



# The Emergence of a Working Poor: Labour Markets, Neoliberalisation and Diverse Economies in Post-socialist Cities

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the transformations of urban labour markets in two central European cities: Bratislava, Slovakia and Kraków, Poland. It highlights the emergence of in-work poverty and labour market segmentation, which together are leading to a reconfiguration of the livelihoods and economic practices of urban households. The focus of the paper is on the growing phenomenon of insecure, poor quality, contingent labour. It examines the ways in which those who find themselves in, or on the margins of, contingent and insecure labour markets, sustain their livelihoods. We ask how such workers and their households negotiate the segmentation of the labour market, the erosion of employment security and the emergence of in-work poverty and explore the diverse economic practices of those who cannot rely solely on formal employment to ensure social reproduction. Further, we assess the articulations between labour market participation and exclusion, and other spheres of economic life, including informal and illegal labour, household social networks, state benefits and the use of material assets. We argue that post-socialist cities are seeing a reconfiguration of class processes, as the materialities and subjectivities of class are remade and as the meaning of work and the livelihoods different forms of labour can sustain are changing.

**Keywords:** post-socialism, labour markets, poverty, cities, Poland, Slovakia

## Introduction

Since the collapse of state socialism in East-Central Europe (ECE) there has been an extensive process of labour market transformation. Relatively secure and singular employment in state-owned enterprises has given way to greater labour market differentiation and uncertainty and increased unemployment. Labour shedding from former state-owned industries has been extensive as de-industrialisation has proceeded (Smith 2000). But industrial decline has been accompanied both by the growth of new forms of employment and by increasing non-participation (Rainnie, Smith and Swain 2002). Sectoral restructuring has been connected to an expansion of service sector activity, particularly in the major cities where it has created new jobs in both the highly paid finance and other intermediary sectors and a raft of less secure and low-paid employment in lower status sectors. Many of these new growth sectors have been allied to changes in employment contracts and security, resulting in increasing insecurity in the labour market.

These transformations have exacerbated the segmentation of ECE labour markets, creating several distinct labour markets characterised by very different pay, employment and status conditions and reinforcing social divisions. This paper examines the growing phenomenon of insecure, poor quality, contingent labour (Peck and Theodore 2001) and the diversification of work amongst poorer households in post-socialist cities. We explore the ways in which labour market restructuring and the precariousness of household livelihoods lead those who would traditionally have been seen as workers into a diversity of class positions (Gibson and Graham 1992; Smith and Stenning 2006). These workers negotiate formal and informal employment, domestic and other unpaid labour and forms of self-employment and entrepreneurship. These shifting forms of labour remake the materialities and subjectivities of class, as the meanings of work are also remade (see, for example, Bauman 1998; McDowell 2003; Stenning 2005b).

Whilst labour market segmentation and change are well documented in North America and Western Europe (Peck 1996), they are a more recent and less-researched phenomenon in the post-socialist world. In this paper, we explore the variety of forms of labour market integration in two major central European cities—Kraków, Poland and Bratislava, Slovakia—and examine the ways in which those who find themselves in, or on the margins of, contingent and insecure labour markets, sustain their livelihoods. We ask how such workers and their households negotiate the segmentation of the labour market, the erosion of employment security and the emergence of in-work poverty and explore the diverse economic practices of those for whom formal employment does not provide adequate enough income to ensure social reproduction. In this way, we assess the articulations between labour market participation and other spheres of economic life, including

informal and illegal labour, household social networks, state benefits and the use of material assets.

The paper is organised as follows. In the next section we examine the key labour market dynamics in the post-socialist countries of ECE, highlighting increasing segmentation and neoliberalisation. We then discuss the dimensions of these changes in the context of the labour markets of the two cities in which we have conducted our research. The third section explores the working lives of residents in two housing districts. After exploring the experience of employment insecurity and the emergence of a “working poor”, we document the ways in which households engage in informal and illegal employment, combine multiple jobs within the household, and connect their employment to other spheres of their household economies. We highlight the need to understand the complex articulations between households’ labour market positions and their wider economic practices in order to fully appreciate how they struggle to create sustainable livelihoods in the face of dramatic employment change.

The research draws upon fieldwork in two of the largest “socialist-era” housing districts in Central Europe: Nowa Huta in Kraków, Poland and Petržalka in Bratislava, Slovakia (Figures 1 and 2). Built during the post-war period, these housing districts became home to largely in-migrating populations of relatively young families, who had continuing connections to rural and (later) wider-city economies alike. Both districts were established at the height of Central European state socialism, and both are located adjacent to primary urban centres. In this sense they offer exemplary case studies of urban settlements established during the state socialist era. The research has used a multi-method approach. While resources and accurate population records prevented the undertaking of a fully random representative sample survey, our approach was to select “representative” neighbourhoods in each district on the basis of a range of criteria, including relative levels of social exclusion (from analysis of census and housing authority data), detailed field observation, location and accessibility in relation to the main city, and age of construction. Within each neighbourhood, individual housing blocks were chosen to reflect the range of socio-economic situations, including levels of poverty, block size, and demographic composition. Within each selected block we then, first, undertook a face-to-face questionnaire with a total of 350 randomly selected households. A selection of around 70 households was then identified for follow-up, in-depth interviews. We used a number of intersecting criteria to identify such households, starting with household income to ensure a range of household material positions. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours and many were conducted with more than one household member. The questionnaire and interview work was complemented with ethnographic research, including observations in street markets, soup

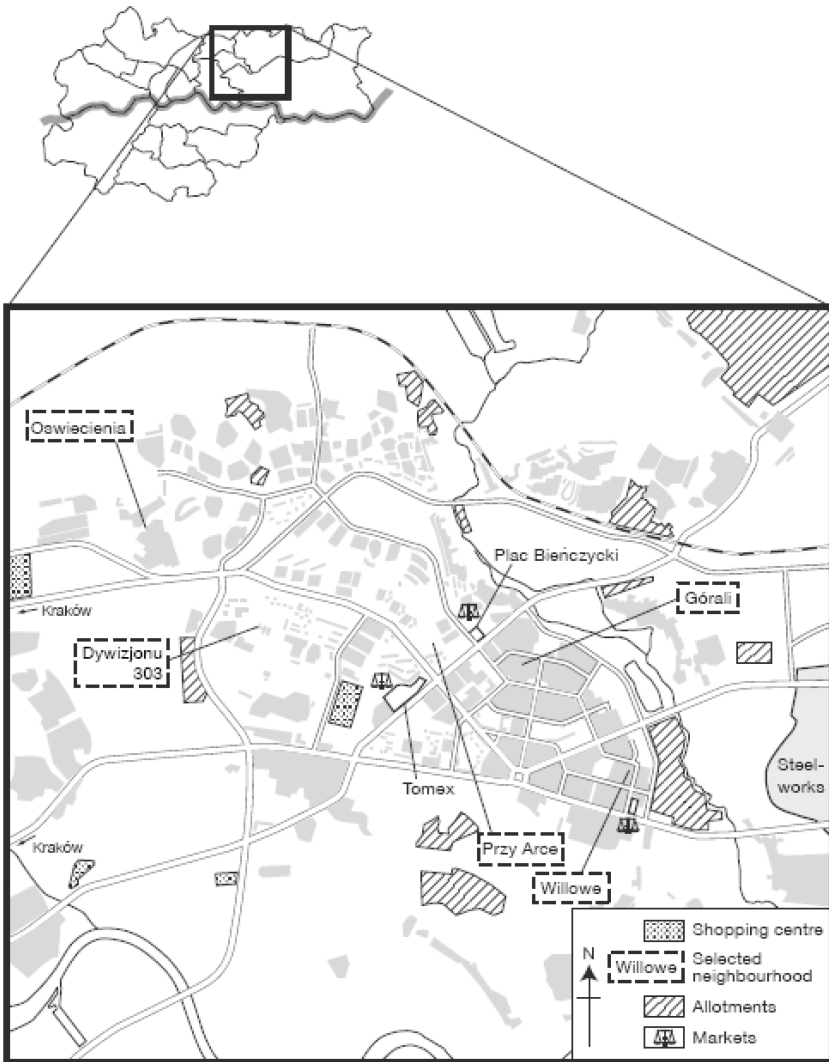


Figure 1: Map of Nowa Huta

kitchens, homeless hostels, pensioners' clubs, allotments, playgrounds and other key community sites, and with 90 semi-structured interviews, carried out with key informants to explore issues of social exclusion, policy measures, and institutional responses.

## Transformation and the Neo-liberalisation of Labour Markets

While the experience of work and employment restructuring varies geographically across ECE, a number of common labour market

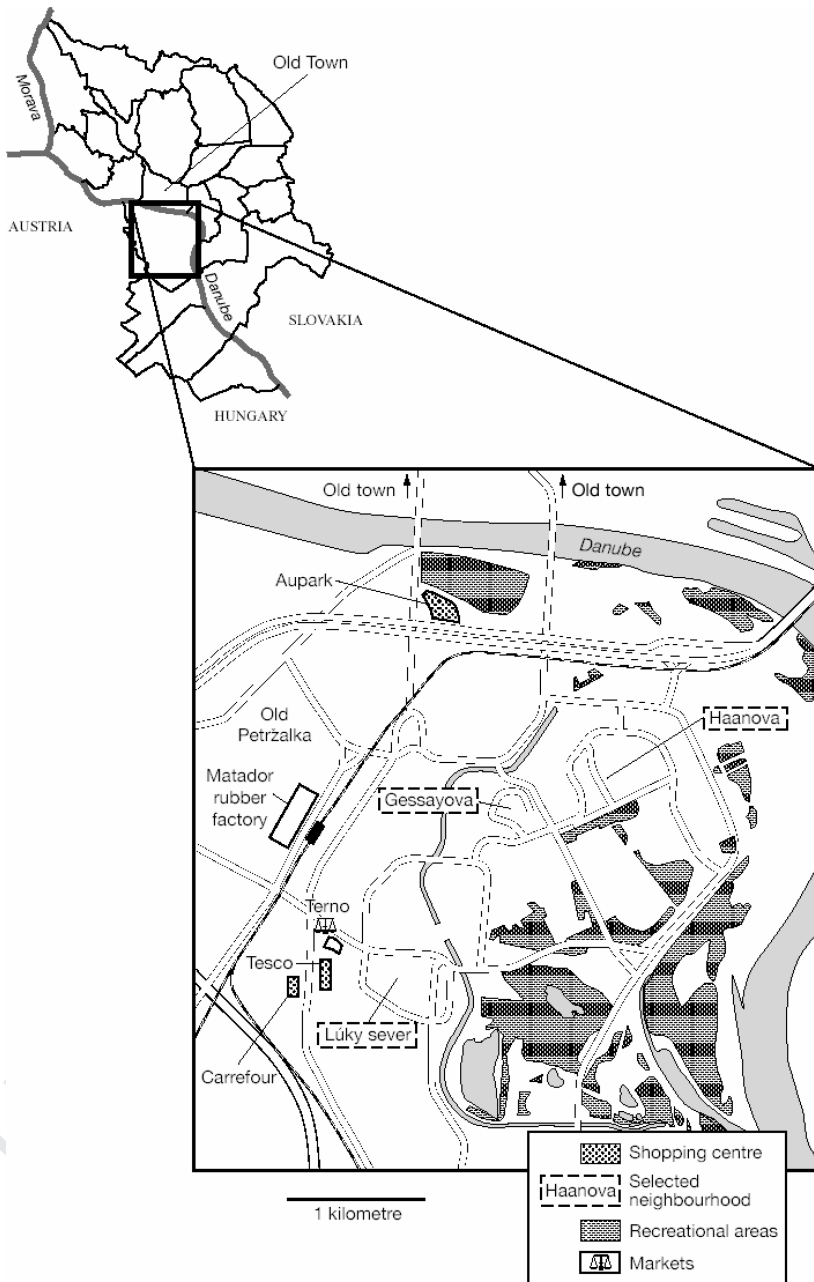


Figure 2: Map of Petržalka

trends are identifiable (Rainnie, Smith and Swain 2002). High levels of relatively secure employment under state socialism gave way to widespread official and/or hidden unemployment; job security has been replaced by greater job insecurity and employee representation has

**Table 1:** Average monthly gross wages in Slovakia and Poland (euros)

	Slovakia (2005)	Bratislava (2005)	Poland (2006)	Kraków (2006)
Average wages	485	700	652	600
Financial intermediation	947	1049	1254	971
Hotels and restaurants	360	428	501	384

Source: Calculated from data provided by the Slovak Statistical Office and the Polish Central Statistical Office

weakened as political settlements shifted and trade unions declined; dependency on state-owned enterprises to provide not only a monetary wage, but also social amenities in kind (the social wage; Domański 1997), was replaced by greater differentials in the value of formal wages and, for the unemployed, reliance on low-value state benefits and on informal legal and illegal income-generating activities. What appeared previously as relatively singular labour markets, with an extremely dominant state sector and some additional activities on the margin (Smith and Stenning 2006) have become much more diverse and fragmented.

Four main interconnected processes have operated in the labour markets of the post-socialist world. First, post-socialist labour markets are characterised by a much more distinct set of segmentation processes than their state socialist predecessors (Pailhé 2003), although segmentation also existed under the previous system (Domański 1990). Labour market segmentation is occurring both between sectors and within them, leading to the emergence of a number of relatively distinct worlds of work. Segmentation between sectors is occurring as a result of the de-industrialisation of the economies of ECE and the attendant growth of financial, producer and basic service employment, particularly in major cities. Segmentation also involves an increased differentiation of the conditions of and remuneration for work within sectors, reflected in a polarisation of income (Milanovic 1999) and exemplified by average monthly wage levels in Slovakia and Poland (Table 1). In both countries, financial intermediation is the highest paid sector, whilst the lowest paid is hotels and restaurants. Both activities are increasingly concentrated in major urban areas—such as those we focus on here—leading to wage polarisation in cities.

Labour market segmentation has also been accompanied by a reconfiguration of gender and age differentials within the labour market. Women were often first to lose jobs and have found it more difficult to find new work, experiencing longer periods of unemployment (Hardy and Stenning 2002; Pine 1998). Generational differences have also emerged—at both ends of the age spectrum. Unemployment has been



1  
2  
3 persistently high amongst young people, including graduates, such that  
4 many of the young unemployed have never held formal employment. In  
5 both Poland and Slovakia in 2005, the unemployment rate amongst 15–  
6 24 year olds was approximately double the average rate (in Poland 36.9%  
7 against 18.1%; in Slovakia, 30.1% against 15.9%; Eurostat 2006b).  
8 Large numbers of older workers (over 50) have also been laid off, more  
9 often through early retirement than redundancy (Cazes and Nesporova  
10 2003a; Surdej 2004), and have found it difficult to re-enter the labour  
11 market (Junghans 2001; Stenning 2005a, 2005b, forthcoming).

12 Second, post-socialist labour markets have also become increasingly  
13 precarious as the commitment to full employment has given way  
14 to individualised employment relationships, the decline of collective  
15 representation, instability in working time and, in some cases, greater  
16 casualisation. Cazes and Nesporova (2003b:43) point to the increasing  
17 privatisation of employment, alongside “increasingly flexible forms  
18 of employment”. The uncertain legal status of temporary contracts,  
19 reflecting their relatively recent appearance in central European labour  
20 markets,<sup>1</sup> has seen employers resort to the increasing use of civil  
21 law<sup>2</sup> and self-employment contracts, enabling avoidance of health and  
22 safety responsibilities, regular pay increases and payment of social  
23 contributions, and to fire staff more easily (EIROnline 2002). Recent  
24 attempts to regulate temporary work and the appearance of global  
25 staffing agencies in the region (Coe, Johns and Ward 2006) suggest that  
26 this form of contingent labour will become more significant. Moves  
27 to increase labour market flexibility have also been associated with  
28 instability of job tenure, particularly in the new service sectors, and  
29 considerable levels of “multiple job holding”.

30 Third, non-participation, through labour market withdrawal and  
31 persistent unemployment, has increased (Cazes and Nesporova 2003b).  
32 Estimates vary but suggest that around 19 million jobs were lost in  
33 the early years of transition (Smith 2000). More recently, the return  
34 to positive economic growth has led to greater degrees of employment  
35 creation, but most economies in ECE have been unable to create jobs  
36 sufficient in number and location to balance employment losses. Indeed,  
37 there has been a general failure to tackle serious problems of long-term  
38 unemployment (Burns and Kowalski 2004). In 2005, in Poland, Hungary,  
39 the Czech Republic and Slovakia between 46 and 68% of the registered  
40 unemployed had been out of work for more than 12 months (OECD  
41 2006:269). In most countries, unemployment benefits are limited to  
42 6–12 months such that coverage rates are often as low as 25–30%  
43 of those unemployed (Cazes and Nesporova 2003b:116). The limiting of  
44 unemployment benefit is just one of the factors behind a marked growth  
45 in people leaving the workforce, either to become officially “inactive”  
46 or to exchange non-existent unemployment benefits for pensions or  
47 incapacity benefit. Echoing experiences in old industrial regions in

the UK (Beatty and Fothergill 2002), withdrawal from the labour market has become a key feature of labour market dynamics across ECE.

Fourth, persistently high levels of unemployment have provided a context for the neoliberalisation of labour market regulation and social welfare systems aimed at promoting flexibility (Jurajda and Mathernová 2004; Smith and Rochovská 2007; Surdej 2004). As a World Bank study has argued “EU countries may need to err on the side of greater flexibility and lower security. This may be the case for newer EU members in particular, because they have much poorer business environments, lower employment rates, and far greater disparities in employment” (Rashid, Rutkowski and Fretwell 2005:59). The report goes on to argue that any employment, even in low-paid jobs, is worthwhile, not least because “low paid workers are often secondary earners whose earning complement incomes of other family members. If this is the case, low pay does not necessarily imply poverty” (ibid:64), although the authors give no evidence to support this claim. High levels of unemployment at the national scale have therefore encouraged governments in the region to focus their attention on job creation without considering the quality of employment, in an echo of western “work first” policies (Peck and Theodore 2000).

In Poland and Slovakia,<sup>3</sup> the focus has been on reducing unemployment rates by cutting benefits, providing “incentives” to work, and labour market liberalisation through labour law reforms. This has been most clearly captured in the “work pays” slogan and liberalisation programme of labour market and social welfare reform of the former Dzurinda government in Slovakia (Barancová 2006; Fisher, Gould and Haughton 2007; Smith and Rochovská 2007), and the Polish government’s 2002 “Entrepreneurship, Development, Work” programme, including its “First Work” initiative and its plan to ease the Labour Code (Chancellery of the Prime Minister 2002), making it easier to both hire and fire workers. In Poland, whilst successive governments, on the left and right, did move to make the Labour Code more flexible and to control government spending, this was associated, in the 2003 Hausner Plan,<sup>4</sup> with attempts to better target key social benefits (Millard 2006) and to develop more effective labour market institutions (EIROnline 2004). More recently, elections in both Poland and Slovakia have encouraged a tempering of welfare reductions and labour market flexibilisation as new governments have focused on a partial rejection of the singularly neoliberal state (Millard 2006; Smith and Rochovská 2007).

In the urban areas that form the focus of this research, the key labour market issue has not however been unemployment—in Bratislava and Kraków unemployment rates were 3% and 7%, respectively in 2006, compared to national rates of between 13% and 15%. Rather, the key issue has been the quality and security of employment, connected to



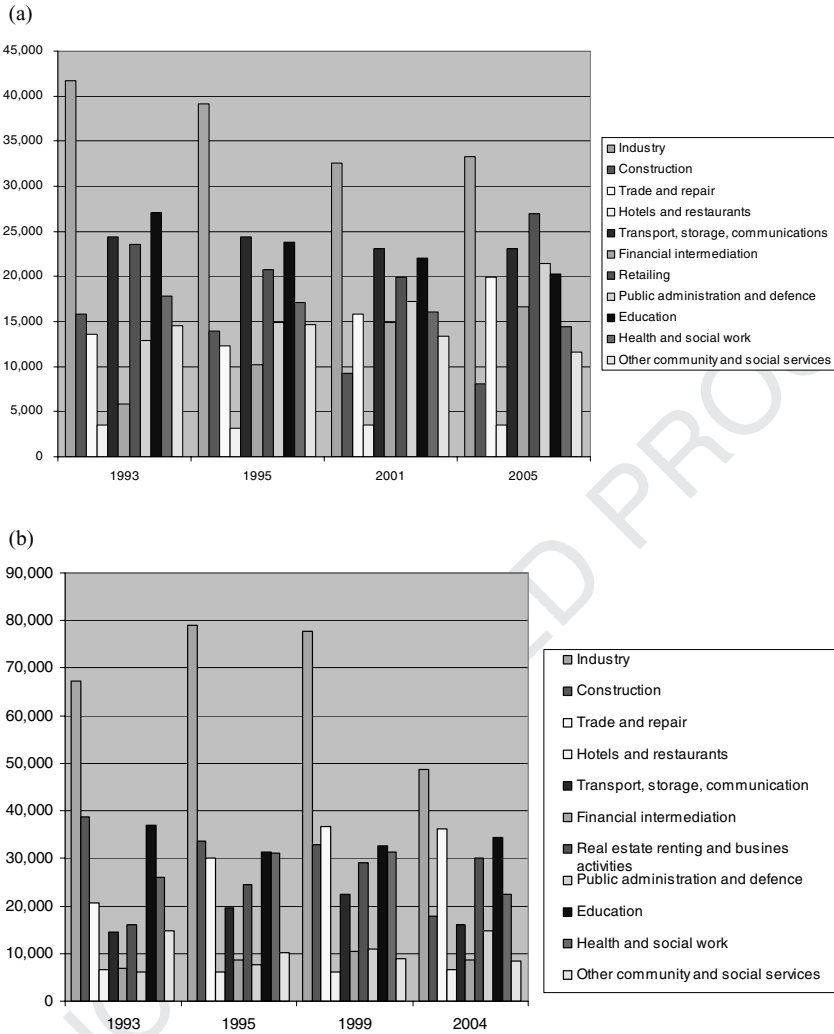


Figure 3: Sectoral employment change, Bratislava (a) and Kraków (b), 1993, 1995, 2001 and 2005 (source: Slovak Statistical Office, Polish Statistical Office)

the emergence of in-work poverty. The “working poor” is a relatively new phenomenon in the post-socialist world, and a largely urban one, reflecting the segmentation of urban labour markets. In both cities, there has been a notable process of labour market restructuring since the early 1990s (Figure 3). This has involved a decline in employment in manufacturing and construction and a dramatic growth in tertiary sectors.<sup>5</sup> Particular growth was witnessed in retail and wholesale and in financial intermediation and real estate. These growth sectors are characterised by markedly different wage levels (see Table 1).

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2  
3 The emergence of secondary labour markets with pay levels far  
4 below the labour market average raises critical questions about the  
5 ability of jobs in these occupations to provide a living wage and to  
6 sustain household livelihoods on the basis of formal employment alone,  
7 particularly in such high-cost cities.<sup>6</sup> In order to understand how social  
8 reproduction is attempted within poor households all forms of labour  
9 need to be explored, taking analysis into wider realms of commodified  
10 and non-commodified work.

### 11 12 13 **Negotiating Segmented Labour Markets and the** 14 **Emergence of In-Work Poverty**

15 Despite the existence of low levels of unemployment in Bratislava and  
16 Kraków, exclusion from the labour market remained an important issue  
17 for many households involved in this research. In 2005, unemployment  
18 levels among surveyed households averaged 11% of the total sampled  
19 population in Petržalka and 9% in Nowa Huta, higher than the cities'  
20 averages. The incidence of unemployment was significantly higher  
21 among those living in surveyed households with equivalised incomes  
22 below 60% of the regional median (a typical measure of households  
23 "at risk" of poverty), and much lower in the highest income group  
24 (Table 2). Consequently, unemployment is very closely related to  
25 poverty. Not only are benefit levels generally very low, but in most  
26 instances are only paid for the first six months of unemployment.  
27 In Petržalka, 31 of the 150 surveyed households had at least one  
28 unemployed household member, yet just four households had income  
29 from unemployment benefit and in Nowa Huta, 35 of the 200 surveyed  
30 households had at least one unemployed household member yet just six  
31 households had income from unemployment benefit.

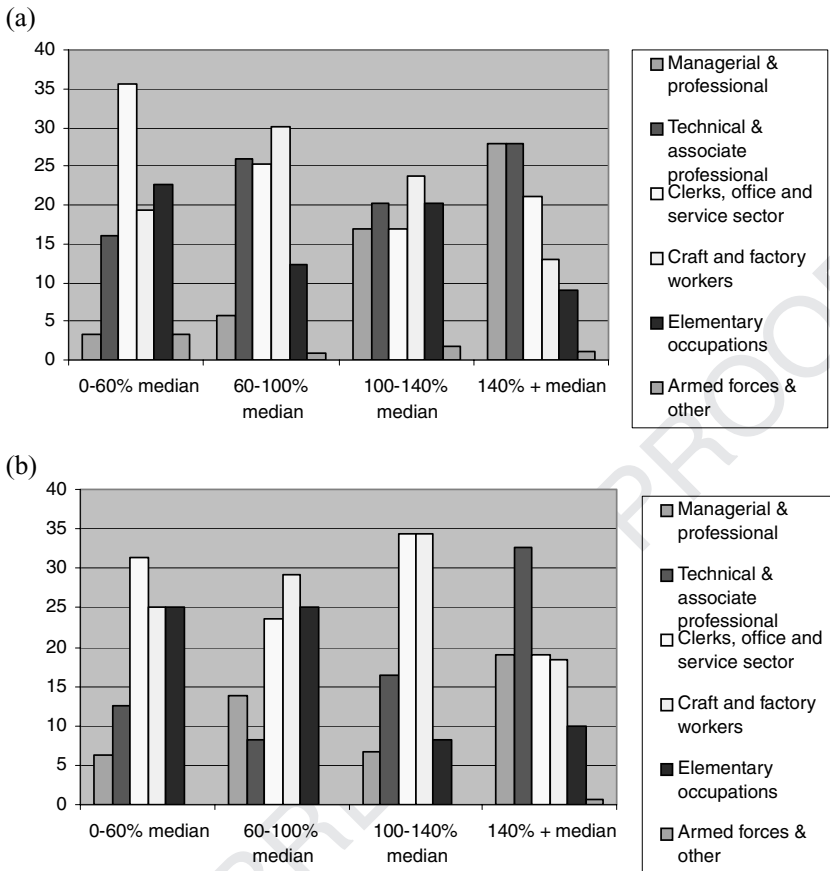
32 Around one-third of members of households "at risk" of poverty  
33 (with equivalised incomes below 60% of the regional median) were *in*  
34 *employment* in both Petržalka and Nowa Huta, suggesting the existence  
35 of high levels of "in work poverty" (Table 2). Those "at risk" of  
36 poverty tend to occupy jobs characterised by low pay in lower skill,  
37 lower status service sector and elementary occupations. Over half of  
38 adults living in surveyed households in both districts with the lowest  
39 incomes, and therefore at risk of poverty, worked in basic service  
40 sector jobs and "elementary" occupations (cleaners, security guards  
41 etc) (Figure 4). At the other extreme, over half of adults living in  
42 surveyed households in the highest income group worked in managerial,  
43 professional and technical jobs. Average monthly equivalised household  
44 income was lowest among surveyed households in both Petržalka and  
45 Nowa Huta, with members employed in elementary occupations, clerks,  
46 office and service sector jobs, and craft and factory worker occupations  
47 (Table 3).

**Table 2:** Employment structure of households in Petržalka and Nowa Huta relative to “at risk” of poverty levels (% figures relate to proportion of household members in each income group)

	<b>Below 60% of median income (%)</b>	<b>61–100% of median income (%)</b>	<b>101–140% of median income (%)</b>	<b>Over 140% of median income (%)</b>
<b>Petržalka</b>				
Employed	32.4	45.4	58.8	72.2
Self-employed	2.8	5.7	5.0	6.1
Carer	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Not working for health reasons	2.8	0.6	0.0	0.0
Maternity/paternity leave	5.6	5.7	1.3	3.5
Studying	12.7	9.8	7.5	4.3
Unemployed	31.0	8.0	5.0	0.9
Retired but working	2.8	2.3	5.0	4.3
Retired	5.6	16.7	15.0	2.6
Studying and working	0.0	1.7	0.0	5.2
Other	4.2	4.0	1.3	0.9
Total ( <i>n</i> )	71	174	80	115
<b>Nowa Huta</b>				
Employed	27.5	44.0	48.0	55.7
Self-employed	0.0	7.8	2.9	8.6
Carer	0.0	1.7	2.0	0.0
Not working for health reasons	11.7	6.0	7.8	3.8
Maternity/paternity leave	2.0	0.9	1.0	1.6
Studying	3.9	3.4	11.7	3.8
Unemployed	39.2	12.9	2.9	2.2
Retired but working	0.0	0.9	0.0	4.3
Retired	9.8	19.8	20.6	16.2
Studying and working	0.0	0.9	0.0	3.2
Other	5.9	1.7	2.9	0.5
Total ( <i>n</i> )	51	116	102	185

Source: household survey (2005)

Labour market segmentation and the emergence of in-work poverty are also associated with the feminisation of certain sectors of the labour market (Domański 2002). While the proportion of women in higher status jobs (managerial and professional, and technical and associate professional occupations) was slightly above the average in the two urban districts, there was a marked concentration of women in office and service sector occupations (retailing and hotels/restaurants) (Table 4). While some of these jobs may be of the kind referred to as “secondary earners” by Rashid, Rutkowski and Swain (2005), many are prime earners in a context in which male household members are out of work, or simply not present due to family break-up. For example, of the 41% of employed women in Petržalka who worked in basic service and elementary occupations, 36% of these women were living without



**Figure 4:** Occupational profile of household members relative to relative poverty risk levels, Petrzalka (a) and Nowa Huta (b), 2005 (source: household survey 2005)

a male partner in the same household. There is also marked evidence of particular problems experienced by young people within the labour market such as concentration in service and elementary occupations characterised by low pay levels and insecurity (69% of those 18–24 year olds living in Nowa Huta who were working).

Consequently, unemployed household members involved in our research tended to be either older men and women whose skills no longer matched the demands of the labour market or younger people who had struggled to make the transition from education to employment. In Nowa Huta, for example, Mrs Kwiatek<sup>7</sup> explained that her husband, a trained electrician, had been unable to find work because of the increasing conditions attached to employment: “an electrician always finds work but they’re always putting conditions, if it’s not age, then a driving license, if not a driving license then a computer”. Mr Kowalik, in his

**Table 3:** Average monthly income for households with different employment structures (equivalised Euros)

	Petrzalka	Nowa Huta
Managerial and professional	480	471
Technical and associate professional	380	374
Clerks, office and service sector	368	270
Craft and factory workers	363	276
Elementary occupations	359	230

Source: household survey (2005)

Note: data for “other” households are not included because of the low count.

**Table 4:** Gender and occupational structure in Nowa Huta and Petrzalka

	Nowa Huta		Petrzalka	
	Total (%)	Women (%)	Total (%)	Women (%)
Managerial and professional	14.4	15.9	14.5	16.9
Technical and associate professional	22.0	26.9	24.9	28.9
Clerks, office and service sector	24.4	31.7	23.3	33.1
Craft and factory workers	24.7	12.4	22.4	8.4
Elementary occupations	14.1	13.1	13.6	11.4
Armed forces and other	0.3	0.0	1.3	1.2
Total	291	145	317	166

Source: household survey (2005)

mid-twenties, was typical of the younger unemployed worker: “I’ve been registered with the labour office for two years . . . When they make an offer, because I’m without an occupation . . . then I go to the place of work and it turns out someone else has already started”.

The experience of long-term unemployment was common—for those with particular barriers to employment, such as single mothers and those with disabilities, unemployment occasionally stretched for five or more years. For the majority, unemployment benefits had long since ceased—older workers waited desperately for when they could start receiving their pensions and younger workers were forced to rely on their families, one-off emergency benefits or informal work (see below).

Others found themselves slipping between unemployment and insecure employment. Mrs Modzelewska, a single mother in her 30s, living in Nowa Huta and currently out of work, explained:

For now I don’t work, for some time, because it’s hard to find work. And before, yes, it worked well for me . . . then I worked as a sales assistant in a small bar, for more than a year, then I had my child and for maybe 5 years I was out of work. I worked in [a second-hand

clothes shop], but that was really brief. And I cleaned in a shop here in Huta. That was more than five years ago . . . it was very casual work.

Mrs Zajacová, a 50-year old female respondent living in Petržalka with her partner, her adult son and her former husband, represented another typical experience of more unstable work patterns:

I changed [my job] a lot. I lost my job in Pozemne Stavby [a construction company] in 1991, when the enterprise was closed. I got a redundancy payment and I was then registered at the labour office. Then I was employed in a kindergarten. I worked there for four years, but it was a very poor salary, so I decided to go to [work for a] private entrepreneur . . . He went bankrupt after half a year, [and] he didn't pay me. He still owes me SKK10,000 [263€] and also a redundancy payment. Then I was unemployed for half a year after which I went to [work at] Minigril. It was also a private enterprise and they also went broke . . . so I had to leave and I was at the labour office again for around two months. I met the director who works in the kindergarten. She told me they have a vacant position . . . and she asked me if I wanted to come back. So I am there.

Yet, the pay levels at the kindergarten remain very low and Mrs Zajacová is forced to supplement her income by working in a second job at a hypermarket as a cashier. Such employment trajectories mean that household members negotiating the low wage service economy rarely experience a stable career path. They invariably move from one low-paid, insecure job to another, to periods without work, and back again, combining multiple jobs during periods of employment in order to earn enough to ensure basic social reproduction.

For some, this temporality was mediated by labour market institutions, such as temporary work agencies, which were often used in conjunction with personal networks to access casual and irregular work. There are a number of disadvantages to such institutions, which result from their lax regulation. Evidence in Petržalka suggests that those registering with such agencies pay an initial fee, which is frequently too high for the very poor, whilst interviews in Nowa Huta indicated other risks: Mrs Sasnowicz, a woman in her fifties living with her husband and daughter, had worked in a printing firm through a temporary agency on a series of 355 one-day contracts for a year and a half (four days on, one day off). When the work dried up and she tried to register as unemployed, she found that she lacked one day's work to be eligible for unemployment benefit. Yet, notwithstanding these significant difficulties, such agencies often provide the easiest way for those with the lowest qualifications and without work to find short-term work.

Even for those in work, pay and conditions are rarely stable. Recent years have seen the withdrawal of in-work benefits—the “social wage” provided in addition to monthly wages (Domański 1997). Reported



levels of in-work benefits tended to be higher in Nowa Huta than Petržalka, reflecting the continuing role of the former Lenin steelworks as a major employer (Stenning 2005a). A significant number of households continued to have access to free or subsidised food at work, to subsidised holidays and, occasionally, subsidised transport and medicines. In Nowa Huta, 44% of surveyed households also had access to very cheap or even interest-free loans through their employers, contrasting with just 9% in Petržalka (see Stenning et al 2007). In Nowa Huta, interviews suggested that access to loans through the workplace was a very important means of managing household budgets. Mrs Senecka, a single woman working for a housing association on an average income, was typical of such households:

I use a mutual assistance fund [Kasa Zapomogowo-Pozyczkowa, KZP] and Workers' Repair Fund [Pracowniczy Fundusz Remontowy]. . . it's certainly [a big help to the budget] because it's an interest-free loan, or a very low rate. And it's good even just to take it into your account and deposit it and then buy something, or do some small repairs . . . very useful, those funds are very useful.

In contrast, Mrs Kwiatek, living in a very low income household and struggling financially, lost access to such funds as her workplace was contracted out (from a hospital to a private provider). Whilst she had previously had access to such loans, she no longer does and "it makes a big difference".

### **Articulations Beyond the Formal Labour Market**

The precariousness of the formal labour market forces poorer households to engage with a number of other economic practices to attempt to sustain household livelihoods (Gibson-Graham 2006; Smith and Stenning 2006; Williams and Round 2007). Our research indicates that whilst income from primary employment was the most important source, on average, for all households (see also Clarke 2002), it was considerably less important in households at risk of poverty (Table 5). To supplement income from formal employment, poorer households drew not only on other forms of informal and illegal labour, but also on their other assets—housing, land, citizenship rights and social networks (Smith and Stenning 2006).

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on documenting and explaining the diversity of economic practices negotiated in the construction of livelihoods (Gibson-Graham 2006; Leyshon, Lee and Williams 2003; Smith and Stenning 2006). For many, these have been centred on attempts to think differently about the nature of economic practices, placing an emphasis on diversity and dynamism, seeing within and alongside capitalist social relations myriad other economic

**Table 5:** Average proportion of income derived from various sources (average % of household income relative to household income groups)

	Main job	Other jobs	Pensions	Child benefit	Unemp- loyment benefit	Other social benefits	Other sources
<b>Petržalka</b>							
Below 60% of median	54.9	4.8	19.6	2.6	1.6	3.4	8.9
61–100% of median	58.4	4.1	28.0	2.2	0.4	0.6	4.6
101–140% of median	70.1	0.9	21.0	0.7	0.0	3.5	3.1
Over 140% of median	91.7	2.6	3.6	0.4	0.0	0.0	1.2
Total	69.8	3.3	18.0	1.4	0.4	3.8	2.8
<b>Nowa Huta</b>							
Below 60% of median	32.5	0.8	11.2	8.3	15.4	2.9	29.4
61–100% of median	52.2	6.5	27.3	0.8	0.8	0.2	12.4
101–140% of median	55.5	3.9	28.1	0.2	0.3	0.4	11.8
Over 140% of median	72.0	5.9	18.3	0.1	0.0	0.9	2.8
Total	58.5	4.9	21.6	1.4	2.3	0.9	10.5

Source: household survey (2005)

forms (Gibson-Graham 1996, 2006) that do not “belong to capital’s life process” (Chakrabarty 2000:63). For some, this kind of approach has been operationalised through the livelihoods concept such that:

[l]ivelihoods are understood not only in terms of income earning but a much wider range of activities. These include gaining and retaining access to resources and opportunities, dealing with risk, negotiating social relationships and managing social networks and institutions within households, communities and the city (Beall and Kanji 1999:1).

Our emphasis here is on the ways in which such assets and practices work in combination with activity in the formal capitalist labour market and are articulated with wider social relations. In addition to exploring these articulations, we also recognise that diverse economic practices draw workers into a variety of class positions (Gibson and Graham 1992) within and beyond the capitalist class processes of post-socialism. These include diverse forms of entrepreneurship and self-employment—largely informal, domestic and other unpaid labour, and reciprocal labour, amongst others.

### *Informal and Illegal Employment*

One of the main ways in which household members attempt to secure a livelihood in the context of low-paid work is through combining several jobs, a kind of “portfolio employment”, either in the formal economy, or through work in informal employment. Indeed, engaging in additional and informal employment is often not a choice but is widely seen as a

necessity to enable individuals to secure a living wage. Mrs Senecka, for example, a single woman in her thirties living in Nowa Huta, has formal employment as a caretaker in a neighbouring housing block. In addition, she earns a supplementary income from doing odd jobs (shopping, cleaning, caring) for an elderly couple living in the block where she works, sometimes takes on extra shifts to cover for her colleague, and in her spare time, as a trained seamstress, takes in small sewing jobs from friends and acquaintances in the neighbourhood—many of whom she knows from her caretaking work—for which she “charges” anything from a cup of coffee to a few zloty. Like many individuals engaging in secondary work, and in an echo of socialist practice (Kalleberg and Stark 1993; Smith and Stenning 2006), such additional income-earning opportunities are often founded on the basis of the skills, knowledge and contacts acquired through primary paid work. This is exemplified by a female respondent, Mrs Cukrikova, in Petržalka, living in a “working poor” household with a male partner employed as a carpenter, who suggested: “In fact this moonlighting of my husband is very important. He gets paid SKK 100 [2.60€], sometimes SKK 200, which we save so that we will have at least something to buy things with for Christmas, otherwise I don’t know what we would do”.

Many individuals and household members—especially in the poorer households—were actively engaged in work in the informal economy that involved “illegal” practices. Often, informal work was seen as an alternative to being registered as unemployed. The low level of state benefits, coupled with a desire to avoid state surveillance, acts as a disincentive to register, especially in Slovakia where the state had been doing its utmost to monitor labour market participation and benefit payments. Mr Pustelak, a middle-aged man from Nowa Huta, provides a good example of the shift from formal to informal employment. He had had a series of legal jobs, mostly as a security guard, but struggled to support his family. As his wife explained: “my husband worked but not much and he didn’t earn enough to support the family”. Consequently, he left legal employment and “now I work on the black, I earn a lot more money than if I was on unemployment, but at least I have child benefit”.

For others not eligible to receive social assistance benefits, informal work provides a small but important additional income supplement. For example, the Bombová household in Petržalka, comprising one retired woman and her middle-aged son, supplemented the pension income they received with income from the son’s periodic informal work cleaning windows and flats. This accounted for about one-third of their monthly income of SKK17,000 [447€] and much of the work is organised through the personal networks of his mother. For others, the margins of informal employment are a means to manage flows of benefit and employment income. A typical example of this is the Lastovičková household in Petržalka comprising a woman in her thirties and her young

son, living with her parents and her single brother. The woman is formally unemployed and receives some state benefits for herself and her child, yet she works informally in a kitchen for 3–4 hours a day. She has no contract for this work. Rather her retired mother has the contract of employment, which allows the daughter to continue to claim benefits and the employer to avoid tax and insurance payments, a clear articulation of commodified informal labour and citizenship assets, which we explore in more detail below.

In other cases, the benefits from illegal employment are not mutual: the husband of Mrs Brestovicová, one Petržalka respondent, works as a barman in the city centre and receives irregular salary payments from his employer. The household can never be certain how much money they will have and, as a consequence, often have to borrow money to meet their costs. Officially Mr Brestovic is paid the minimum wage and is given the rest as cash-in-hand. This enables his employer to pay lower taxes, but means that he will never have sufficient “official” income to access a mortgage from a bank. In Nowa Huta, Mrs Kowalik, a young woman with an unemployed husband, recently attempted to formalise her employment contract:

Yes, for now I have a contract, but I worked for this woman for almost a year without a contract, but I asked for a contract because of my child . . . She said to me, you’re a young woman, you have time to earn for your pension . . . so I asked again for a contract, and now I have a contract for a year, but I don’t know what will happen . . . I used to earn more, but when I got a contract . . . she had to cut my wages because she had to pay for [social] insurance.

In some cases, informality had been imposed by employers “sub-contracting” employment and transferring workers to positions of self-employment. While reported self-employment in our household survey was relatively low (7% of the economically active age population in Petržalka and 9% in Nowa Huta),<sup>8</sup> the experience of self-employment varies according to the position in the labour market. Whilst some encounter insecurity, long hours and the loss of in-work benefits, others see advantages in the opportunities for additional work and greater autonomy. In one Petržalka household, Mr Senzo, a former employee at the local rubber enterprise, Matador, was told by the management of the privatised former state-owned enterprise that he either had to become self-employed or he would be made redundant. He now has to find work on his own and one consequence is that he works very long hours (sometimes up to 80 per week) and experiences periods without work. Consequently, the household’s income is insecure and remains reliant on the female partner’s income from her relatively low-paid job as a secretary, belying the argument that female workers are secondary earners in household budgets. In a contrasting example from Nowa Huta,

Mr Wolak, a qualified accountant, was required to work freelance so that his former employer could avoid paying his social insurance and pension contribution. Yet, despite some months of real insecurity, he had more recently seen his income increase as he was able to work both for his former employer and for other firms, and informally for friends and acquaintances.

### *Households and Labour Migration*

For some the flexibility and temporality of employment was linked to opportunities for labour migration to western Europe. We identified—particularly in Nowa Huta (reflecting prevailing patterns of labour migration in the two countries)—several cases of household and family members working overseas, either currently or in the recent past.<sup>9</sup> In some cases, this had involved periods of temporary work—for instance, Mrs Senecka, introduced above, had replaced her sister-in-law in her job in Brussels for seven months whilst she was on maternity leave and in the Dawidowicz household in Nowa Huta, the mother had worked for a number of years as a care assistant in Switzerland, relying heavily on the income earned there in the two years since her return. For some, labour migration had been a feature of socialist work too, with contract work in “friendly” states and working holidays in Europe and North America providing means for major purchases.

However, bearing in mind that this research was carried out as labour migration to the old EU member states (particularly to the UK, Ireland and Sweden) was rapidly growing, we also identified households where, during the course of our research, members had migrated within Europe for short periods.<sup>10</sup> Whilst for some this was about individual earning and return migration, for others the household connection to labour migration came through remittances providing short-term but crucial support for household budgets. In Petržalka, one female pensioner, Mrs Badunická, relied on monthly remittances from her 43-year-old daughter who had been working in Austria as a medical technician since 1991. The increasing costs of medicines and Mrs Badunická’s ailing health meant that she was reliant on this remittance income to purchase the medication she required. For many households, especially in Nowa Huta, short-term labour migration is a regular option within the breadth of economic strategies considered. Of course, such opportunities are structured by household characteristics (age, skill, independence etc) and thus not equally available. Labour migration, then, though an option, was not unproblematic.

### *Combining Multiple Jobs within Households*

These examples demonstrate that many households combine multiple jobs—legal and illegal, full-time and part-time, local and international—in an attempt to sustain livelihoods. The experience of multiple job

holding is a very real one, as households try to balance work and domestic responsibilities to increase the number of hours worked, and thus the income received. The creation of “portfolios” of employment experience, both simultaneously and consecutively, appears to be a key means of maintaining household livelihoods, as workers have been forced to engage in multiple employment strategies.

For some households, increasing the number of household members is used to increase the size and number of jobs in a single (extended) household. One example of such struggles is found in the case of the Brestovicová household in Petržalka, comprising three generations of seven people living in a three-room apartment. All three adult women were unemployed at the time of interview, although each pursued occasional informal work. The two adult men (the father and husband of the respondent) both worked in low-pay service sector jobs in Bratislava. Their combined household livelihood is based on the articulation of the wages of the two men, occasional irregular and informal work of the women, and regular short-term borrowing from a network of family members living in the neighbourhood (Stenning et al 2007). This enables the household to survive month by month but provides no income to enable savings and little prospect of the couple with a young child to access their own apartment. In other examples, a number of poorer households pointed to the fact that their younger members—schoolchildren and full-time students—took on part-time and casual work in order to supplement household incomes. Multiple job holding in large households thus plays a critical role in sustaining livelihoods, with the benefits often disseminated through kinship networks.

### *Social and Kinship Networks*

The importance of kin and friendship networks extends through a number of spheres of household economic activity. The most direct connection is the use of social networks to access work. The failure of job centres to offer reasonable work means most find work through acquaintances and recommendations. For the self-employed too, contacts provided by friends and neighbours are crucial for continuity of income, and in the sphere of informal work, such contacts are often the only means to secure work. For example, Mrs Bombová, a retired woman in her early seventies living in Petržalka, used her personal networks to find work for her 42-year-old son. He was trained as a machine engineer in a Bratislava factory, but never secured permanent work. He is unemployed but receives no unemployment benefit; rather he works in cleaning and maintenance jobs for local households to supplement the household budget and accesses this work largely through the social networks of his mother. At the other end of the income scale, Mr Wolak, the self-employed accountant introduced above, also relied on networks of



1 friends and acquaintances to access book-keeping work to supplement  
2 his regular earnings.

3 For others, family and kinship networks provide a source of childcare  
4 and enable access to the labour market. The most common version of  
5 this relationship involves grandparents caring for their grandchildren  
6 whilst their adult children, usually daughters, work. In Nowa Huta, Mrs  
7 Fabian, after some 12 years on the margins of the labour market, works  
8 as an office cleaner but limits her working hours each morning in order  
9 to take care of her granddaughter whilst her daughter works. In other  
10 instances, shifting labour market opportunities have resulted in a reversal  
11 of working responsibilities and the remaking of non-commodified labour  
12 in the home. Whilst Mrs Kwiatek in Nowa Huta continues to go to  
13 work, her husband—an unemployed electrician discussed above—stays  
14 at home to take care of their daughter and to maintain the home.

15 In other cases, social networks formed at work prove particularly  
16 useful for other spheres of life. In Nowa Huta, Mrs Sedlak, employed  
17 in local government, used networks established through workplaces to  
18 access scarce services:

19 I went to work and I said that [her daughter] had to go [to hospital]  
20 because something was wrong with her eye, and selflessly my  
21 colleagues called and said, listen, but E—, that's her son-in-law, he  
22 works somewhere and he has this acquaintance who's a doctor . . . And  
23 later I got a [business] card, and I went to that woman, and she already  
24 knew on whose recommendation, and so it was.

25 Yet, this use of work networks may also serve to reinforce exclusion.  
26 Poorer households are disadvantaged not only by limited funds for bribes  
27 and gifts, but also by the fact that they have less access to the kinds  
28 of contacts (whether through professional spheres or with the “right  
29 person”) which might be useful. Consequently, they are less likely to use  
30 such contacts to access services. As one of our Nowa Huta interviewees,  
31 Mrs Kowalik, living on a very low income and employed in marginal  
32 jobs, suggests: “No, we don't do things in that way, because we do not  
33 have the sort of acquaintances who have access [to services]”. In contrast,  
34 in both districts the use of professional contacts to access services and  
35 employment opportunities among the most affluent households is very  
36 common—reflecting the way in which such households can use job-  
37 based networks to further consolidate labour market position and access  
38 to services.

### 42 *Citizenship Assets*

43 For some, the small flows of income within extended families and social  
44 networks, outlined above, rest on the presence of one or more secure,  
45 if small, incomes from the state, most often in the form of a pension.  
46 Following Burawoy, Krotov and Lytkina (2000) such state benefits can  
47

be conceptualised as “citizenship assets”. We argue that despite the relative decline in the value of and the liberalisation of pensions in several countries (Muller 2002; Smith and Rochovská 2007), they continue to be an important source of money income (Table 5).

For many households, citizenship assets provide a small but stable income base and articulate in complex ways with various forms of employment. Here we highlight two examples of these mechanisms. The first is where pensions provide a relatively stable income that is redistributed through kinship and extended family networks. For example, a Petržalka household comprising a divorced middle-aged woman, Mrs Uhlíková, living on invalidity benefit with her school-age daughter, receives a regular financial contribution from her pensioner parents living elsewhere in Bratislava since she lost her job due to health problems: “I pay SKK3,000 [79€] for my flat and my parents pay the rest (SKK4,500) [118€]. But they won’t [continue to do that anymore], when my daughter finishes school . . . They have helped me for many years in this way”.

The second is where pension, or other benefit, income provides a basis for the running of very small businesses or the taking on of part-time insecure work (see Cellarius 2004). In labour markets where restructuring has led, through early retirement programmes, to significant numbers of young retirees, this kind of combined pension/employment strategy is quite common. In Poland, early retired pensioners can earn 70–130% of the average monthly salary with a concomitant reduction in pension payments.<sup>11</sup> In Nowa Huta, one of our respondents, Mrs Idziak, attempts to sustain a living through a couple of informal activities—she gives massages and copies paintings to order—but until recently struggled financially. However, she recently qualified for a disability pension and explains that her financial situation has “improved a bit because I have this permanent allowance and it’s secure, because I used to be without money and it lasted up to three months”. Household members therefore combine employment with benefit income and, in some cases, use their citizenship status as pensioners to negotiate contract and benefit situations. Yet, while for some, pension incomes provide a small but stable base on which to attempt to sustain livelihoods, the pressures outlined above to restrict state expenditures and cut back on benefit incomes raise questions about the continuing potential for this kind of combination.

### *Material Assets: Land, Home and Other Income-generating Activity*

A household’s home space and other material assets, such as garages and cellars, can also enable additional employment and earning. Not only does available space in the home allow households to increase

in size and incorporate more income earners (see above) but it also enables both more and less established “entrepreneurial” activities, from starting small businesses to ad hoc work. In addition to the examples of home-based casual work mentioned above, a Nowa Huta couple run a successful publishing business from a spare room and were starting up a manicure business from the home of the wife’s mother and a Petržalka woman was running a small second-hand clothing shop from her cellar. Whilst some of these activities are wholly commodified, others negotiate a boundary which sees charges being levied for strangers, but being lowered or waived for friends and family (in an echo of socialist era practice, see Pawlik 1992). In all, our survey demonstrated that 15% of “other jobs” (that is, any additional jobs beyond the “main job”) were located in the home in Petržalka, and 12% in Nowa Huta. All of this highlights the centrality of domestic space in household economic practices (see also Burawoy, Krotov and Lytkina 2000).

In addition to employment in home-based enterprise, a significant number of households involved in this research also engaged in work on the land, either on their own or family plots or in labour offered reciprocally to friends and neighbours (Smith 2002; Smith and Rochovská 2007). This labour is rarely commodified, even when employed on other people’s land, but more often than not involves some kind of exchange, either through the receipt of vegetables, meat, and fruit or through the provision of other forms of non-commodified labour (such as painting and decorating, repairs or childcare). This kind of reciprocal labour is often enacted by the very household members who are the least productive in the formal economy (pensioners, teenagers, unemployed workers), and involves skills developed previously in the workplace. In one Nowa Huta household, for example, the husband, a retired steelworker, regularly does welding on his friends’ and neighbours’ allotments. In this way, the attempt to sustain livelihoods through work involving commodified wage labour is also articulated with a range of reciprocal practices of unpaid and “self-employed” labour on the land (Cellarius 2004; Smith 2002).

One further way in which household production of food articulates with the capitalist labour market involves households bypassing the monetary economy, and reducing their dependence on cash income (see also Smith and Rochovská 2007; Smith and Stenning 2006). The Slamková household in Petržalka provides a clear example. The household receives a regular, but low (SKK15,500 [408€]) income from Mrs Slamková’s work as a kindergarten teacher. Her daughter, a university student, works regularly in a variety of short-term and informal jobs, to supplement the household budget—sometimes even up to 30 hours in a week. Yet they receive up to 70% of their food consumption needs from a family plot some 60 km from Bratislava in exchange for reciprocal labour offered in looking after the house and

land. The Slamková household uses its stable income from employment on essential items, such as housing, but also is integrated into the kinds of reciprocal labour exchange systems outlined above (Smith and Rochovská 2007).

## Conclusions

We began this paper by identifying a dual process of renewed labour market segmentation and the commodification and neoliberalisation of the labour market and its regulation. Our central argument is that these processes have fed the emergence of in-work poverty in large urban labour markets, such that whilst the unemployed continue to demand particular policy attention, there is also a need to focus on those in contingent, marginal and insecure labour. We have highlighted the ways in which the working poor are impelled to rely on *more than* capitalist labour processes, to engage in a diversity of income earning and livelihood activities with which to supplement earnings from primary employment.

These diverse economic practices rest not solely, then, on households' formal labour market position but also on a wide range of social and economic assets—social networks, land and property, and claims on the state—which are employed in attempts to develop alternatives or complements to formal employment and integrate not only commodified labour, but also domestic and reciprocal labour. These practices cross the boundaries between the formal and informal, the legal and illegal, and the capitalist and non-capitalist and demonstrate the always already articulated nature of these spheres. Capitalist labour market activities should therefore be understood as articulated with a range of “outsides”, leading us to ask, with Gibson-Graham (1996:244), “what it might mean to call the countries of eastern Europe “capitalist””.

These articulations also highlight the plural geographies of household economic life (Stenning and Smith 2006), indicating the ways in which working life not only moves between the home and the workplace, but also through a range of other spaces, local and more distant. Whilst the household, and the home, continue to be critical in the management and negotiation of diverse economic practices, much of the work takes place elsewhere, in commercial spaces, in the homes of others, on the land and, indeed, in distant cities, and between these spaces. The variety of practices in which households engage draw them into a range of diverse class processes. The fact that most working household members combine numerous forms of labour means that many also experience a shifting of their working identity, from employee, to contingent labourer, to self-employed, for example, and articulate these with their family and social roles in the exchange of domestic and reciprocal labour. These shifting identities connect to the performance of numerous class

positions, making the identification of a singular post-socialist working class difficult, but also making space for class transformations which “do not necessarily involve social upheaval and hegemonic transition” (Gibson and Graham 1992:116).

It is clear that the lives of households in Petržalka and Nowa Huta have been radically altered by these labour market transformations, like those of households across the region (Smith et al 2002; Williams and Round 2007). The precariousness and plurality of work have had very real impacts on the material shape of households, introducing pressures not only on household budgets but also on time resources (Tarkowska 1999) and on the balance of work, pleasure and other responsibilities. Whilst state socialism—particularly in its twilight years of shortage—created significant household pressures and demanded strategic skills (Wedel 1986), many of the households we researched found themselves in a relatively privileged position, working in the favoured manufacturing sectors and, in the case of Nowa Huta, at the heart of the project of socialism (Stenning 2000, 2005a). They did not have to struggle so much to construct a livelihood nor to develop such proactive strategies in the search for work. The emergence of in-work poverty has meant the utilisation and adaptation of all kinds of practices, which may have existed in the past but were rarely used at that time as explicit livelihood strategies. In this sense, then, the commodification of everyday labour and life has produced a dramatic transformation in the nearly two decades of post-socialism. The diverse labour which we have documented, though produced through the neoliberalisation and segmentation of the formal labour market, is often rooted in the experiences of state socialism. Many of the practices—from moonlighting, to self-provisioning—developed in the shortage years of socialism, often on the legacies of earlier rural practices (Smith 2002). Yet in post-socialism, they work in articulation with newer forms of labour, liberalised welfare systems and the growing transnational worlds of work to construct a very particular set of labour processes which for increasing numbers raise questions over the ability to ensure social reproduction.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> There is a longer history of temporary work in ECE connected to seasonal work in harvests and in production storming in enterprises to meet central plan targets. Much of this was organised through so-called “brigada” work in the construction of socialist work practices.

<sup>2</sup> That is, contracts for the delivery of services rather than contracts of employment.

<sup>3</sup> The analysis here draws on the period before the loss of power in 2006 of the neoliberalising Slovak government led by Mikulaš Dzurinda (see Smith and Rochovská 2007), which was the period during which the main fieldwork was undertaken. Since 2006, the new populist and more social democratic government has introduced a partial reform, not least increasing the minimum wage level.

<sup>4</sup> Named after the then Minister for Economy, Labour and Social Policy, Jerzy Hausner.

<sup>5</sup> Two important changes in the enumeration of employment in Kraków are reflected in the data in Figure 3. First, in 2000 employment in firms with more than nine employees was included, compared to firms with four employees before that. Second, since 2004, employment at the major industrial employer (the steelworks) was re-registered to the Katowice region where the owner of the plant, Mittal-Steel, has its headquarters in Poland.

<sup>6</sup> Bratislava was recently ranked higher than Prague, Warsaw and Budapest by Mercer Human Resources Consulting in its index of city living costs (see <http://www.mercerhr.com/pressrelease/details.jhtml?idContent=1142150>), and Kraków was identified as having the highest increase in property prices in Europe (Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors 2007).

<sup>7</sup> All names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

<sup>8</sup> Self-employment in Poland as a whole in 2005 was 14% and in Slovakia 15% (Eurostat 2006a).

<sup>9</sup> At the time of the household survey in 2005, in Nowa Huta, 11 working household members (out of a total of 315, 4%) had jobs outside Poland and in Petržalka five (out of a total of 307, 2%) had jobs outside Slovakia. However, interview evidence, especially in Nowa Huta, indicated greater levels of labour migration. In the Nowa Huta case, of the 38 households interviewed, there were as many as 15 examples of household members working overseas, either currently or in the recent past and 13 households who could identify close family who had lived abroad for varying periods in recent months and years.

<sup>10</sup> For more on the emergent forms of migration from Poland to the UK, see Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich (2006).

<sup>11</sup> Those earning over 130% have their pension payments suspended (ZUS 2006:30).

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