility may go together with higher wages and, despite greater work intensity and discipline, with more humane working conditions. Jobs may be ‘better’ (in a sense, more secure) here in many respects, including training, gender equality, even chances for the employees for developing

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<sup>26</sup> To avoid misunderstandings, the sequence of countries (Slovakia, Hungary, Spain, United Kingdom) I will follow in this and the next section does not reflect a ranking order.

pride for and loyalty to the firm. Trade unions are, however, not welcome. Of course, these transnational companies do not conceal the fact that by raising job quality, they simply follow the prescriptions of management literature, and expect higher profits from offering security to the 'good' (mostly young, educated, creative, loyal) employees while using flexible rules of hire and fire to filter out the 'bad' ones.

'Western'-based car manufacturers provide a whole series of examples for a relatively high level of job satisfaction in both Hungary and Slovakia, whereas those coming from the 'East' find it rather hard to sugar the pill of flexibility because what they offer in terms of 'decent work' (higher wages, well-organized production, training, etc) is often spoiled by the 'indecent behaviour' of bosses as far as work ethic is concerned. The Slovak report speaks of *corvée* in a South-Korean enterprise. The author quotes a Slovak manager. In his opinion, "to be on good terms is not enough (...) Koreans are markedly objective. And that is fair. Sometimes even tough. But that fairness must please you." A Korean HR official says: "Korean employees often sacrifice personal vacation or work over the weekends due to the fact that hard work is one of the most honoured values in Korean culture." A Slovak worker objects: „We are hard-working but why should we act like their slaves? Why should we deliver *corvée* labour for some foreigners." Her former colleague adds: "Koreans asked us to work twelve-hour shifts, they did not care whether we faint or not. We slept two hours at most and immediately went to the afternoon shift. There was a slap in the face; another worker got his arm twisted when he did not work properly by the line" (Veselkova 20). The workers also complain about an incredibly quick pace of work and the lack of company welfare services.

The trade-off between extreme flexibility (without physical violence) and some kind of security is demonstrated by the example of a large Scandinavian firm in Hungary that employs unskilled and semi-skilled workers with a long probation period and a contract that can be terminated any time almost without cost; leases half of them from labour hire companies; and requires monotonous work in three shifts, 12 hours long for three days in a row. This is how the workers remember:

*"I badly needed job and livelihood. But it's not so good to be a prisoner. My son named this place Alcatraz. (...) I lost 16 kilos during this period. I ate only once a day. (...) Constant nausea. My nose was permanently bleeding. (...) I was crying all the time."*

*"The other day a woman collapsed next to me by the line. The other workers got frightened. But you cannot call an ambulance car, but she goes to the factory GP and she doesn't dare go home because she is afraid that she'll be fired."*

*"I am nobody, I am just a number. Everybody is registered by a number and not by his/her name. (...) Once I was on the night shift, it was about one o'clock after midnight when the chief and some minor executives came in and said that now they would fire twenty people. It is cruel, as if a firing squad did it." (Virag 8-9)*

The workers take these 'bad jobs' under the pressure of severe unemployment and poverty in the hope of becoming once 'real' members of the staff with permanent contracts. The prospect of relative protectedness prompts them to accept physical deterioration, the upsetting of work-life balance, and continuous angst. Also, for many the 'bad job' is actually a 'good' one in another respect as well: the company pursues a colour-blind policy of hire and fire, and punishes discriminative behaviour at the



workplace – a rare refuge for Roma workers in Hungary. As one of them recalls: “There was no such differentiation within groups that he/she is Gypsy, and he/she is not. There were some people anyway who made us feel it. But the management does not allow it. If I report to my bosses that there are such problems, then the person gets disciplined or fired.” The same is expressed in HR language as follows: “social responsibility includes the well-being and professional competencies of the company’s employees, occupational health and safety, human rights, code of conduct and collaboration within the corporate network, product liability, and relations with local communities. (Our) aim in this context is to ensure the well-being of (...) employees, and to respect human rights and local cultures in all (...) operating locations” (Virag 9).

In these firms, job quality suffers from flexibility primarily due to adverse working conditions, easy dismissal, disruption of work-life balance, etc., but legality is not harmed – a feature that sets these companies apart from smaller domestic enterprises. Hungary and Slovakia (to a lesser extent also Spain) provide plenty of examples for law-bending or outright law-avoidance in employment matters. Although the traditionally personal relations at the workplace may convey the feeling of security, incomplete/fake/non-existent work contracts are actually weak pillars of a ‘good job’. The complicity between employers and employees in tax evasion increases the exposure of the latter to the benevolence of the former, creating thereby an atmosphere of permanent uncertainty. According to the Hungarian report, “the smaller the enterprise, the more it tends to informally employ workers, and supplement the official minimal wage of the workers with an informal extra wage (not subject to taxation) or employ them as subcontractors. In private enterprises, especially in small- and medium-sized ones, work conditions are worse, the work environment is less favourable, social care is weaker if there is any. In contrast, work intensity is lower, the work schedule is less fixed, and they pay more attention to personal problems of the employees” (Virag 11).

Informality or illegality in the form of subcontracting, i.e., of forcing the employees to turn into self-employed (while staying in the firm), saving social security contributions, and transferring a large portion of the risk of employment to them, is a widely debated issue in Slovakia, too. The term for what is called in Hungary *kényszervállalkozó* (forced entrepreneur) is *živnostník z donútenia* (forced tradesman) in the neighbouring country. Both refer to false self-employment. The business contracts are more flexible than most work contracts, and the employees accept them not only because they are urged/blackmailed to do so but also because their tax burden gets smaller this way. “If I am to choose between high unemployment and individuals working as tradesmen, I vote for the latter,” stated the minister of labour in the centre-right government of Slovakia in 2005 (Veselkova 17). In denouncing the efforts made by the Statistical Office to collect data on false self-employment, the National Union of Employers labelled the reference to force ‘demagogic’ and ‘misleading’. According to the chairman of the right-wing Civic Conservative Party, “there is no such thing as the forced tradesman. (...) The Statistical Office relies on criteria that were used by totalitarian regimes with regard to work in the concentration camps or the gulag.” In response to the fierce criticism, the Statistical Office renamed the category from ‘forced tradesman’ to ‘tradesman whose work has characteristics of dependent work’ (Veselkova 17).



Are Spain and the UK different, or do they belong to the same camp as the two Eastern European countries as far as flexibility discourses are concerned? Apparently, the employment strategies are very similar: they range from the loosening up of the hire and fire regulations, through narrowing down the scope of collective bargaining, all the way down to widening the opportunities for employers to prolong or restructure working time, reduce training costs, or let physical working conditions deteriorate.

The Spanish SoA report, for example, shows that atypical/precarious low-paid jobs with temporary contracts have been mushrooming during the past decade. The employers justified the changes with arguments similar to those used in Hungary and Slovakia. Above all, they complained about the permanent contracts, the share of which was exceptionally high in Spain as compared to the rest of Western Europe, and about the fact that wages cannot respond to changes in the business cycle because of the rigidities in social partnership. The socialist government's attempt at easing hire and fire was fiercely rejected by the trade unions in 2010. The new, conservative government follows the logic of its predecessor, and starts introducing a series of labour market reforms that range from making work contracts more flexible to relaxing the rules of collective bargaining and restricting informal employment. For instance, says the author of the Spanish report, the employers "proposed that the mere expectation that there will be an economic deficit in a company in a given year should be sufficient to trigger the mechanism of the wage opt-out clauses. (...) The employers also proposed that the pay review clauses should lead to additional wage payments if the actual inflation is higher than the foreseen one, but that it should lead to negative wage adjustments in case the actual inflation is lower than the forecast" (Hilbert 46).

The conservative reformers expect that the firms will enjoy more freedom to decide on overtime, working schedules, holiday planning, etc. Thus, they may become able to enhance internal flexibility instead of relying on the external one that was primarily due to the high limits/costs of dismissal, and led to the proliferation of low-paid, temporary, unprotected jobs during the 2000s. It is widely hoped (even by the trade unions) that this kind of internalization will help moderate the well-known duality of the Spanish labour market: eventually, the young and skilled entrants will have a chance to get access to 'good jobs', and will not be trapped in insecure, temporary positions. Part-time jobs with open-ended contracts will crowd out the temporary ones, and retraining (a neglected issue in Spain thus far) will make the labour market more dynamic. Listening to the new Spanish government officials when they explain why they decided to reduce severance pay lately, one would think to hear their Slovak colleagues speak: "The goal is to make it easier to hire new workers in our country, especially the young and long-term unemployed".<sup>27</sup>

Apparently, in the light of the extremely high rate of unemployment, the Spanish representatives of the 'flexibility camp' do not want to say much more about 'good jobs' than that they first have to exist as jobs. In turn, they may become more secure and 'decent' if they are released from the catch of temporary employment, and enable the employee to develop through training. Employability tomorrow matters more than stability of employment today.

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<sup>27</sup> Spain introduces sweeping labour reforms, *The Telegraph* 2012/2/10

Do the dominant employment discourses of the ‘flexibility camp’ in the United Kingdom also remind the observer of those in Eastern Europe? Are quality considerations in this liberal ‘variety of capitalism’ with its dynamic labour market as inferior to quantity goals as in Spain? As a matter of fact, in the course of the past decade, the narrative of job creation has overshadowed that of the ‘good job’ in the UK, too. The Blair governments with their ambiguous slogan of ‘making work pay’, and the objective of bringing people back in the labour market (with some compulsion) took a basically quantitative approach to employment. Reducing unemployment and poverty made the increasing number of low-paid and unprotected jobs legitimate while the rights of the trade unions, which had been curbed by the previous conservative governments, were not restored. Flexibilization resulted in the preservation of a high share of part-time jobs but did not bring about a significantly more educated workforce. The current ‘race for talent’ indicates that the aim of ‘matching skills and jobs’ has not been attained, as it is still difficult to fill the high-skill ‘good jobs’ in the UK. The Cameron cabinet continued to focus on the principle of flexibility. In 2010, the programme of the new coalition envisaged a review of employment and workplace laws to “ensure they maximise flexibility for both parties while protecting fairness and providing the competitive environment required for enterprise to thrive (...), and create a more educated workforce that is the most flexible in Europe” (Hilbert 31). The government decided to change the ‘sick notes’ to ‘fit notes’, increase the number of adult apprenticeships, and acknowledged the right of employers to close certain pension schemes for new entrants, and to hire (or refuse to fire) workers who were blacklisted by the trade unions.

Unlike in the other three countries, the insistence by UK policy-makers and employers on flexibility does not offset careful reflection upon job quality in the end. Not only the consecutive cabinets but also a large array of think tanks have proven instrumental in keeping the idea of ‘good work’ warm even in the cold of the financial crisis, and producing a sophisticated discourse full of original insights. Many reviews (Barker, Leitch, Lyons, Gershon, etc), and, in particular, the Future of Work Project, the Work Foundation, including the Good Work Commission, most of them non-partisan/non-governmental, examined how ‘more work’ could become ‘better work’ in a long-run perspective. As the UK SoA report claims, they “seek to balance the interests of all stakeholders (...), and talk of a ‘new tripartism’. Employees connect good work with the opportunity to develop skills; choice, flexibility and control over working hours and the pace of work; trust, communication and the ability to have a say in decisions that affect them; and a balance between effort and reward. From a business perspective, productivity and efficiency are main points characterizing good work that aims to involve and engage employees and to encourage their contribution to organizational success. Finally, from a society perspective, good work is socially aware, ethical, and sustainable.” (Hilbert 2)

The experts of the Good Work Commission suggest that the concept of ‘good work’ should “break out of the strait-jacket of interest-group gains and losses and instead aim at work that is able to deliver performance, engagement and fairness” (Hilbert 25). Accordingly, a definition that would balance the interests of the stakeholders can be summarized in the following way: (a) secure employment; (b) a low degree of monotony, (c) a high degree of autonomy, control and task discretion, (d) balance

between efforts and rewards, (d) skills to cope with periods of intense pressure, (e) a fair workplace, and (f) strong workplace relationships (social capital). The crisis has added new chapters to the above agenda. The issue of how to rebuild trust among the unemployed is also discussed in the other three countries but it is difficult to imagine that academics or politicians there would reflect in great numbers on problems like the 'survival syndrome' of those who keep their jobs but end up in precariousness. The same applies to the whole issue of 'bad jobs'. The question "is new work 'good work'?" has provoked the minds of dozens of experts in the UK during the past decade. It is also not very likely in Hungary or Slovakia (or even in Spain) that leading labour economists like Richard Layard would philosophize about happiness in this context, or that such influential narratives as suggested by Jeremy Rifkin's vision of the 'end of work' would dominate employment discourse.

To turn to real life experiments to create better jobs, the 'agile work' project of Unilever seems also unique in our sample. To save office space and, at the same time, enhance the well-being of the employees, the firm recently decided that (1) the staff may work anytime and anywhere as long as business needs are fully met, (2) leaders must lead by setting the example of working in an agile way themselves, (3) performance is determined by results, not time and attendance, (4) travel is to be avoided whenever possible, and (5) managers are assessed annually on how well they support agile working. 'Anytime and anywhere' does not mean that the employees must be 'always on', instead they may use flexibility for enriching their private lives (Hilbert 33).

## 4.2 The 'security camp'

Just as the flexibility narratives cannot be regarded in a simplistic fashion as if they did not go beyond the axiom of 'good jobs are cheap jobs' (of disempowered, easy-to-fire employees), the security discourses also do not confine themselves to demanding more, and more stable jobs (possibly with no wage cuts and worse working conditions). Undoubtedly, the 'security camp' tends to focus on the major quantitative aspects of employment, and would like to assure that flexibilization would concern (internal) work organization rather than (external) hire and fire regulation. However, even in the two Eastern European countries one hears its representatives lament the worsening of jobs all the time, and demand quality improvements. According to them, security should also mean stability and inclusion once flexibility is unavoidable. They demand higher minimum wages, income support for the transition from one job to another, more training that enables the employees to adapt to flexible employment conditions, reducing precariousness, etc. -- all this, of course, in the framework of active labour market policies and social dialogue. Because it is hard for the 'security camp' not to admit that insisting on the status quo would mean that the labour market remains segmented, protecting the insiders with higher-quality jobs, and discriminating against the outsiders, who are either unemployed or have lower-quality or expressly precarious jobs, the security narratives have to 'escape ahead' instead of sticking to a 'security, security and again security' discourse. Let us see whether they succeed in gaining, with the help of the 'good jobs' idea, what they lost by abandoning the old version of the concept of security.

Starting with Slovakia again, here academic authors are inclined to stress the disadvantages of flexibilization: informal, unprotected employment, 'bad jobs',

emergence of the working poor, exclusion from the formal labour market, etc. A neoliberal invention, it is the employer who profits from flexibility while the employee suffers from loose contracts and easy dismissal and, at the same time, cannot enjoy either the advantages of training programmes and flexible work organization within the companies. If flexibility really balanced work and life, that would be nothing else but 'harmonization downwards' (Veselkova 33). The trade unions and the socialist governments echo these views when safeguarding the traditional concept of security. The Fico government declared in 2006 that it "will respect the demand for a certain degree of labour force flexibility; however, it will secure the highest possible protection of employees in the work process." According to the Slovak report, "the emphasis was on measures that would 'improve life and work conditions of employees and the work-life balance' (...), would not enable to mask employment (...), (would result in) protection of employees from unjust lay-off, elimination of 'misuse' of fixed-term employment, (...), fixation of the maximum working time (...). The government planned to enforce that 'trade unions recover their position of the effective advocate of employees' interests and the equal participant in the social dialogue'" (Veselkova 8). The government and the trade unions agreed on increasing the costs of dismissal by coupling the notice period and the severance pay, on reducing the period of temporary employment, and raising the minimum wage. As the socialist minister of labour said in 2009, the growing minimum wage "will certainly not lead to a bankruptcy of a single employer. (...) Maybe if the employer forbore one cigar a month from his profit, that would be enough to cover the increase (...)" (Veselkova 23). In 2010, the trade unions demanded to shorten the working week from 40 to 35 hours - without reducing the wages proportionally.

Is a 'green turn' part of the solution for making employment more secure and jobs better? As demonstrated above, the conservatives in Slovakia were not bothered by the decline of security but 'green jobs' have not become popular among the socialists either. The recent election programme of the latter, for example, puts up with the general formula of 'orientation toward green economy'. It is only the mini-party of the Greens that promulgates the idea of 'green jobs' as a means of combatting unemployment. True, they talk about 'decent work' but suppose implicitly that green investment will lead to that.<sup>28</sup> Otherwise, they reiterate the conventional socialist claims concerning equal opportunity, social dialogue, health and safety and the like.

As a contrast, in Hungary, the socialist-liberal governments did not suggest any compelling security narratives during the past decade, took a neutral-permissive position to flexibilization (with the exception of raising the minimum wage several times), and let the trade unions, which were weak and fragmented anyway, care for the protection of the insiders, and forget about the outsiders. The latter are primarily represented by NGOs and academic specialists but these, unlike in Slovakia, take a human rights-oriented rather than a leftist-syndicalist approach. While fighting ethnic and gender discrimination, and condemning new poverty, they cherish a moderately illiberal agenda. They are ready to admit that the new private sector, especially the large transnational firms, have brought along a vast number of 'good' (well-organized,

<sup>28</sup><http://www.zelenavolba.sk/?nazov=Volebn%C3%BD%20program>;  
<http://www.stranazelenych.sk/?page=4-zdrave-ekonomicke-prostredie>

clean, skill-enhancing, etc.) jobs in the country even if these are not so secure in the traditional sense. As mentioned above, even the worst among them are ‘good’ to some extent, for example, in terms of banning unfair treatment of Roma workers. Informal jobs are also valued by a few experts: even if these jobs are extremely unprotected, they save hundreds of thousands of families from utmost deprivation, and may serve as entry-gates to the world of formal employment. Flexibility exercised in the official economy is seen by virtually all main labour market actors as a much lesser evil than the extremely high share of the inactive population, widespread informal employment, and ethnic discrimination. If one looks for the reasons for the proliferation of precarious jobs in Hungary, flexibility dwarfs among the chief culprits. Hence, establishing an inclusive labour market became the primary goal for most who are concerned about security.

The current national-conservative government decided to make the labour law more flexible for the employers but did not launch any major initiative whatsoever to augment job quality with public training programmes, welfare schemes, etc. In the new labour code approved in 2011, hiring and firing as well as atypical employment became easier, working time regulations (overtime, holiday, etc) changed to the detriment of the employees, the legal status of the trade unions was considerably weakened and tripartism practically abolished. According to the Hungarian Plan for Labour, which provided the policy foundations of the labour code, “instead of job security employment security will be targeted, assisting the changing of jobs. (...). The legal obstacles to telecommuting, part-time employment and job sharing should be minimized, and the contracts left to the discretion of the parties concerned. The same applies to labour hire”<sup>29</sup>. The trade unions are awakening. Although they continue to focus on the loss of various benefits (including their own), even the most government-friendly among them start using heated rhetoric. To cite the president of one of these organizations, the new labour code “is in its present form inhuman, unchristian, and turns employees into servants while talking about contractual freedom”. The socialists have become more security-prone in the opposition, and decided “to represent the dual objective of ‘more jobs’ and ‘better jobs’”. Symptomatically, they mean by ‘better jobs’ higher wages and legal guarantees of secure employment no matter if that materializes in part-time work, telecommuting or any other atypical job.<sup>30</sup> The green party, however, rejects all attempts at flexibilization as a whole.

The ‘employment security’ discourse of the government has nothing to do with the creation of higher-quality jobs in another respect, too. The overambitious policy objective of creating one million new jobs in ten years has so far boiled down to fabricating plans of major public work schemes (a veritable *corvée* programme) with workers who are supposed to live in guarded settlements (camps) far from their place

<sup>29</sup> [http://azujmunkatorvenykonyve.hu/wpcontent/uploads/2011/07/Magyar\\_Munka\\_Terv.pdf](http://azujmunkatorvenykonyve.hu/wpcontent/uploads/2011/07/Magyar_Munka_Terv.pdf) (38, 44)

<sup>30</sup> Egyeztetni szeretnének a szakszervezetek (The trade unions would like to negotiate, *Heti Válasz* 2001/9/1); Új iránytű (New Compass), [http://mszp.hu/sites/default/files/j%20Ir%C3%A1nyt%C5%B1\\_0\\_0.pdf](http://mszp.hu/sites/default/files/j%20Ir%C3%A1nyt%C5%B1_0_0.pdf); Rugalmas biztonság helyett ... (Instead of flexicurity ...) [http://mszp.hu/hirek/rugalmas\\_biztonsag\\_helyett\\_jott\\_a\\_felelem\\_kulturaja](http://mszp.hu/hirek/rugalmas_biztonsag_helyett_jott_a_felelem_kulturaja)



of residence, employed in low-skilled jobs to do construction work in the framework of grand infrastructural projects for about half of the minimum wage. Work-for-aid was an important element of employment policy for the previous governments as well, just like the gradual reduction of unemployment benefits. Nevertheless, the ethos of controlling and disciplining the excluded as a principal motive behind the ‘training to work’ rhetoric used by the current government is a rather new phenomenon, despite the fact that it is supported by age-old ‘quality’ arguments, such as these suggested by prime minister Orban:

*“We know very well that there are such unemployed people in Hungary today who don’t work, although jobs are offered to them. It would be a great mistake to consider equal those people who want to work but don’t have jobs, and those who could work, yet, they think it is more convenient to live on state aid, and besides the benefits they can make money some way. As cat burglars.”*

*“Unemployment not only pushes us into poverty; but idleness also kills men. Especially Hungarian men. It kills their faith, self-esteem and courage. The less people work, the worse it is going to be to live in this country. Idleness brings about our worst traits.”*

*As the crisis heightens, (...) it is especially true that Hungary needs all men to work. We are firmly convinced that only growth based on work may guarantee a rise from poverty and hopelessness. Therefore we offer work for anyone who is capable to work.”*  
(Virag 22)

In Hungary, green ideas have not been deeply anchored in the employment narratives of the governing parties during the past twenty years. Even the small new eco-party promotes a ‘green turn’ today with the aim of increasing employment through investing in environmental industries rather than asking whether the turn would result in ‘good jobs’ at all.<sup>31</sup> They seem to know the answer: the greening of the economy should take place in the form of smaller-scale community (co-operative) development projects with direct participation of the locals. This would also help counter the flexibilization efforts of the conservative government that turns the employees into ‘wage-slaves’. The lack of sensitivity to ecological problems on the part of the conservatives prompts the socialists to begin talking at last about ‘green jobs’ that “may give a chance to well-paid and reasonable public works”.<sup>32</sup>

Interestingly enough, the Spanish narratives of security do not differ much from those of the Slovak socialists. The new conservative government uses a rather ambiguous language that may even please those anxious about job security. The election programme of the conservative party says the following:

*“We will implement a comprehensive reform of the labour market as a response to the unprecedented social trauma suffered by a country having five million unemployed. This comprehensive reform will represent a coherent and co-ordinated change in employment contracts, collective bargaining, the system of industrial relations, job-*

<sup>31</sup> Zöld fordulat. Munkát levegőt! (Green Turn. Work and Air!) <http://lehetmas.hu/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Az-LMP-2012.-%C3%A9vre-sz%C3%B3l%C3%B3-k%C3%B6lts%C3%A9gvet%C3%A9si-javaslat.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Új iránytű (New Compass), [http://mszp.hu/sites/default/files/j%20Ir%C3%A1nyt%C5%B1\\_0\\_0.pdf](http://mszp.hu/sites/default/files/j%20Ir%C3%A1nyt%C5%B1_0_0.pdf)



*based training and employment intermediation. We will simplify the range of employment contracts to reduce the rate of temporary employment and increase stability, flexibility and security for all workers and companies.” (Hilbert 52)*

The trade unions, in harmony with the former socialist government, made important concessions in terms of the stringency and centralized nature of collective bargaining in the hope of shifting, in exchange, the external forms of flexibility toward the internal ones. They gradually moderate the objective of defending the security of the insiders, and put up with less security for the entrants, provided their number grows fast. However, the basic security narrative of the trade unions still insists on permanent contracts for the latter, or at least on prohibiting the repeated use of temporary contracts. The unions would like to change the unfortunate state of the labour market, in which a high level of flexibility coincides with a similarly high level of precariousness. Yet, together with the socialists, they fight each and every measure of the new government to relax the work contracts (curbing severance pay, prolonging the probation period, etc), and urge the government to expand its active labour market policies, which have been among the poorest in the EU. All in all, trade unions are still “more concerned about the labour market situation (inactive population, gender differences, temporary jobs, etc.) than about defining good jobs”, concludes the author of the Spanish SoA report (Hilbert 50).

As regards ‘green jobs’, normally, they were not directly associated with ‘good jobs’ in the dominant discourse of the socialist governments in Spain during the 2000s. The controversial programme of fostering ‘green investment’ with heavy public support (highly praised by Barack Obama) was primarily meant to create secure jobs that are sustainable in both senses: economic and environmental. The current government claims that the programme that focused on the renewables killed more jobs than it brought to life, led to higher energy consumption, and produced plenty of ‘dirty jobs’ instead of cleaning them.

In the UK of the 2000s, the ‘security camp’ has been even less vocal than in Hungary (where, by the way, Blairism was held in high esteem among the socialists), and challenged the flexibility narratives not by promoting security *per se* but by sacrificing its old variants for new ones. Unlike in the other three countries, most employment programmes managed to ‘escape ahead’, rather than engaging in rear-guard battles, to find a place for the concept of security within that of employability. The welfare-to-work regulations were increasingly complemented by active labour market policies aiming, in particular, at improving education and training (including lifelong learning), and creating more room for skills, engagement and a good working atmosphere within the concept of ‘good work’. In the United Kingdom even the trade unions, which used to be less reform-minded than New Labour, contend by now that ‘decent jobs’ may compensate for the hardships caused by flexibilization. Back in 2003, a government strategy paper was entitled “Full and Fulfilling Employment”. Today, the adjective ‘full’ would likely be omitted.

It seems also unique in our sample of countries that in the UK an old-new component of ‘decency’, health and safety has been strongly re-emphasized by the trade unions. In the Touchstone Report/TUC “In Sickness and in Health – Good Work and How to Achieve It” they claim that

*“good work is not just about ensuring that jobs do not make people ill (although in many cases that would be a big improvement in itself). It is about organising work in a way that actually promotes good physical and mental health. Often this is called well-being” (...). So long as we see good work or well-being as a good idea rather than a basic human right, work will continue to make workers ill and as a result workers, and society, will continue to suffer. We need to challenge the traditional approach (that employers have only to NOT kill or injure their staff) to turn it on its head and argue that workers should have a right to a workplace that promotes good health and well-being.” (Hilbert 37).*

There is, however, another strand of tradition since flexibilization can be attacked with the help of isolationist/protectionist arguments, too. The issue of, let me call it, ‘less flexibility for the foreigners’ provided a link between the strategies of the trade unions and the UK governments already during the 2000s and before. Apparently, the conservative-liberal cabinet is convinced that, in one way or another, foreigners are to be disadvantaged by employment policy (probably, they should get the worst among the precarious jobs). In 2011, the state secretary for labour said the following:

*“(...) Who took all the new jobs? Over half of them went to foreign nationals. (...) So much for Brown's British jobs for British workers. (...) There will be a need for workers once again. And when that day comes we will either reap the rewards - or reap the whirlwind. We'll either have the whole working age population in the active economy - working or available for work, skilled and incentivised to get a job. Or we'll have five million people still sitting on the sidelines - poor, demoralised, excluded, with their children facing the same life their parents led, another generation lost (...).” (Hilbert 35)*

Finally, the UK discourse is the only one among the four countries in which ‘green values’ appear on the horizon of main stakeholders when they try to leave the ‘flexibility with or without security’ discourse behind, do not consider the concept of flexicurity sufficient, and reach out for the ‘good work’ narrative. The secretary of state for energy and climate change in the current cabinet, for example, wants “to ensure low carbon skills are brought within the wider skills framework. Businesses need to recognise that skills development doesn’t stop. I will make the case to businesses and employers that career development will be critical to ensure jobs created by green growth aren’t one-shot wonders (...).”<sup>33</sup> In its strategy document “Skills for Sustainable Growth”, the cabinet says: “there is clear recognition by the coalition Government that tackling climate change, securing future energy supplies and making a permanent transition to a low carbon, high growth economy is an urgent and vital task. Without a skilled green workforce, the UK will continually follow in the footsteps of international counterparts (...).”<sup>34</sup> The turn is rather dramatic (probably due to the presence of the Liberals in the coalition), at least in rhetorical terms: ‘Green Deal’, ‘third industrial revolution’, ‘low-carbon opportunity’, ‘green skills for green jobs’. The trade unions also put forward new phrases (‘green workplaces’, ‘green-collar workers’, ‘green revolution’ etc) but stress ‘just transition’ that brings ‘better jobs’ with more rights to the employees. They are happy “to identify areas where a reduction in CO2 emissions

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.greenskills4greenjobs.co.uk/>

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

can be achieved” but insist on not “sacrificing employees’ jobs, pay and conditions.”<sup>35</sup> It is assumed that ‘green jobs’, that is, jobs emerging in environmental industries, are ‘good jobs’ *per se*, or at least ‘greening the workplace’ will lead to a more ‘decent work’ in other industries.

Ironically enough, the Green Party in the UK is only a little bit more ‘green’ than the government and the trade unions. While also demanding a ‘just transition to a low-carbon economy’, it lays an emphasis on the creation of an extra million jobs and training places as well as on the introduction of a ‘Living Wage’ (a sort of basic income) and a 35-hour working week to enhance job quality.<sup>36</sup>

## 5. What is good in a ‘good job’?

The four national SoA reports present a fair amount of data (however heterogeneous these may be) on the attitudes of employees to ‘decent work’. Although these attitudes are identified mostly by academic research, they are in a way condensed, as views of trade union members, NGO activists, voters, etc., in the employment programmes of the main actors of the labour market, and appear in the discourses discussed above. Unfortunately, as regards the opinion of employers on job quality, there are hardly any appropriate surveys that would go beyond the simple truism, according to which employers prefer to offer efficient (profit-making) jobs with flexible contracts concluded with dynamic and loyal employees of matching skills. Yet, it would be crucial to know more about how employers think about the ‘goodness’ of jobs. Probably, many of them know very well that employees’ engagement that transcends slavish loyalty and is built around job satisfaction based on task discretion, participation, respect, etc. may matter more than a work contract that can be terminated at low cost any time. In the four countries, the only study known to our research team on how employers interpret the concept of ‘good jobs’ in general was made in the UK. It ended with the surprising and controversial result that “78 per cent of employers questioned did not mention the importance of pay or remuneration in their definition. Of the 22 per cent that did, it was never the sole characteristic, being combined in all cases with a variety of (other) factors (...)”<sup>37</sup>

Returning to our working hypotheses, do the existing data support the dual assumption of a growing preference among employees for the stability of employment (i.e., for some kind of job and its steadiness), and a similarly increasing propensity to compromise on wages, working conditions, not to mention fair treatment, career development or work-life balance, when asked about the hierarchy of the ingredients of a ‘good job’? As suggested in the *Introduction*, in revealing their attitudes (‘individual employment programmes’), the employees ‘speak’.<sup>38</sup> Let me present their

<sup>35</sup> TUC GreenWorkplaces – greening the work environment, <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/employment-matters/docs/t/10-1024-umf-2-tuc-green-workplace>; <http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/G201207.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> [http://www.greenparty.org.uk/policies/jobs\\_2010.html](http://www.greenparty.org.uk/policies/jobs_2010.html)

<sup>37</sup> Susannah Constable et al, Good Jobs, The Work Foundation [http://www.theworkfoundation.com/DownloadPublication/Report/226\\_226\\_good\\_jobs2.pdf](http://www.theworkfoundation.com/DownloadPublication/Report/226_226_good_jobs2.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Christian Grund, Job Preferences as Revealed by Employee Initiated Job Changes, IZA, November 2011

approaches to the ideal quality of work, as they appear in the national SoA reports, below.

A typical Slovak employee (97% of the respondents) considered wage as the most important component of a 'good job' in 2007. It was followed by working conditions and workplace atmosphere (Veselkova 1). As mentioned above, 'decency' in Slovakia is associated with dignity, and tends to be "equalled to traditional forms of employment with a high degree of social protection. Flexible, atypical forms of employment or self-employment are interpreted as inferior to traditional full-time employment". (Veselkova 44) If asked about their preferences with regard to job quality, the employees give wages a much higher rank than security, and hardly mention other attributes. As for working time, they would be happy to shorten it but reject the corresponding reduction of wages. (Veselkova 16)

According to the Hungarian report, the overwhelming majority of the employed work in full-time jobs with permanent contracts, and their expectations adjust to these conditions: they long for security/stability. "The labour force is extremely inflexible, in terms of flexibility of working hours by all means. In Hungary there is a very sharply defined virtual borderline between work and free time, and deviation from the traditional 'five days a week, eight hours a day' work schedule is very rare (...)" (Virag 3), except in the informal economy. In a 2005 comparative survey three quarters of the Hungarian respondents said to prefer full-time employment, from morning to early afternoon. A longitudinal survey made in 1989, 1997 and 2005 offers the most consistent information on employment attitudes. The survey presents job security and high wages as the two outstanding criteria in job search. In all the three years, 96 to 99 per cent of the respondents claimed that security was important or very important for them. The need for security was reinforced between 1989 and 2005: the share of respondents who found it very important continuously increased. Similarly, the vast majority of respondents (at least 93 per cent) considered it very important to earn high wages, and only a quarter of them was ready to accept lower wages in exchange for keeping a job. Meanwhile, internal flexibility was important for only less than a quarter (23%) of them. Following 1989, the share of those who wanted to become self-employed grew, and in ten years it reached about half of the population. Then, it began to decrease, and by the end of the 2000s, two thirds of the Hungarians prefer to work as employees again. They are also very rigid in terms of spatial mobility (especially as far as working abroad is concerned). Today, only every third person is willing to commute to avoid unemployment. Instead, they are ready to work more or under worse circumstances for the same wage. (Virag 4-5).

In the light of the massively segmented Spanish labour market, it is no wonder that on the top of the Spanish employees' preference list one also finds the transfer from less secure (informal) temporary to more secure (formal) permanent jobs. Once employed, their level of engagement is high. Right after high wages, they appreciate promotion and motivation at work the most. What they dislike is above all health and safety risks, stress, overtime work and flexible work schedules.<sup>39</sup> Political or ethical attributes of

<sup>39</sup> Diego Dueñas et al., Job Quality, Job Satisfaction and Services in Spain, Journal of Innovation Economics, 2010/1 (<http://www.cairn.info/revue-journal-of-innovation-economics-2010-1-page-145.htm>)

'good jobs' such as participation, equal opportunity, etc., feature rather low on their list. An unrelated study, however, detects a significant shift in the ecological sensitivity of Spanish employees, who are increasingly convinced that environmental regulations foster job creation, and willing to take 'green jobs'.<sup>40</sup>

Among the four countries, it is the UK again where research into job preferences (job values) is the most advanced, and where the employees do not focus on the security and remuneration of employment as desperately as in the other three countries.<sup>41</sup> According to the national SoA report, in the United Kingdom today, "irrespective of sector, neither pay and bonuses nor working hours and flexibility are considered to be as important as job security" but - interestingly enough - the atmosphere in the workplace ranks even higher (Hilbert 27). Also, equal opportunity, the nature of actual work and training opportunities follow security in the ranking order of employees' choices while prospects for promotion and a series of 'nice-to-have' benefits (ranging from personnel services to gym membership) are downgraded. With professionals, almost half of the respondents prefer flexible working conditions more than anything else, and would like to work on their own. A more profound longitudinal analysis<sup>42</sup> reinforces these results. Between 1992 and 2006, high wages and job security did not lose their privileged positions in the hierarchy of preferences, but also the value of 'work you like doing' remained high (actually higher than that of the other two) on the list. Furthermore, the importance of 'friendly colleagues' and 'good relations with supervisor' became equal to that of security, and the value of 'using one's abilities' and 'making initiatives' also grew. In other words, there was no evidence of a declining relative importance of so-called intrinsic rewards compared with pay and security, which suggests the relative strength of post-materialist values in this country.

Do we learn more about the preferences of employees if we consult the large comparative surveys of job quality in Europe? It is not by chance, I believe, that the authors of the national SoA reports do not cite them too often. Part of the reason for our reservations was revealed in section 3.2. The other part will be the subject of the next section.

## 6. How far is Brussels? And European scholarship?

The previous two sections presented the ways in which the principal actors of the labour market have thought and spoken about 'good jobs' in the four countries during the past decade. Do they represent the European discourse<sup>43</sup> whatever we mean by that? Do they offer less or more (or just something else) in terms of new ideas? Would we miss something if we did not include the dominant EU narratives on job quality in our literature review to examine their reception in our countries, and/or did not look

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/2008/04/ES08040191.htm>

<sup>41</sup> Arguably, more sophisticated studies would also provide a more colourful picture of job values in the other three countries.

<sup>42</sup> Alan Felstead et al, Skills at Work, 1986 to 2006, [www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/contactsandpeople/alanfelstead/SkillsatWork-1986to2006.pdf](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/contactsandpeople/alanfelstead/SkillsatWork-1986to2006.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> I thank Christoph Hilbert for calling my attention to a number of papers and books to which I will make a reference in this section.



around in other countries as well? The answer to the second half of the last question is a definite 'yes': countries such as Denmark, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Italy, and Sweden underwent major reforms of the labour market, and produced labour research that collected ample empirical knowledge and suggested original solutions with regard to those reforms.<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, our research group will put these cases under some scrutiny in the near future.

As for the first half of the question, I am hesitating to give an unambiguous answer. To put it mildly, I am convinced that the EU narratives could have been received in three of the four countries with a deeper interest and more erudition (the UK is an exception again) but I am afraid that even in that optimistic case the country discourses would not have become much more sophisticated. Nonetheless, in Slovakia and Hungary (and to a lesser extent, in Spain), both scholars and politicians could have exploited the enormous opportunity provided by the repeated campaigns of the large international organizations (ILO, EC, ETUC, etc) to make a strong case for 'decent work'. As the previous two sections have shown, only moderate efforts (frequently not even lip service) were made to comply with the ever more powerful policy and research agenda revolving around the concepts of job quality.

The invitation to participate in the Europe-wide discussion was very strong though. At least since the Delors White Paper in 1993, the Essen Strategy and the Treaty of Amsterdam, a vast machinery was set in motion: the Lisbon Agenda, the European Employment Strategy and the whole Luxembourg Process with its annual employment guidelines, national employment action plans, joint employment reports, and a working conditions observatory -- all this in the framework of an open method of co-ordination and in a strong co-operation with the ILO, which operates a mega-programme on 'decent work', publishing "Decent Work Country Reports", as well as contributing to the 'green jobs' agenda.<sup>45</sup> The European Commission issues important documents on job quality almost every year (e.g., Jobs, Jobs, Jobs (Kok report 2004), Promoting Decent Work for All (2007), Towards Common Principles of Flexicurity (2007), New Skills for New Jobs (2008), Towards a Greener Labour Market (2010), Youth on the Move (2010), Towards a Job-Rich Recovery (2012), etc) to keep the initiative going.

What could our four countries have learned from these international institutions? This question does not apply to the UK, which has been self-sufficient in terms of research and policy with regard to job quality from the very beginning, and an active producer of thoughts that could be incorporated in the EU employment programmes. As for the

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<sup>44</sup> See, e.g., Thomas Brunk and Yvonne Thorsén, Decent Work. Country Report: Sweden, ILO, 2008, [http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/eurpro/geneva/download/events/lisbon2009/dwreports/dw\\_sweden.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/eurpro/geneva/download/events/lisbon2009/dwreports/dw_sweden.pdf); Egger P, and Sengenberger W (eds), Decent Work in Denmark, ILO 2003, [http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/2003/103B09\\_9\\_engl.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/2003/103B09_9_engl.pdf); Ton Wilthagen, Decent Work. Country Report: Netherlands, ILO 2011, [http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/eurpro/geneva/download/events/lisbon2009/dwreports/dw\\_netherlands.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/eurpro/geneva/download/events/lisbon2009/dwreports/dw_netherlands.pdf); Gallie, D. (2003). "The Quality of Working Life: Is Scandinavia Different?" European Sociological Review, Vol. 19.

<sup>45</sup>Promoting Decent Work in a Green Economy, ILO, 2011, [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/---emp\\_ent/documents/publication/wcms\\_152065.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_152065.pdf)



others, ultimately, three important lessons could have been drawn. First, they could have understood that the 'good jobs' issue is not just another Trojan horse of the European Social Model (considered, with suspicion, as a sort of social-democratic or trade union conspiracy). Rather employers and conservative policy-makers, too, might profit from it in moving beyond a simplistic notion of flexicurity (cf. 'escaping ahead' in section 4.2). Second, the Slovak, Hungarian and Spanish experts could have joined the European discussion with a view to refining their conceptual apparatus, borrowing from a large repertoire of academic literature that has managed to develop an intricate language of job quality research during the past two decades.<sup>46</sup> Actually, nothing would have prevented them from enriching their own vocabulary of job quality, and initiating comprehensive (and comparative) surveys to support employment programmes in the respective countries. (If that had happened, the authors of our SoA reports would not have had to struggle so hard to identify the local discourses.) Third, they could have learned how to offer their own country-specific approaches to the concept of 'good jobs' for international reflection. In this way, the issue of preferences for informality, immobility, pride etc., to name a few attitudes described on the previous pages, could possibly have nuanced the European taxonomies of work quality. To avoid excessive generalization, one has to do justice to Spanish specialists who have done something like this<sup>47</sup>. While it is probably fair to say that they did not

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<sup>46</sup> For the concepts of flexicurity, see Note 12. For measuring job quality, see Note 22. See also Peter Auer, Protected Mobility for Employment and Decent Work, Employment Strategy Papers, 2005/1; Auer, P. and Cazes, S. (2000), Stable or Unstable Jobs, ILO, Geneva; Clark, A. (2005), Your Money or Your Life ...; Clark, A. (2005). What Makes a Good Job? ...; Coats, D. (2009), Advancing Opportunity: the Future of Good Work, The Smith Institute; Coats, D. & Lekhi, R. (2008); Donkin, R. (2009). *Work Futures*, Palgrave; 'Good Work': Job Quality in a Changing Economy, The Work Foundation, London; Gallie, D. (2002). The Quality of Working Life in Welfare Strategy. In G. Esping-Andersen (ed.); *Why We Need a New Welfare State*. Oxford UP; Gallie D, (ed) (2007) *Employment regimes and the Quality of Work*, Oxford UP; Francis Green, *Demanding Work ...*; Jencks et al, (1988), What is a Good Job? ...; Stephen Overell, *The Meaning of Work*, The Work Foundation, London 2009; Stephen Overell et al, *The Employment Relationship and the Quality of Work*, The Good Work Commission, London 2010; Schmid, G. (2008). Full employment in Europe: Managing Labour Market Transitions and Risks, Cheltenham; John Schmitt, *The Decline of Good Jobs. How Have Jobs with Adequate Pay and Benefits Done?*, Challenge 2008/1; Mark Smith et al, *Job Quality in Europe*, Industrial Relations Journal 2008/6; Toolkit for Mainstreaming Employment and Decent Work, ILO, 2007, <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/dgo/selecdoc/2007/toolkit.pdf>; Westwood, A. (2006). Is New Work Good Work? The Work Foundation, London; Zimmer, M. J. (2008): Decent Work with a Living Wage, in: R. Blanpain and M. Tiraboschi (eds), *Global Labor Market: From Globalization to Flexicurity*, Kluwer 2008.

<sup>47</sup> See, e.g., De Bustillo Llorente R. and Macias E., (Job Satisfaction as an Indicator ...; Antonio Corral and Iñigo Isusi, *Quality of Life in the Spanish Workplaces*, <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/surveys/ES0507SR01/ES0507SR01.pdf>; Felix Requena, *Social Capital in the Spanish Quality of Working Life Survey, 2002*, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/23/3/2382039.pdf>; Working Conditions and Quality of Life in Spanish Workplaces, <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/surveyreports/ES0906019D/ES0906019D.pdf>; Cebrián, I., Moreno, G., Samek, M., Semenza, R. & Toharia, L. (2003), Atypical Work in Italy and Spain, in Osawa, D. S. H. Y. M. (ed.) *Nonstandard Work Arrangements in Japan, Europe and the United States*; Cerviño, E. (2009). Spain: Flexicurity and Industrial

manage to provide genuine concepts, they explored, at a high scholarly level, quite a few quality issues related to mass unemployment, temporary jobs, etc., which could be embedded in the international discussion later.

It is not my task here to highlight the causes of these unexploited opportunities. Yet, I have to explain in some words why I wrote that even in the best case the ‘good jobs’ narratives in the respective countries would probably not have become much more sophisticated. If one browses through the job quality literature, one witnesses, besides brilliant insights, an escalation of rival/overlapping taxonomies, as well as a great uncertainty about (a) the possibilities of generating reliable and comparable data, (b) the compatibility of subjective and objective indicators as well as economic, sociological and psychological approaches, (c) the role of cultural factors.

### 6.1 On the taxonomies of quality features

First let me take the example of the taxonomy of quality attributes. Among others, the following influential typologies were circulating in European politics and academia in the late 1990s and the 2000s:

- The so-called Laeken indicators of job quality included *ten* components: intrinsic job quality, lifelong learning and career development, gender equality, health and safety at work, flexibility and security, inclusion and access to the labour market, work organization and work/life balance, social dialogue and worker involvement, diversity and non-discrimination, and overall economic performance and productivity. ILO's *four* strategic objectives concerning ‘decent work’ (with gender equality as a crosscutting objective) were: creating jobs, guaranteeing rights at work, extending social protection, and promoting social dialogue. The European Trade Union Confederation outlined *five* basic principles for ‘decent work’: an end to precarious jobs, better work organisation, strong employment protection legislation, social welfare systems, and social dialogue. The Eurofund suggested *four* quality features: ensuring career and employment security, maintaining and promoting the health and well-being of workers, developing skills and competences, and reconciling working and non-working life. The Council of the European Union announced *five* points: fair wages, protection against health risks at work, workers’ rights to assert their interests and to participate, family-friendly working arrangements, and enough jobs. The UN Economic Commission for Europe put forward *seven* dimensions of employment quality: safety and ethics of employment, income and benefits from employment, working hours and balancing work and non-working life, security of employment and social protection, social dialogue, skills development and training, and workplace relationships and work motivation.<sup>48</sup>

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Relations, EIRO, <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/studies/tn0803038s/es0803039q.htm>; Duran, J. (2011). Spain: Flexible Forms of Work: ‘Very Atypical’ Contractual Arrangements. European Working Condition Observatory, <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/studies/tn0812019s/es0812019q.htm>.

<sup>48</sup> Decent Work Agenda, ILO, <http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/decent-work-agenda/lang--en/index.htm>; Decent Work, ETUC, <http://www.etuc.org/a/4311>; Council Resolution on “Good Work”, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press/press-releases/>

- Turning to some important scientific studies that lie in the background of many of these classification schemes, one finds an even greater divergence of attributes. Lucie Davoine et al. apply *four* variables in their model: decent wages and wage inequality, skills and training, working conditions, and ability to combine work and family and gender equality. Francis Green distinguishes *six* features: skills, work effort, personal discretion of workers over their job tasks and forms of participation in workplace decisions, pay, low risks and security, and job satisfaction and well-being at work. Sverren-Age Dahl et al. speak of *six* dimensions of job quality: pay and fringe benefits, job security, work intensity, autonomy and control, skills and intrinsic job rewards. Janine Leschke et al. work with *seven* indicators: wages, non-standard forms of employment, working time and work-life balance, working conditions and job security, health and safety at the workplace, skills and career development, and collective interest representation and voice. Andrew Clark enumerates *six* aspects of a good job: pay, hours of work, future prospects (promotion and job security), how hard or difficult the job is, job content (interest, prestige and independence), and interpersonal relationships. Anker et al. also discuss *six* dimensions of 'decent work': opportunities for work, work in conditions of freedom, productive work, equity in work, security at work, and dignity at work. Rafael Muñoz de Bustillo Llorente et al. propose an aggregate index of job quality based on *five* components: pay, intrinsic quality of work, employment quality, health and safety and work-life balance.<sup>49</sup>
- In almost all taxonomies, the 'greenness' of jobs is missing from the list of main quality features (and does not even appear among their constituting variables) despite the fact that, as demonstrated above, in the political discourse terms such as 'green values', 'green jobs', 'green skills', 'green turn', 'Green Deal' 'green investment', 'green transition', 'green-collar worker', 'greening the economy' have been mushrooming during the past 10 to 15 years. Thus, the fundamental question of whether or not 'green jobs are good jobs' cannot be discussed with the survey respondents. The same applies to the rival preferences for 'creating jobs in a green industry' versus 'greening' the jobs in a 'brown' industry, or to the problem of the 'brown' (dirty) jobs in 'green' (clean) industries'.<sup>50</sup>

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[employment,-social-policy,-health-and-consumer-affairs?target=2007&bid=79&lang=en&id=](#); Indicators of Quality in Work ...; Quality of Work and Employment in Europe, 2002, <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2002/12/en/1/ef0212en.pdf>; Fifth European Working Conditions Survey, Eurofound Luxembourg, 2012; Measuring Quality of Employment, UNECE... (2010);

<sup>49</sup> Anker et al (2002); Clark (1998); Dahl et al (2009); Davoine et al (2006); Debustillo et al (2011); Green (2005); Leschke et al (2008).

<sup>50</sup> The omission of the 'green features' by the job quality surveys means an underutilization of a widening body of knowledge. Apparently, the world-wide thinking on green jobs has not reached the specialists of 'decent work' yet. (Cf. James Medhurst, Green Jobs, European Employment Observatory, 2009, <http://www.eu-employment-observatory.net/resources/reports/GreenJobs-MEDHURST.pdf>; The employment dimension of economy greening, European Employment Observatory, 2009, <http://www.eu-employment-observatory.net/resources/reviews/EN-EEORReviewAutumn2009-OOPEC.pdf>; Eurofound (2009), Greening the European economy: Responses and initiatives by Member States and social

Reading these lists of features, one may perhaps hope that, given a fair number of identical terms, these models are able to communicate with one another. However, in looking at the hundreds of concrete variables attached to the individual attributes of job quality (which are also measured in rather different ways), the initial optimism declines. The concepts are broadened and narrowed, combined and separated almost at will, making any comparison between the surveys very tedious.

This heterogeneity (sometimes bordering on cacophony) may have disturbed many experts in the four countries, especially in the two new member states, during the past 10 to 15 years. Probably, it did not really help either that, *ex officio*, the European Commission tends to streamline the scientific debates to construct catchphrases such as ‘more and better jobs’, ‘new skills for new jobs’, ‘inclusive growth’ and the like. These in turn occur in innumerable strategy papers, action plans, recommendations and

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partners (<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/studies/tn0908019s/index.htm>); Olga Strietska-Ilina et al, Skills for Green Jobs, ILO, 2011, [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_emp/@ifp\\_skills/documents/publication/wcms\\_156220.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_156220.pdf); OECD Interim Report of the Green Growth Strategy, 2010, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/42/46/45312720.pdf>; Carlo Stagnaro (ed), The Impact of Green Investments on Labor Market, Adapt Dossier, issue 9, 16 July, 2009 – Green jobs Observatory, [http://www.etechgermany.com/DOSSIER\\_GREEN\\_INVESTMENTS.pdf](http://www.etechgermany.com/DOSSIER_GREEN_INVESTMENTS.pdf)

Michaels, R. and Murphy, R. (2009), “Green jobs: fact or fiction? An assessment of the literature”, Institute for Energy Research, [www.adapt.it](http://www.adapt.it), Green jobs Observatory; Pollin, H. et al, Green recovery, A Program to Create Good Jobs and Start Building a Low-Carbon Economy, Political Economy Research Institute (PERI), University of Massachusetts-Amherst, 2008; Philip Mattera et al, High Road or Low Road? Job Quality in the Green Economy, 2009; The New Apollo Program. Clean Energy, Good Jobs, 2008 [http://www.bluegreenalliance.org/apollo/programs/new-apollo/file/Program.NewApolloProgram\\_Report.pdf](http://www.bluegreenalliance.org/apollo/programs/new-apollo/file/Program.NewApolloProgram_Report.pdf); Cedefop: Skills for green jobs. European synthesis report. Luxembourg: 2010; UNEP, ILO, IOE, ITUC: Green Jobs: Towards Decent Work in a Sustainable, Low-Carbon World (Geneva, 2008) [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms\\_098504.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_098504.pdf)

Studies like these not only shed light on the amorphous nature of the concept of ‘green jobs’ and the various shades of ‘greenness’ but also emphasize the uncertainties (even adverse consequences) of ‘greening’. Accordingly, it is doubtful whether in ‘green industries’ high-quality (skilled, safe, clean, etc) jobs and labour-intensive technologies would prevail. Thus, the ‘back to industry from services’ shift, a sort of reindustrialization, might not absorb the unemployed and provide them with ‘good jobs’.

In focusing on similar issues, WP 1 in our NEUJOBS project promises to deliver a conceptual apparatus that might be used in our case studies. (See Marina Fischer-Kowalski et al, Socio-Ecological Transitions: Definition, Dynamics and Related Global Scenarios, NEUJOBS Working Paper April 2012, [http://www.neujobs.eu/sites/default/files/publication/2012/05/wp1\\_Socio-ecological%20transitions%20and%20global%20scenarios.pdf](http://www.neujobs.eu/sites/default/files/publication/2012/05/wp1_Socio-ecological%20transitions%20and%20global%20scenarios.pdf)). At this point, the following prognoses of the SET researchers seem relevant for us: (a) a decline in knowledge work, a rise in physical labour; (b) a further decrease in working time per employee and the persistence of high unemployment rates. One of the reasons for the growing share of blue-collar (physical) work is the fact that ‘green jobs’ tend to emerge in industries such as forestry and agriculture, construction, waste management, trade and transportation, etc. Although these changes do not necessarily result in ‘worse jobs’, they may ruin hopes about ‘decent work’ becoming dominant in the long run.



communications, and from time to time, the member states have to file reports about whether they have made enough progress in – let me call it – ‘quality awareness’. Frequently, they feel lost between the controversial research results and the slogans, and return to the more comfortable and seemingly straightforward idea of ‘jobs first’ policy while simulating adherence to the ‘decency message’ coming from Brussels.

## 6.2 Learning from the surveys

In section 3.2., I briefly introduced the problems of comparability, subjective versus objective indicators, satisfaction levels versus preferences, measurement and aggregation, etc. Be that as it may, leaving the methodological dilemmas and the political pressures behind, one has to admit that any anthropological/sociological research project could hardly cope with the conundrum of job quality if it disregarded the larger surveys presented above. (That is why I spoke of an alliance between the two approaches.) True, these surveys do not cover discourses and cultural aspects directly. However, they suggest ways of getting access to those by providing a set of relevant variables (vocabulary) as well as estimates of their relative importance and a map of their linkages, especially if the conclusions of the surveys happen to converge.<sup>51</sup>

In casting a glance on just a few recent studies in Europe<sup>52</sup>, one sees the following picture emerge:

- Despite the divergent taxonomies, it is easy to devise a new selection of job quality features because the surveys offer a large variety of indicators/variables for recombination, and many of these variables have already undergone prudent data collection and testing.
- No matter what selection of indicators the surveys apply, the resulting ranking orders of the countries they examine are rather similar: on the top one finds the Scandinavian and the Benelux countries, as well as the UK, on the bottom many of the ex-communist countries (Hungary for sure), Spain and Greece, while Germany is somewhere in the middle.
- In the field of both the objective and subjective variables, older and/or female employees fare better (a rather surprising conclusion), and education, power and status are also positively related to job quality as a whole (a less surprising one).
- The indicators are not separated from one another by a Chinese Wall, rather they exhibit a certain degree of correlation within and between the groups of the ‘materialist’ and the ‘non-materialist’ features. For instance, unskilled work is considered unrewarding, insecure, monotonous, unsafe, stressful, lacking autonomy and creativity, thus, representing ‘bad jobs’.
- Despite the fact that recently materialist attributes (perhaps) matter more than earlier, the employees have not abandoned (but rather suspended) their need for the post-materialist ones. Intrinsic job rewards and a good working atmosphere are

<sup>51</sup> See, e.g., Davoine, L. and Erhel, C. (2006) and Leschke, J. and Watt, A. (2008) for converging quality indices.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Davoine, L. and Erhel, C. (2006), Fifth European Working Conditions Survey (2012), Leschke, J. and Watt, A. (2008), Measuring Quality of Employment (2010), Overell et al (2010).



high on the list of preferences (provided, presumably, that an appropriate level of pay and security of the work contract are given).

- Seen from a comparative perspective, the job preferences of the respondents are determined by their country of origin rather than industry, gender, age, etc., which may point to institutional/cultural factors.

## 7. Tentative conclusions and cultural hypotheses

As mentioned above, these surveys tend to mix preferences for certain attributes of 'decent work' with real job satisfaction. The latter is also heavily loaded with culture (for example, Hungarians usually win all contests for pessimism/dissatisfaction), therefore, theoretically, the question whether the employees are content with their jobs might interest our work package. Undoubtedly, satisfaction levels shape the employment discourses (both collective and individual) although it is extremely difficult to tell how and to compare them between countries. However, what is really disturbing about them is that they often misrepresent the real world.<sup>53</sup> A good example is the feeling of insecurity that is widely supposed to have risen during the past decade and, in particular, in the course of the recent crisis, resulting in an overall decline of job satisfaction. Yet, in the UK, for instance, claim Stephen Overell and his co-authors, "[T]here is little evidence to support the view that insecure, casual and disposable forms of employment are displacing the 'proper job' over the longer term. More than 80 per cent of jobs have permanent contracts. There are fewer full-timers and more part-timers – yet two-thirds of UK employees continue to be employed on a full-time basis. There has been no significant trend towards greater self-employment or temporary work in the UK, with levels of the latter relatively low in comparison to other European economies. Perceptions of job insecurity are not rising exponentially. (...) Job tenure (...) has remained stable in recent years, with average tenure at about eight years. (...) Although long working hours are often highlighted, average working time has actually decreased slightly."<sup>54</sup>

Perceptions, no matter if they are wrong or correct, affect satisfaction levels, and in turn satisfaction levels affect attitudes to quality attributes. On the assumption that employment security diminishes, one may internalise pessimism and increase the value of job security on one's own preference list. Today, in Slovakia, satisfaction with wages is, for example, significantly lower than in Western Europe. Hungarians are even less content and optimistic, and would like to change jobs in similar proportions to the Slovaks while fearing imminent dismissal. Slovaks, Hungarians and Spaniards are equally pessimistic about the future of employment in their countries.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See Note 24.

<sup>54</sup> Stephen Overell et al, The Employment Relationship and the Quality of Work, The Good Work Commission <http://www.goodworkcommission.co.uk/Assets/Docs/ReportsWithCovers/07.EmploymentRelationshipQualityOfWork.pdf>. See also Andrew E. Clark, Your Money or Your Life: Changing Job Quality in OECD Countries, IZA May 2005, <ftp://repec.iza.org/RePEc/Discussionpaper/dp1610.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> Eurobarometer 75, Spring 2011

As regards flexibilisation, Spanish data demonstrate that fixed-term employees are less satisfied with their wages, working conditions, collective agreements, etc., than those with permanent contracts, who are approximately as pleased as an average EU employee.<sup>56</sup> In the UK, practically all satisfaction indicators score higher than in the other three countries. Evidently, it would be a tremendous exaggeration to explain satisfaction levels exclusively or primarily by means of cultural differences. The fact, for instance, that employees in the United Kingdom are less pessimistic probably originates in the much more favourable prospects of employment in the country than in the 'British national character' that would, supposedly, be full of self-confidence, hope and positive thinking. At any rate, if this were an SoA report on how employment narratives emerge, one could name a great many features of the actual labour market which are 'harder' than job satisfaction and shape employment attitudes/discourses more profoundly.

Cultural impacts should not be ignored, however. If one does not use them to craft exhaustive explanations and build typologies of the 'national character' but rather treats them as one of the important means of understanding, the alternative employment discourses examined above may become more comprehensible. Without anticipating the cultural contents of our still-non-existent case studies, let me attach a few cultural arguments to these discourses.

First, I will briefly summarise our main conclusions concerning the state of the art of the 'good jobs' narratives in the four countries. Brevity requires simplification (even oversimplification). Prior to the second phase of research, in which field work will begin, the conclusions are essentially tentative propositions connecting the original working hypotheses with our future case studies. Probably, it will not hurt if we continue to provoke discussion with a few preliminary thoughts. In my view, a comparison of the four SoA reports suggests the following eight points:

1. In thinking of 'good jobs', the main actors of the labour market organise their employment discourses by and large along the flexibility/security axis. The 'discursive alliances' are rather stable and include similar sets of actors in the four countries. They tend to refer to various concepts of flexicurity (ranging from the Danish original to the one disseminated by the EU), and take the liberty to pick and choose from their constituents and often remix these at will.
2. Frequently, the emerging policy blends are of dubious quality, and their scientific foundations seem rather fragile (with the exception of the UK). The related concepts, ranging from precariousness to employability, are poorly defined, often misunderstood. Even in the case of the principal notions of flexibility and security, neither are their possible combinations identified nor is a distinction between their different shades of meaning made with sufficient rigour. Concepts such as stability and security, flexibility and precariousness, internal and external flexibility, employment and job security, job preferences and job satisfaction, etc., are frequently used as synonyms without further qualification. In many cases, secure

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<sup>56</sup> Duran, J. (2011)

<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/studies/tn0812019s/es0812019q.htm>

jobs are regarded as ‘good jobs’ while flexible jobs are seen as ‘bad jobs’ and vice versa: both discursive alliances suffer from tunnel vision.

3. The flexibility and security discourses are intertwined but lean toward the former. Flexibility can be interpreted as inclusion, and, as such, as a contribution to a new version of security that replaces the outmoded narrative of stability with that of employability. The ‘security camp’ (old or new) could, in principle, show a greater interest in attributes of ‘good jobs’ which go beyond those related to wages and contractual rights, but it does not seem to make the leap in this direction (and make virtue of necessity) in three of the four countries. But even in the fourth one, the UK, where a coherent narrative (stressing skills, health and even green values) has crystallised around the concept of ‘good work’, concern about the quantity of (secure) jobs offsets quality considerations with the major stakeholders. Hence, focusing on the ‘flexibility versus security’ *problématique* results in severe simplifications in the composition of quality-related narratives.
4. The catchphrases of the EU employment programmes are borrowed (if at all) without critical reflection, in particular in Hungary and Slovakia. Much of the borrowing is simulated. Nonetheless, even if the takeover were full of enthusiasm and sincere curiosity, in these countries, unlike in Spain, sometimes even the elementary social science information on quality variables is missing, which would have helped the main actors of the labour market to determine how job quality might be conceived of. The distance between the European and the national discourses is due, to a certain extent, to inconsistent messages being sent from Brussels, more exactly, to diverging interpretations of job quality in both EU policies and international research.
5. Many of the interpretation problems originate in an almost exclusive concentration of the research programmes on the flexibility-security nexus, in the rival/overlapping taxonomies of job quality features both in politics and research, in *sui generis* difficulties of comparability (e.g., subjective versus objective indicators, satisfaction levels versus preferences, etc.), measurement and aggregation. There seems to be an urge to construe synthetic indicators of job quality before solving the underlying problems of methodology. As a rule, the emerging indices ignore green variables. Job quality is not observed through discourses and cultures, but by means of impersonal/shallow questionnaires in the framework of large surveys. Despite these shortcomings, such surveys not only provoke anthropological/sociological research by their imperfections but also assist them by delivering the relevant variables (vocabulary) as well as estimates of their relative importance and a map of their linkages. Hence, the two approaches could become allies in reflecting on the concept of ‘good jobs’.
6. The attitudes of the employees to ‘decent work’ often do not match the dominant discourses of the stakeholders. Small wonder that these are more complex and disorderly than what is derived from them by governments, trade unions or NGOs in constructing their own narratives. In all four countries, the popular attitudes seem to be less inclined towards flexibility than their representations by the stakeholders. Again, the UK is an exception to a certain degree, for here even the employees see more clearly some of the inherent opportunities stemming from

flexibility as an enrichment to their lives than their Hungarian, Slovak and Spanish colleagues.

7. As regards the various components of job quality, those of a post-materialist nature, including SET-related features, are the clear losers. Hence, retraditionalisation proves to be a valid assumption, especially in Spain and to a lesser degree in the UK, while in the two Eastern European countries the same phenomenon could be described as being stuck in a traditional interpretation of job quality focusing on full-time work with permanent contracts and appropriate wages. In the rare cases in which 'green jobs' are promoted by the employment programmes, they are presumed to be 'good jobs' with no doubt.
8. Instead of the expected East-West divide in reflecting upon job quality, a North-South cleavage emerges, in which Hungary and Slovakia join Spain on the southern side. This division is demonstrated in the three countries by less sophisticated employment discourses, a stronger antagonism between the two discursive camps, a quantitative rather than qualitative approach taken by the employment programmes to jobs, and a relatively low value attributed to the post-materialist components of job quality, including SET awareness.

One could meditate for long on why the 'good jobs' discourses have evolved this way over the past 10 to 15 years, and come up with a series of 'fast-food' explanations for both the similarities and dissimilarities between the selected countries. As a rule, such explanations rest on a large bundle of historical arguments on development and backwardness, capitalism and communism, a variety of labour market and welfare regimes, globalisation and crisis, growth and unemployment, and so on but also include a great many references to current economic traps and policy options, not to mention the strategies of the ruling elites. I would not be reluctant to listen to these arguments if they were not permeated with cultural stereotypes most of the time.

An attentive reader might also be able to pick a few stereotypes from our national SoA reports (I mean, stereotypes used by the labour market actors themselves) concerning Spanish *machos* who send their wives and daughters to work part-time, Slovaks and Hungarians who detest both their Roma colleagues and 'Asian' bosses, or utopian-minded green politicians in all the four countries who think that renewables are a panacea for all troubles of modern capitalism. This would lead, I believe, to grave misunderstandings. The reports are not cultural studies *per se* but reviews of employment discourses in the respective countries; reviews that focus on national bodies of literature, the scholarly part of which, as mentioned above, does not pay a great deal of attention to cultural matters. Nevertheless, the authors of the SoA reports succeeded in extracting from the thousands of pages they read at least two large clusters of cultural features that may help understand the 'good job' discourses in a comparative fashion. The first is related to the collective actors of the labour market, the second to the individual ones. Although there is no doubt that these cultural features exert a significant influence on the dominant employment discourses, at this point, however, one cannot advance more than a number of basic assumptions on the patterns and strength of that influence.

Firstly, apart from the truism that the 'goodness' or 'decency' of jobs is an eminently normative, i.e., cultural issue, the choice and ranking of its components cannot be

performed on the basis of purely pragmatic (instrumental, technical) judgements either.<sup>57</sup> The simultaneous stability and national diversity of the ‘discursive alliances’ suggest that in deciding on the composition of the narratives, economic and political cultures matter in two respects for sure. On the one hand, they contribute to the (rhetorical) choice of the respective values, norms, etc., on the other, they determine the ways of implementing these. That is why one witnesses quite a bit of variation even within the same alliance between the individual countries. For example, it is difficult to imagine a Tory leader proposing, like his Hungarian colleague, public work projects in guarded camps, or a Slovak socialist politician committing him/herself to a ‘green transition’ as strongly as his/her Spanish counterpart. A Hungarian socialist is less afraid of flexibilisation than a Slovak one while a Hungarian conservative was until recently more security-prone than a Slovak, Spanish or a British one. The latter would think twice before declaring the abolition of social dialogue as it happened in Hungary in 2011. A trade union leader in the UK is often ready to accept disadvantageous deals (e.g., wage cuts) in the hope of compensation (e.g., stable employment), although he/she knows that these deals may only materialize in the long run. At the same time, his/her colleague in Slovakia or Hungary would rather go for immediate compensation both for instrumental and cultural reasons (i.e., due to painful memories of being cheated by the negotiating partners as well as to short-termism and a *carpe diem* mentality). In Eastern Europe the spread of green values or a wide acceptance of skills development are also impeded by this pattern of thinking, not only by adverse economic conditions. All things considered, within the framework of seemingly similar economic, political or social discourses, the authors of the SoA reports experienced diverse combinations of cultures of paternalism and self-reliance/competition, of collectivism and individualism, of institutional and personal relations, of rule abiding and rule bending, etc. What has been said above about ‘forced entrepreneurship’ or the preference for being employed rather than self-employed in Eastern Europe is more than telling in this respect.

Secondly, turning to individual attitudes, these are much less influenced by political cultures than by norms, values, habits, etc., of everyday behaviour. It is very likely that if asked, a Slovak or a Hungarian employee (much like a Spanish or a British one) would not enumerate illegal work, tax fraud or physical violence among the attributes of a ‘good job’. When they nonetheless tolerate or even initiate these practices, that may certainly happen due to a rational calculation of costs and benefits. However, one may suspect that in the neighbourhood of such a calculation cultural choices also play a

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<sup>57</sup> By pragmatic judgement I mean applying a kind of instrumental (technical) rationality that does not follow closely any end in itself (e.g., moral, religious, ideological, etc. goals). Of course, it is sometimes extremely difficult to distinguish deep-seated cultural motivation from pragmatic calculation and/or *ad hoc* arguments. (This is especially so in analyzing discourse in the absence of the speaker, like in the case of the state-of-the-art reports.) Particular difficulties arise when pragmatism is the core of culture (e.g., attitudes to wages), or when cultural commands and pragmatic decisions coincide. Nevertheless, in most instances the researcher witnesses choices between the ‘cultural’ and the ‘pragmatic’ or between alternative cultural considerations. We strongly hope that our case studies will be able to reveal those cultural motives of choosing from among numerous features of job quality (and of ranking them) which could not come to the surface in the SoA reports.



role. For example, an employee in the UK would have a harder time than in the other three countries to conspire with his/her employer in concluding fake contracts to cheat the tax authority, at least – and this transpires from comparative corruption studies – he/she would not regard informality as a normal ('decent') attribute of his/her job. Let me take now a more innocent cultural feature as an example. For Hungarians commuting or migrating is a characteristic of a 'bad job' whereas Spaniards do not refuse these nearly as vehemently. Health and skills are higher on the list of preferences in the UK (cf. health as a human right) than in Spain while participation is more important for Spanish employees than for Slovak ones. Anyway, Eastern Europeans seem rather to prefer the non-collectivist features of 'good jobs'. Ethical imperatives like promoting gender equality are observed in the UK more strictly than in the other three countries. The flexibility of working time may be an asset for a British employee whereas a Hungarian one would consider it a menace to his/her work-life balance. Again, the choices are not devoid of pragmatic elements: lack of mobility can originate not only in century-old traditions of clinging to one's birthplace but also in prosaic matters such as high costs of transportation or a rigid housing market. Similarly, part-time work may be disliked more by a Slovak, Hungarian or Spanish employee because in such a job he/she cannot earn enough to make ends meet. As a consequence, the relatively high importance attached to post-materialist values (including leisure or 'good joblessness') by employees in the UK or Spain may be considered by their Hungarian or Slovak colleagues as sheer luxury they would also like to enjoy if they could. And conversely, the 'bad jobs' that one is not willing to fill at any price will also differ country by country (cf. 'Gypsy work' in Hungary) no matter where employees are in a more favourable overall situation.

## 8. Instead of an epilogue

The reader may wonder why my report concludes with a number of cultural hypotheses rather than firm conclusions. The reason is simple: one cannot speak about cultures exclusively on the basis of analysing discourses. In order to grasp the linkages between the two, our research group first will have to go to the field, and prepare the planned case studies that will confront the employment narratives with actual practices. Thus far, we have not had to give up any of our initial working hypotheses though some of them were nuanced as research progressed. For example, I was persuaded more than a year ago (when we launched the project) that the concept of 'good jobs' is not just a cover discourse to make flexibilisation more attractive or, on the contrary, to smuggle in outdated security principles in the employment programmes but one that may be filled with quite a few thought-provoking cultural components. The international discussion on good/decent work brings new insights year by year, day by day. While working on the case studies, we cannot stop reviewing the literature – within the selected countries and, increasingly, beyond.

## Annex

Source: Eurostat, Luxembourg:

<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/eurostat/home>

Table 1. GDP at market prices (2000 = 100)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	100	112.8	129.2	130.4	138.3	143.8	139.7	154.9	162.9	151.4	158.8	162.1
<b>Slovakia</b>	100	103.3	108.9	118.0	129.4	137.4	146.6	163.4	181.6	186.3	187.2	190.2
<b>Spain</b>	100	104.2	108.7	113.3	117.8	123.0	128.0	132.2	135.4	135.5	136.0	137.9
<b>UK</b>	100	99.4	100.8	93.8	98.0	99.4	102.9	104.8	92.9	84.4	90.2	91.2
<b>EU-27</b>	100	102.0	104.4	104.6	107.1	109.5	112.0	115.1	115.4	113.6	116.2	117.9

Table 2. Employment rate (15 to 64 years)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	56.3	56.2	56.2	57.0	56.8	56.9	57.3	57.3	56.7	55.4	55.4	55.8
<b>Slovakia</b>	56.8	56.8	56.8	57.7	57.0	57.7	59.4	60.7	62.3	60.2	58.8	59.5
<b>Spain</b>	56.3	57.8	58.5	59.8	61.1	63.3	64.8	65.6	64.3	59.8	58.6	57.7
<b>UK</b>	71.2	71.4	71.4	71.5	71.7	71.7	71.6	71.5	71.5	69.9	69.5	69.5
<b>EU-27</b>	62.2	62.6	62.4	62.6	63.0	63.4	64.4	65.3	65.8	64.5	64.1	64.3

Table 3. Employment rate (15 to 64 years): males

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	63.1	62.9	62.9	63.5	63.1	63.1	63.8	64.0	63.0	61.1	60.4	61.2
<b>Slovakia</b>	62.2	62.0	62.4	63.3	63.2	64.6	67.0	68.4	70.0	67.6	65.2	66.3
<b>Spain</b>	71.2	72.5	72.6	73.2	73.8	75.2	76.1	76.2	73.5	66.6	64.7	63.2
<b>UK</b>	77.8	78.0	77.7	77.8	77.9	77.7	77.5	77.5	77.3	74.8	74.5	74.5
<b>EU-27</b>	70.8	70.9	70.4	70.3	70.4	70.8	71.6	72.5	72.7	70.7	70.1	70.1

Table 4. Employment rate (15 to 64 years): females

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	49.7	49.8	49.8	50.9	50.7	51.0	51.1	50.9	50.6	49.9	50.6	50.6
<b>Slovakia</b>	51.5	51.8	51.4	52.2	50.9	50.9	51.9	53.0	54.6	52.8	52.3	52.7
<b>Spain</b>	41.3	43.1	44.4	46.3	48.3	51.2	53.2	54.7	54.9	52.8	52.3	52.0
<b>UK</b>	64.7	65.0	65.2	65.3	65.6	65.8	65.8	65.5	65.8	65.0	64.6	64.5
<b>EU-27</b>	53.7	54.3	54.4	54.9	55.5	56.1	57.2	58.2	58.9	58.4	58.2	58.5

Table 5. Employment rate (15 to 24 years)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	33.5	30.7	28.5	26.8	23.6	21.8	21.7	21.0	20.0	18.1	18.3	18.3
<b>Slovakia</b>	29.0	27.7	27.0	27.4	26.3	25.6	25.9	27.6	26.2	22.8	20.6	20.2
<b>Spain</b>	32.5	34.0	34.0	34.4	35.2	38.3	39.5	39.1	36.0	28.0	24.9	21.9
<b>UK</b>	56.6	56.6	56.2	55.4	55.6	54.4	53.8	52.9	52.4	48.4	47.6	46.4
<b>EU-27</b>	37.5	37.5	36.7	36.1	36.1	36.0	36.6	37.3	37.4	35.0	34.0	33.6

Table 6. Employment rate (24 to 54 years)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	73.0	73.1	73.0	73.7	73.6	73.7	74.2	74.6	74.4	72.9	72.5	73.1
<b>Slovakia</b>	74.7	74.8	75.0	76.0	74.7	75.3	77.2	78.0	80.1	77.8	75.8	76.5
<b>Spain</b>	68.4	69.5	70.2	71.4	72.7	74.4	75.8	76.8	75.3	70.7	69.6	68.7
<b>UK</b>	80.2	80.4	80.4	80.6	80.9	81.2	81.2	81.3	81.4	80.2	79.8	80.1
<b>EU-27</b>	76.0	76.2	76.0	76.2	76.7	77.0	78.1	79.0	79.5	78.0	77.6	77.6

Table 7. Employment rate (55 to 64 years)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	22.2	23.5	25.6	28.9	31.1	33.0	33.6	33.1	31.4	32.8	34.4	35.8
<b>Slovakia</b>	21.3	22.4	22.8	24.6	26.8	30.3	33.1	35.6	39.2	39.5	40.5	41.4
<b>Spain</b>	37.0	39.2	39.6	40.7	41.3	43.1	44.1	44.6	45.6	44.1	43.6	44.5
<b>UK</b>	50.7	52.2	53.4	55.4	56.2	56.8	57.3	57.4	58.0	57.5	57.1	56.7
<b>EU-27</b>	36.9	37.7	38.5	40.0	40.7	42.3	43.5	44.6	45.6	46.0	46.3	47.4

Table 8. Part-time workers in percentage of total employment

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	3.5	3.6	3.6	4.4	4.7	4.1	4.0	4.1	4.6	5.6	5.8	6.8
<b>Slovakia</b>	2.1	2.3	1.9	2.4	2.7	2.5	2.8	2.6	2.7	3.6	3.9	4.1
<b>Spain</b>	7.9	8.0	8.0	8.2	8.7	12.4	12.0	11.8	12.0	12.8	13.3	13.8
<b>UK</b>	25.1	25.0	25.3	25.6	25.7	25.2	25.3	25.2	25.3	26.1	26.9	26.8
<b>EU-27</b>	16.2	16.2	16.2	16.5	17.2	17.8	18.1	18.2	18.2	18.8	19.2	19.5

Table 9. Part-time workers in percentage of total employment: males

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	2.0	2.2	2.3	2.8	3.2	2.7	2.6	2.8	3.3	3.9	3.9	4.7
<b>Slovakia</b>	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.1	1.4	2.7	2.8	2.8
<b>Spain</b>	2.8	2.8	2.6	2.6	2.8	4.5	4.3	4.1	4.2	4.9	5.4	6.0
<b>UK</b>	8.9	9.0	9.6	10.1	10.3	10.4	10.6	10.8	11.3	11.8	12.6	12.7
<b>EU-27</b>	6.5	6.6	6.6	6.7	7.1	7.4	7.7	7.7	7.8	8.3	8.7	9.0

Table 10. Part-time workers in percentage of total employment: females

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	5.2	5.2	5.1	6.2	6.3	5.8	5.6	5.8	6.2	7.5	8.0	9.2
<b>Slovakia</b>	3.1	3.5	2.7	3.8	4.2	4.1	4.7	4.5	4.2	4.7	5.4	5.9
<b>Spain</b>	16.8	16.8	16.8	17.1	17.9	24.2	23.2	22.8	22.7	23.0	23.2	23.5
<b>UK</b>	44.4	43.9	43.8	43.9	43.8	42.6	42.5	42.2	41.8	42.5	43.3	43.1
<b>EU-27</b>	28.9	28.6	28.5	29.0	30.0	30.9	31.2	31.2	31.1	31.5	31.9	32.1

Table 11. Percentage of employees with temporary contracts

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	7.1	7.5	7.3	7.5	6.8	7.0	6.7	7.3	7.9	8.5	9.7	8.9
<b>Slovakia</b>	4.8	4.9	4.9	4.9	5.5	5.0	5.1	5.1	4.7	4.4	5.8	6.6
<b>Spain</b>	32.2	32.2	31.8	31.8	32.5	33.3	34.0	31.7	29.3	25.4	24.9	25.3
<b>UK</b>	7.0	6.8	6.4	6.1	6.0	5.8	5.8	5.9	5.4	5.7	6.1	6.2
<b>EU-27</b>	12.3	12.4	12.3	12.7	13.3	14.0	14.5	14.6	14.2	13.6	14.0	14.1

Table 12. Percentage of employees with temporary contracts: males

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	7.7	8.1	7.9	8.3	7.5	7.6	7.4	7.7	8.7	9.0	10.1	9.4
<b>Slovakia</b>	5.1	5.1	5.2	5.3	6.0	5.1	5.0	4.9	4.6	4.6	5.6	6.4
<b>Spain</b>	30.9	30.6	29.9	29.9	30.6	31.7	32.0	30.6	27.6	23.8	23.9	24.2
<b>UK</b>	6.1	6.0	5.7	5.4	5.5	5.3	5.2	5.3	4.9	5.3	5.8	5.9
<b>EU-27</b>	11.6	11.7	11.6	12.0	12.8	13.5	14.0	13.9	13.4	12.8	13.4	13.6

Table 13. Percentage of employees with temporary contracts: females

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	6.5	6.8	6.6	6.7	6.1	6.4	6.0	6.8	7.0	7.8	9.2	8.4
<b>Slovakia</b>	4.5	4.7	4.5	4.6	5.1	4.9	5.2	5.3	4.8	4.1	5.9	6.9
<b>Spain</b>	34.2	34.7	34.8	34.6	35.2	35.7	36.7	33.1	31.4	27.3	26.1	26.6
<b>UK</b>	7.9	7.6	7.2	6.9	6.6	6.3	6.5	6.4	6.0	6.1	6.5	6.5
<b>EU-27</b>	13.0	13.3	13.2	13.4	13.9	14.5	15.1	15.3	15.0	14.5	14.6	14.6

Table 14. Unemployment rate

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	6.4	5.7	5.8	5.9	6.1	7.2	7.5	7.4	7.8	10.0	11.2	10.9
<b>Slovakia</b>	18.8	19.3	18.7	17.6	18.2	16.3	13.4	11.1	9.5	12.0	14.4	13.5
<b>Spain</b>	11.7	10.5	11.4	11.4	10.9	9.2	8.5	8.3	11.3	18.0	20.1	21.7
<b>UK</b>	5.4	5.0	5.1	5.0	4.7	4.8	5.4	5.3	5.6	7.6	7.8	8.0
<b>EU-27</b>	8.8	8.6	8.9	9.1	9.2	9.0	8.3	7.2	7.1	9.0	9.7	9.7

Table 15. Unemployment rate: males

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	7.0	6.3	6.2	6.1	6.1	7.0	7.2	7.1	7.6	10.3	11.6	11.0
<b>Slovakia</b>	18.9	19.8	18.6	17.4	17.4	15.5	12.3	9.9	8.4	11.4	14.2	13.5
<b>Spain</b>	8.2	7.5	8.2	8.4	8.1	7.1	6.3	6.4	10.1	17.7	19.7	21.2
<b>UK</b>	5.9	5.5	5.7	5.5	5.1	5.2	5.8	5.6	6.1	8.6	8.6	8.7
<b>EU-27</b>	7.8	7.7	8.2	8.5	8.6	8.4	7.6	6.6	6.7	9.1	9.7	9.6

Table 16. Unemployment rate: females

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	5.6	5.0	5.4	5.6	6.1	7.4	7.8	7.7	8.1	9.7	10.7	10.9
<b>Slovakia</b>	18.6	18.7	18.7	17.8	19.2	17.2	14.7	12.7	10.9	12.8	14.6	13.6
<b>Spain</b>	17.0	15.1	16.2	15.8	14.8	12.2	11.6	10.9	13.0	18.4	20.5	22.2
<b>UK</b>	4.8	4.4	4.5	4.3	4.2	4.3	4.9	5.0	5.1	6.4	6.8	7.3
<b>EU-27</b>	10.0	9.6	9.8	9.9	10.1	9.8	9.0	7.9	7.6	9.0	9.6	9.8

Table 17. Unemployment rate: below 25 years

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	12.4	11.3	12.7	13.4	15.5	19.4	19.1	18.0	19.9	26.5	26.6	26.1
<b>Slovakia</b>	36.9	39.2	37.7	33.4	33.1	30.1	26.6	20.3	19.0	27.3	33.6	33.2
<b>Spain</b>	22.9	21.0	22.2	22.6	22.0	19.7	17.9	18.2	24.6	37.8	41.6	46.4
<b>UK</b>	12.2	11.7	12.0	12.2	12.1	12.8	14.0	14.3	15.0	19.1	19.6	21.1
<b>EU-27</b>	17.5	17.2	17.9	18.6	19.0	18.8	17.5	15.7	15.8	20.1	21.1	21.4

Table 18. Unemployment rate: 25 to 74 years

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	5.4	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.2	6.1	6.5	6.5	6.9	8.7	10.0	9.8
<b>Slovakia</b>	15.3	15.7	15.3	14.9	16.0	14.4	11.7	10.0	8.4	10.4	12.5	11.7
<b>Spain</b>	9.8	8.8	9.8	9.8	9.4	7.7	7.3	7.0	9.8	15.9	18.0	19.4
<b>UK</b>	4.2	3.8	3.9	3.6	3.3	3.3	3.8	3.6	3.9	5.5	5.8	5.8
<b>EU-27</b>	7.5	7.3	7.7	7.8	7.9	7.7	7.1	6.1	6.0	7.6	8.3	8.3

Table 19. Long-term unemployment in percentage of active population

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	3.1	2.6	2.5	2.4	2.7	3.2	3.4	3.4	3.6	4.2	5.5	5.2
<b>Slovakia</b>	10.3	11.3	12.2	11.4	11.8	11.7	10.2	8.3	6.6	6.5	9.2	9.2
<b>Spain</b>	4.9	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.5	2.2	1.8	1.7	2.0	4.3	7.3	9.0
<b>UK</b>	1.4	1.3	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.9	2.5	2.7
<b>EU-27</b>	4.1	3.9	4.0	4.2	4.3	4.1	3.7	3.1	2.6	3.0	3.9	4.1



Table 20. Activity rate (15 to 64 years)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	60.1	59.6	59.7	60.6	60.5	61.3	62.0	61.9	61.5	61.6	62.4	62.7
<b>Slovakia</b>	69.9	70.4	69.9	70.0	69.7	68.9	68.6	68.3	68.8	68.4	68.7	68.9
<b>Spain</b>	65.4	64.7	66.2	67.6	68.7	69.7	70.8	71.6	72.6	73.0	73.4	73.7
<b>UK</b>	75.5	75.3	75.3	75.3	75.3	75.4	75.7	75.5	75.8	75.7	75.5	75.7
<b>EU-27</b>	68.6	68.6	68.6	68.9	69.3	69.7	70.2	70.4	70.8	70.9	71.0	71.2

Table 21. Activity rate (15 to 64 years): males

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	67.9	67.2	67.1	67.6	67.2	67.9	68.7	69.0	68.3	68.2	68.3	68.8
<b>Slovakia</b>	76.8	77.4	76.7	76.7	76.5	76.5	76.4	75.9	76.4	76.3	76.1	76.7
<b>Spain</b>	78.8	78.4	79.1	80.0	80.4	80.9	81.3	81.4	81.8	81.0	80.7	80.4
<b>UK</b>	82.9	82.6	82.4	82.4	82.1	82.0	82.3	82.2	82.4	82.0	81.7	81.7
<b>EU-27</b>	77.2	77.0	76.8	76.9	77.0	77.3	77.6	77.7	77.9	77.8	77.6	77.6

Table 22. Activity rate (15 to 64 years): females

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	52.7	52.4	52.7	53.9	54.0	55.1	55.5	55.1	55.0	55.3	56.7	56.8
<b>Slovakia</b>	63.2	63.7	63.2	63.5	63.0	61.5	60.9	60.8	61.3	60.6	61.3	61.0
<b>Spain</b>	52.0	50.9	53.1	55.1	56.8	58.3	60.2	61.4	63.2	64.8	65.9	67.0
<b>UK</b>	68.2	68.0	68.3	68.3	68.5	68.8	69.2	69.0	69.4	69.5	69.4	69.7
<b>EU-27</b>	60.1	60.2	60.5	61.0	61.7	62.2	62.9	63.2	63.7	64.1	64.4	64.9

Table 23. Unemployment trap

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	-	71.00	68.00	66.00	67.00	62.00	78.00	81.00	80.00	81.00	82.00	-
<b>Slovakia</b>	-	74.00	72.00	71.00	43.00	43.00	43.00	55.00	55.00	42.00	42.00	-
<b>Spain</b>	-	80.00	80.00	80.00	80.00	80.00	80.00	81.00	81.00	81.00	83.00	-
<b>UK</b>	-	68.00	68.00	69.00	68.00	68.00	68.00	68.00	65.00	65.00	64.00	-
<b>EU-27</b>	-	74.51	73.57	74.03	73.60	74.78	75.54	75.08	74.73	75.39	75.42	-

Table 24. Mean equivalised net income (EUR)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Hungary</b>	-	-	-	-	-	3,915	4,586	4,363	4,827	5,201	4,631	-
<b>Slovakia</b>	-	-	-	-	-	3,115	3,804	4,378	5,180	6,290	6,785	-
<b>Spain</b>	9,762	10,602	-	-	11,744	12,176	12,926	13,654	14,583	14,948	14,747	-
<b>UK</b>	17,813	20,441	-	-	-	22,519	22,780	24,823	22,805	19,391	20,546	-
<b>EU-27</b>	-	-	-	-	-	14,556	14,718	15,924	16,777	16,832	16,955	-
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011

Table 25. Mean equivalised net income (EUR): males

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Hungary	-	-	-	-	-	3,958	4,616	4,403	4,899	5,265	4,679	-
Slovakia	-	-	-	-	-	3,176	3,846	4,497	5,306	6,421	6,943	-
Spain	9,993	10,839	-	-	11,898	12,415	13,184	13,930	14,849	15,186	14,921	-
UK	18,333	21,085	-	-	-	23,164	23,455	25,493	23,485	19,771	21,044	-
EU-27	-	-	-	-	-	14,934	15,084	16,351	17,222	17,213	17,336	-

Table 26. Mean equivalised net income (EUR): females

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Hungary	-	-	-	-	-	3,877	4,560	4,328	4,762	5,144	4,587	-
Slovakia	-	-	-	-	-	3,060	3,766	4,270	5,068	6,167	6,635	-
Spain	9,539	10,374	-	-	11,595	11,943	12,676	13,385	14,323	14,716	14,578	-
UK	17,336	19,857	-	-	-	21,910	22,135	24,175	22,141	19,022	20,058	-
EU-27	-	-	-	-	-	14,197	14,369	15,516	16,352	16,469	16,590	-

Table 27. Mean equivalised net income (EUR): 18-24 years

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Hungary	-	-	-	-	-	3,963	4,335	4,072	4,398	4,781	4,324	-
Slovakia	-	-	-	-	-	3,084	3,880	4,308	5,225	6,079	6,441	-
Spain	-	-	-	-	11,310	11,858	12,332	13,215	13,629	13,898	13,561	-
UK	-	-	-	-	-	19,853	20,946	22,905	20,948	16,963	18,700	-
EU-27	-	-	-	-	-	12,808	13,074	14,083	14,799	14,677	14,965	-

Table 28. Mean equivalised net income (EUR): 25-54 years

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Hungary	-	-	-	-	-	4,058	4,923	4,581	5,020	5,371	4,784	-
Slovakia	-	-	-	-	-	3,299	3,959	4,715	5,584	6,765	7,306	-
Spain	-	-	-	-	12,700	13,270	14,086	14,697	15,737	16,067	15,596	-
UK	-	-	-	-	-	25,484	25,477	27,728	25,443	21,670	22,566	-
EU-27	-	-	-	-	-	15,502	15,670	16,902	17,692	17,708	17,685	-

Table 29. Mean equivalised net income (EUR): 55-64 years

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Hungary	-	-	-	-	-	4,300	5,004	4,879	5,353	5,835	5,078	-
Slovakia	-	-	-	-	-	3,397	4,226	4,679	5,458	6,810	7,387	-
Spain	-	-	-	-	12,300	12,805	13,721	14,625	15,677	15,966	16,166	-
UK	-	-	-	-	-	24,011	24,639	26,919	24,470	21,116	22,608	-
EU-27	-	-	-	-	-	16,279	16,398	17,948	18,791	18,779	19,029	-



# ABOUT NEUJOBS

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## “Creating and adapting jobs in Europe in the context of a socio-ecological transition”

NEUJOBS is a research project financed by the European Commission under the 7th Framework Programme. Its objective is to analyse likely future developments in the European labour market(s), in view of four major transitions that will impact employment - particularly certain sectors of the labour force and the economy - and European societies in general. What are these transitions? The first is the **socio-ecological transition**: a comprehensive change in the patterns of social organisation and culture, production and consumption that will drive humanity beyond the current industrial model towards a more sustainable future. The second is the **societal transition**, produced by a combination of population ageing, low fertility rates, changing family structures, urbanisation and growing female employment. The third transition concerns **new territorial dynamics** and the balance between agglomeration and dispersion forces. The fourth is a **skills (upgrading)** transition and its likely consequences for employment and (in)equality.

### ○ **Research Areas**

NEUJOBS consists of 23 work packages organised in six groups:

**Group 1** provides a conceptualisation of the **socio-ecological transition** that constitutes the basis for the other work-packages.

**Group 2** considers in detail the main drivers for change and the resulting relevant policies. Regarding the drivers we analyse the discourse on **job quality**, **educational** needs, changes in the organisation of production and in the employment structure. Regarding relevant policies, research in this group assesses the impact of changes in **family composition**, the effect of **labour relations** and the issue of financing transition in an era of budget constraints. The regional dimension is taken into account, also in relation to **migration** flows.

**Group 3** models economic and employment development on the basis of the inputs provided in the previous work packages.

**Group 4** examines possible employment trends in key sectors of the economy in the light of the transition processes: energy, health care and goods/services for the **ageing** population, **care services**, housing and transport.

**Group 5** focuses on impact groups, namely those vital for employment growth in the EU: **women**, the **elderly**, immigrants and **Roma**.

**Group 6** is composed of transversal work packages: implications of NEUJOBS findings for EU policy-making, dissemination, management and coordination.

For more information, visit: [www.neujobs.eu](http://www.neujobs.eu)

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